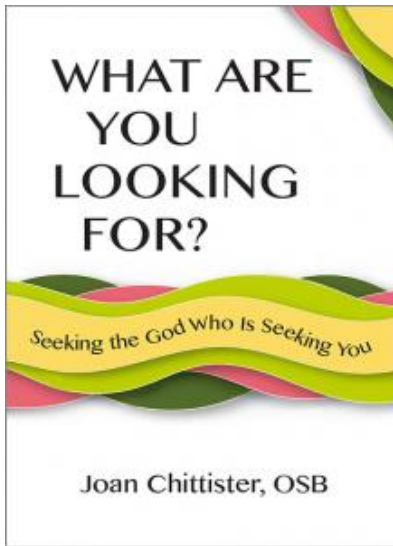


Discussion Questions

What are You Looking For? Seeking the God Who is Seeking You



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General Questions

1. Sister Joan asks us to answer, “Why were you born?” Write a journal entry welcoming yourself as a newborn into the Earth community telling yourself why you were born. You might make a collage or draw an image.

2. Sister Joan gives 5 characteristics of what it means when we say we’re happy:

- Happiness depends on the full development of self
- We are not happy if we confuse happiness with pleasure
- Happiness depends on making a genuine contribution to life
- We are actively engaged in things that serve our overarching purpose
- Life is not a destination but a process of bringing to completeness the gifts we have been given

Do you agree with this list? What would you add or subtract? Why? Write down your definition of happiness.

3. Sister Joan suggests that a genuine gift is what we lose ourselves in. When we’re involved in it, we lose all sense of time. Are there things in your life of which this is true?

4. Can you identify the “first call, the invitation to adulthood” in your life? Talk or write a bit about it.

5. Take a paper and write 3 times:

“It is not too late for _____”

Then fill in the blanks. Choose one of your statements. Now write concrete steps you will take towards making it a reality.

6. The last paragraph of the book is a brilliant summary of the will of God for us. Copy that paragraph into your journal or on paper, but write it with “I” statements. For example, “It is coming to the completion of my best self, it is in following the magnet in my heart...” Then sit with the text. Comment if you’d like.

Chapter 1: Why would I want to talk to anyone about religious life?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.
2. Sister Joan explains that this book could be directed to those who are definitely considering a singular choice—a life “lived entirely through the filter of the Gospel” within an intentional religious commitment. It is, however, equally important to anyone who “cares about the place and nature of religious in the Christian community.” In which category would you place yourself at this point in your life? What is your main reason for reading this book? Explain.
3. What is the “magnet for good” that guides you on your way? How would you define or describe your own true purpose of life?
4. What do you believe is the value of religious life in our present reality? Name what you believe makes the call to religious life a unique and valuable choice.

Chapter 2: Isn't religious life already becoming extinct?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.
2. How do you react to Sister Joan's description of the life of religious communities after the Vatican II Council? Does it fill you with concern or hope or excitement or uneasiness or...?
3. Do you know or have you heard of a religious community who would agree with Sister Joan's premise that, “We were actually meant

to be communities of change, to learn the needs of the time, to be communities faithful to the ongoing and unending quest for God in this changing time and place?” How do you know that is what they believe—how does it manifest itself in the community life and lifestyle?

Chapter 3: What’s the point of such a life in a world like ours?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.

2. Sister Joan offered some clues as to whether this kind of life, a life “grounded in total concentration on the spiritual dimension of life,” might be a life to which you would be attracted:

- a. if you wish to give yourself to a life that is deeply contemplative and at the same time unstintingly active
- b. if what a thing means inside of you is more important to you than what it looks like to others
- c. if the lifestyle you are looking for is a call to change the world

Do any of these clues ring true for you? Which one rings most true for you? In what ways does it do so?

3. Think of someone you admire whose life is “dedicated to spiritual development and the coming of the reign of God.” List three or four specific reasons why you admire this individual. As you review your list, are any of those reasons characteristic of you as well? Name two or three particular ways you might deepen and develop that characteristic further.

