

I Was Just Wondering!

Opening:

Introductions – Please tell us your last name and something about its origin. This week we are going to talk about meaningful authors and people. Do you have a favorite author and if so why and why?

Prayer

Suggestions, some basic ground rules to remember in a small group

The art of listening, respecting one another's opinions, and listening carefully

The art of sharing, do not monopolize the conversation, speak from the heart

The art of NOT gossiping; what's shared stays in the group. Trust can easily be undone.

- 1) P 120 - Nowadays, salesmen and politicians hire consultants to learn how to appear "sincere." Sincerity has become a kind of image, an acquired demeanor bearing no relation to what is going on in the salesman's insecure, doubting interior. *What do you think of this statement? Have we lost anything in our society today? If so, what?*
- 2) P 122 - ***persona non grata***. A person unwelcomed and unaccepted in a nation or at a party is a persona non grata, literally, a person without grace. Whenever I hear those six mellifluous syllables, I think of a passage from 1 Peter in which the apostle reaches for words to impress his readers with the splendor of their calling. "You are a chosen people," he says, "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..." And then, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (2:9-10). *Have you ever felt out of place, out of grace, unwanted? If so, how and does this word from 1 Peter help to resolve that issue?*
- 3) P 124 - "To know a primrose is a higher thing than to know all the botany of it — just as to know Christ is an infinitely higher thing than to know all theology," MacDonald once said. *Can you relate to this statement by MacDonald? If so, how?*
- 4) P 126 – Learning about MacDonald puts his sermons in an entirely different light. ***The powerful words on grace, freedom from anxiety, and the inexorable love of God actually came out of a life full of hardship***. For years MacDonald wandered penniless around London, looking for a job. He constantly suffered from tuberculosis, asthma, and eczema. Two of his children died in their youth. He proved unsuccessful in landing a university teaching post, and the large sales of his novels rarely translated into financial rewards — too many copies were pirated editions. *What does grace mean to you? How, if at all, do you relate to MacDonald's experience?*
- 5) P 129 - It is hard for us today to fathom the shock waves that went out in T. S. Eliot's time when he became a Christian, the premiere poet of despair and alienation. It was as if a Norman Mailer or a Saul of Tarsus had converted. At first, friends explained his conversion as "just an intellectual thing," a longing for order that led him to take refuge in the Anglican church. Any poetry fans, what do you like to read? *Some said when T.S. Eliot became a Christian, he lost his edge when writing poetry. Has there been a poem that's helped you through a challenging situation? If so, can you share a little about that?*

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- 6) P 130 - I take for granted that Christian revelation is the only complete revelation and that the fullness of Christian revelation resides in the essential fact of the Incarnation in which all Christian revelation is understood. The most profound division between human beings is those who accept versus those who deny Christian revelation. *This claim is a strong statement; what do you think about it?*
- 7) P 136 – Dostoevsky never recovered. **He had peered into the jaws of death, and from that moment, life became for him precious beyond all calculation.** Believing that God had given him a second chance to fulfill his calling, he pored over the New Testament and the lives of the saints. After ten years, he emerged from prison with unshakable Christian convictions, as expressed in one famous passage, “If anyone proved to me that Christ was outside the truth ... then I would prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth.” *Have you ever peered into the jaws of death, and did it change you somehow? Explain*
- 8) P 141 – **Rejected** in his homeland, **rejected** in his spiritual homeland, Endo underwent a grave crisis of faith. He spent several years researching the life of Jesus in Palestine and, while there, made a transforming discovery: Jesus, too, knew rejection. More, Jesus’ life was defined by **rejection**. His neighbors laughed at him, his family sometimes questioned his sanity, his closest friends betrayed him, and his fellow citizens traded his life for that of a terrorist. While on earth, Jesus seemed to gravitate toward other rejects: those with leprosy, prostitutes, tax collectors, paralytics, and notorious sinners. *Have you ever felt rejection like Endo or Jesus? Does this make you more or less accepting of other rejects in society?*
- 9) P 142 –“... there were many who were appalled at him: his appearance was disfigured beyond that of any man, and his form marred beyond human likeness ... He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces...” *This statement from Isaiah rejects the notion of Jesus being the blue-eyed, blond-haired, good-looking leader we see in many Jesus movies. Why do we choose our image of Jesus versus what Isaiah says here?*
- 10) P 143 - Christianity has two great symbols to offer the world: a cross and an empty tomb. An empty tomb without a cross would miss the gospel’s central message. As Endo points out, other religions offer a powerful, eternal Divine Being; ***only Christianity offers a God who became a man and suffered and died. The Servant did not take on meaningless pain: “he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.”*** Jesus took on the weight of every rejection, failure, and sin during his life and death. *How do you relate to this statement in our microwave-oriented world, or do you?*
- 11) P 147 - Will we be a shining beacon of freedom, a light on the hill? Will we go down in history (or what’s left of it) primarily as the civilization whose weapons made possible something unprecedented: the abolition of all humanity? How will our million abortions a year look a few decades from now? *What kind of legacy would you like to leave in our world? Do you feel you have impacted our world? If so, how?*