

I Was Just Wondering!

Opening:

Week 3

Introductions – Please tell us your nickname: This week, we will talk about what it means to be a Christian in America today; however, what if you were forced to leave America, where would you go, and why would you choose to go there?

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 means do not monopolize the conversation and speak from the heart.

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

- 1) P 85- Jacques Ellul's disillusionment developed in the corridors of power, during his term as a denominational leader and a politician. His experiences there caused him to question whether the change would ever come from within institutions. *Can any structure convey Christian love and compassion? Ellul asked this from his experience, what is your experience with institutional love and compassion?*
- 2) P 86 -Regardless of the merits of a given issue — whether a pro-life lobby out of the Right or environmental lobby out of the Left — political movements risk pulling onto themselves the cloak of power that smothers love. A movement by nature draws lines, makes distinctions, and delivers judgment; in contrast, love erases lines, overcomes distinctions, and dispenses grace. *Where do you see love shared freely and openly? Does it occur outside of the church? If so, how and when do you experience it?*
- 3) P 87 - Jesus did not say, “**All men will know you are my disciples** ... if you just pass laws, quash immorality, and restore decency to family and government,” but rather, “... **if you love one another.**” (John 13:35). Jesus made that statement the night before his death. The contrasting styles of God's power and human power have never been more openly displayed. Human power, represented by the might of the Roman empire and the full force of Jewish religious authorities, collided head-on with God's power. Amazingly, at that moment, God chose the path of deliberate powerlessness. *Where do you see a conflict today between God's power and human power? How do we/you fit into this world?*
- 4) P 90-92 –Remember Henri Nouwen - I now reflect on the two groups side by side, stars and servants; the servants clearly emerge as the favored ones, the graced ones. They work for low pay, long hours, and no applause, “wasting” their talents and skills among the poor and uneducated. *Do you relate to this, Nouwen's choice to serve in a thankless job? If so, how?*
- 5) P 96-97 - **Anything that tempts us away from the true God may function as an idol.** What modern idols make God seem trivial? What tends to reduce the surprise, the passion, and the vitality of my relationship with God? Most days, I am not conscious of choosing between a god and God; the alternatives do not present themselves so clearly. Instead, I find God edged out by a series of minor distractions. *We don't talk much about idolatry today. Is it still a problem in our modern world, and if so, how? What tempts you away from the true God?*

I Was Just Wondering!

- 6) P 97 - A friend of mine was stopped dead in her tracks by a skeptic. After listening to her explain her faith, he said, “**But you don’t act like you believe God is alive.**” I try to turn his accusation into a question: Do I act like God is alive? It is a good question, one that lies at the heart of all idolatry and that I must ask myself again every day. *Jesus said, “they will know us by our love.” Why do you think it’s so hard for people to see the love of Jesus in Christians today, or is it?*
- 7) P 105 – Remember the story Jesus tells in John 8 about the woman caught in the act of adultery, and he says this: “**Neither do I condemn you,**” Jesus said to her at last. “**Go now and leave your life of sin.**” There is no sin — not murder, adultery, or promiscuity — powerful enough to exclude a person from acceptance by God. Only a refusal to repent stands between a sinner and God’s gift of forgiveness. *Lutherans talk a great deal about grace. Do you think we practice what we preach? If so, how, and if not, why not? Do you think we practice cheap grace, as Luther called it in his writings? How?*
- 8) P 107 – Remember when Yancey filled out the questionnaire about his fundamentalist beliefs? Here’s one of the questions: Has guilt been an issue for you? What types of things make you feel guilty? Do you consider yourself a judgmental person? *How might you respond to these questions regardless of what church background you came from?*
- 9) P 109 –Yancey was influenced positively and negatively by growing up in a fundamentalist faith community. He said, “It didn’t take long for me to determine which of the two lists has proved more important in forming who I am today. A funny thing happened as I filled out the survey. I had expected the exercise would, by prompting me to relive painful moments, bring to the surface unresolved anger and resentment. But I was mainly grateful for my heritage when I reached the end.” *How do you think your background, family, culture, and church in which you grew up have affected or influenced who you are today? Can you see how God has been at work in your life, and if so will you share it with the group?*
- 10) P 113 - Who is **morbid-minded** today? It appears liberal optimists have given way to liberal pessimists almost across the board. Now we have **positive thinking**, possibility thinking, and health-and-wealth theology — more brashly optimistic than anything Emerson dreamed of — all being preached from evangelical pulpits and appearing on the evangelical publishers’ best-seller list. A stunning reversal has taken place since 1902. The healthy-minded have become morbid, and the morbid have become healthy-minded. I ask myself what has happened in our century to cause such a reversal. *Do you agree with Yancey’s conclusion, and if so, how? If you disagree, how and why?*