Chapter 4: Why join a group when you can be on your own?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.
2. Who are the “Romans, Samaritans, Gentiles, lepers and tax collectors of our own time?” What have you already learned about “the gift of differences”? How might you learn to create of those so different than you are a “sacrament of strangers?”
3. Consider the communities of which you are a part. Which ones, if any, truly model the ideal that strangers can live together in love? If so, in what ways? If not, what can you/they do to become such a community of love?

Chapter 5: How can a loveless life possibly be a healthy one?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.
2. Sister Joan describes the love of community members in these terms: “Like the ropes of mountain climbers, the love of sisters holds us fast when everything in life around us—our health, our work, our very faith, our spiritual life, and the depression that comes with change and loneliness – threatens to leave us unmoored in life.” Have you ever experienced that level of love and support? If so, describe its impact on your spiritual journey.”
3. “The challenge of love is to go through each phase of our lives and come out even more committed, more holy and more spiritually

mature that we were when we began.” List three instances in your own life’s journey when this was true of your own growth. Select one of those instances and in some creative way, express your gratitude for the challenge of love you experienced in it.

Chapter 6: When did compliance become a virtue?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.
2. Before you read this chapter, how would you have defined obedience? Select three sentences in this chapter that expand your definition and understanding of obedience – how will that expansion manifest itself in your own life and decision-making?
3. What does it mean in your own life to “become obedient to the gospel message?” In some creative way—writing, drawing, dance, song—express your understanding of what it would take within you or within the groups with which you identify to “make the Gospel real.” Can you imagine yourself as part of such a community? What would be most challenging for you personally if you were part of such a community?

Chapters 7: What’s the use of such an uncommon common life?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.
2. Sister Joan indicates that “common ownership teaches the religious a sense of ‘enoughness.’” What would be the dimensions of

“enoughness” in your life? What would “common ownership” cost you?

3. Sister Joan suggests that “voluntary poverty liberates...us from the drug of accumulation that weighs us down and slows our steps and makes it impossible for us to travel lightly through life, to be where we need to be when we need to be there.” What would “traveling lightly through life” look like in your life? Name three specific steps you might take to move closer to the ability to “travel lightly through life.”

Chapter 8: What’s all the praying for?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.
2. Respond to Sister Joan’s assertion that “prayer is the fountain out of which flows concern for others, a sense of the presence of God in everything, and the stretch of the soul to do and be more and more.” In some creative way, describe an experience in which that is exactly what prayer was for you.
3. “Prayer makes us real, makes us honest with ourselves, makes us simple and humble and true to what otherwise would be image and empty icon only.” In what tangible ways is this true about your own prayer life? What might you do to make prayer even more real and vital in your life?

Chapter 9: What does all this got to do with following Jesus?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.

2. Choose one of the stories Sister Joan offers in this chapter? What does the story mean in your own life?
3. Read Sister Joan's summary of religious life: "Religious life is lived on a mountaintop of prayer, immersed in the cries of the psalmist, challenged daily by the prophets, touched to the core by the demands of the gospel and called by Jesus—liberator, redeemer, healer and lover—to 'Come follow me.'"

Is that something that calls to you? Write this statement three times:

I hear the call "Come follow me" when I...

Now complete each statement. Finally, write concrete steps that will move you toward answering that call in a very real and tangible way.

Chapter 10: What would happen to me if I joined a religious order?

QUESTIONS:

1. Choose one or two sentences in this chapter that are most relevant to your own spiritual journey right now. Explain why.
2. Which of the questions Sister Joan poses in this final chapter struck closest to your own searching heart? Read her answer to that question again? Now explain her insight in your own words. How does it help?
3. Is there a question that is still unanswered in your heart? Think back—is there anything in this book that could help you address that question? How?

Afterword: To Become a Flame of the Fire

You have completed the book. You have pondered with Sister Joan the question: What Are You Looking For? in all its aspects.

Now it is up to you. What more do you need to be “completely turned into fire?”

If the purpose of your life is “to matter, to have it make a difference that you lived at all,” claim it and then do something about it. How will you begin?