

## Discussion Questions

# The Time is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage



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## Dedication

### QUESTION:

1. Prayerfully reflect on Sister Joan's dedication. What inspired you the most?

## Why Read This Book

### QUESTION:

1. If Sister Joan was telling you this in person, what would you say to her in response?

## Foreword: A Choice

### QUESTION:

1. Carefully note the three choices Sister Joan identifies for the reader at this moment in our national and global history. Consider what you believe to be the most pressing issue of our time. You have a choice to confront this issue or walk away. State your choice in addressing this issue and share what it may demand of you—what change in ideas, behaviors, actions could lead you to make a difference for good in our world?

## Introduction: A Word About Prophets

### QUESTIONS:

1. What are, to you, five of the most important descriptions of a prophet in this chapter? Which one(s), in all humility, would you apply to yourself? Explain.

2. Which of the traditional prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures are you most familiar with? Share a line or two from their writings that has particular meaning for you. Explain why.
3. What specific sentence in this Introduction stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 1: Risk

### QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan writes that she came to understand contemplation by immersing herself, through the Gospels, in the life of Jesus. Then she says, “The authenticity of my spiritual life, in other words, depended on my grasp of the life of Jesus.” How has this affected your own reflection on the authenticity of your spiritual life?
2. Read the reflection on Risk on page 31. Sister Joan reminds us that the work of God is in our hands. How do you hear that message, that call? In what ways are you being called to be a carrier of the same prophetic message in our own time? How will you respond?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 2: Paradox

### QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan reminds us that “prophecy has ragged edges.” Have you ever avoided a conversation about important justice issues to “keep the peace, to be nice?” In hindsight, if you had the chance to repeat the conversation, how might you have used the conversation to introduce a new way of thinking about the issue, or offer a tangible way to change behavior in order to uphold a new vision?

2. Complete the following sentence three or four times identifying how you will put your commitment statements to action.

I will reshape the heart and soul of the world by saying YES to\_\_\_\_\_.

Example: I will reshape the heart and soul of the world by saying YES to equality for all and reaching out to come to know someone of another race or culture than my own.

3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 3: Awareness

### QUESTIONS:

1. Prayerfully reflect on the poetic lines by Mary Oliver that Sister Joan quotes in this chapter. Then answer this: In a given ordinary day of your life to what do you pay attention? What astonishes you? With whom do you share this? Then reflect further on what your answers tell you about yourself?
2. Which of the nine points Sister Joan offers in this chapter challenges you the most? Share why?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 4: Insight

### QUESTIONS:

1. Prepare a role description for a contemporary prophet—including the qualifications, responsibilities and skills necessary for the role and reason the role needs to be filled. Then if you want to take it a step further, prepare a letter of interest as if you were applying for the role,

describing how you might qualify for the role and why you are seeking it.

2. On page 45 Sister Joan talks about the Jesus prophets across history knew, as contemporary prophets know as well. She writes: “The Jesus they know moved with drunkards and sinners. He healed the outcast and enemy. He gathered women as well as men to his side. He chastised leaders who overlooked the poor; he defied the doctrine of sexism that religions use to make male ministers superior, powerful, primary. He stood up and in a clear voice declared wrong any policies of either sacred or secular—church or state—that burdened the backs of the powerless and crushed the spirits of the poor.” Do you think this is the Jesus the majority of Christians know? Why or why not? If why not, who is responsible for this lack of knowledge?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 5: Audacity

### QUESTIONS:

1. Name a prophet in our day. Describe the qualities this person exhibits that define her/him as a prophet. What are they doing or saying (or have they said or done) that has the capacity to change our world.
2. Sister Joan declares, “It takes no small amount of courage to speak a different truth, to ask a different question than is common to our peers, to our family, to our social class.” Have you ever done this in the name of a religious conviction you had? Please share the circumstances.
3. What specific sentence in the chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 6: Authenticity

### QUESTIONS:

1. “The question is not, How can we do it all? The question is, Do we do any small thing to participate in binding up the wounds of the world?” insists Sister Joan. What “small thing” are you doing as a regular aspect of your spiritual life to bind up the wounds of the world?
2. The prophet believes that justice is achievable, that peace is essential, and they arrange their life and their world so that they can move the world toward this point. What is your vision of a world where all things are just and where the reign of God is the energy that drives it?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stood out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 7: Support and Wholeness

### QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan reminds us that it is the prophet’s responsibility to “sound the alarm” when our institutions lose their way and live to preserve themselves rather than the common good. Give some real life examples today where people are speaking up and exposing some of the underbelly of our institutions. What are some practical ways you can uphold and support such prophetic efforts?
2. Have you ever been in a position to support someone who was being prophetic in the sense that she/he was, in Abraham Heschel’s words, “reminding the community of the values it is no longer living?” Share your experience doing so.
3. What specific sentences in this chapter stood out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 8: Self-giving

### QUESTIONS:

1. What message do people receive from you – from your message, from your behavior, from your efforts to speak the truth? What sky do you light up so that others may find their way to new peace and clear justice in an increasingly violent world?
2. In our broken world, do you see some sense of wholeness and goodness and completeness taking shape? Do you see a light at the end of the suffering you confront? Explain.
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 9: Patience

### QUESTIONS:

1. “Where there is little or no personal necessity to face an issue, people avoid it,” according to Sister Joan. Do you agree or disagree with her? Discuss why or why not?
2. In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Ranier Maria Rilke wrote this famous quotation: “. . . have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. . . Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.” (Stephen Mitchell, trans.) Prayerfully reflect on this. What thoughts, feelings, insights, does it provoke in you? Please share.
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?



## Chapter 10: Failure

### QUESTIONS:

1. “It is in God alone that we must put our trust, abandon all our ambitions, and simply allow things to evolve as they may.”(86) What inner qualities of heart and soul must a person have to be able to do this in your opinion?
2. Recall a significant experience of failure in your life? Describe it in one sentence. Did it lead you into deeper trust in God alone as Sister Joan counsels? What is the most important lesson this failure taught you?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 11: Voice

### QUESTIONS:

1. “It is the history of the prophetic tradition—right up to and including the prophets of our own time—that is our witness to keeping faith when there is no obvious reason to go on believing” (90). Name a contemporary prophet (2020-2021 and beyond) whose witness has given you reason to keep on believing. What, in particular, inspired you about their witness? How did this impact your life?
2. Sister Joan mentions the Protestant pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who spoke out against the Nazis and Hitler and was murdered for doing so. In his writings, he warned Christians about “cheap grace.” What do you think he meant by these two words? Do you see it present today in Christianity? Explain.
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 12: Wisdom

### QUESTIONS:

1. “The people perish for want of knowledge, “cried the prophet Hosea. Do you think this is true today? If yes, give several examples of where you see this.
2. After identifying the agenda for prophetic communities, Sister Joan asks, “And you–What are you doing about it?” Prayerfully reflect on her question and then answer it.
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 13: Proclamation

### QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan herself proclaims many haunting challenges for all of us in this chapter. What two or three did you find most compelling? Discuss why.
2. “Gone were the grubby and the outcast around us, gone were the forgotten or forsaken. These kind, we figured, should do it for themselves. After all, we had.” (101) This is a common belief among many white Christians. How do you think people whose skin color is brown or black would respond to this and why?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 14: Vision

### QUESTIONS:

1. St. Augustine had a question: “Cui Bono?” Loosely translated it meant whose good is being served by what is being said and what is being done or not done? Sister Joan’s version of this, on page 109, is, “Who is being advantaged by maintaining the present situation and who stands to lose if it changes?” Surveying the US Congress and the issues facing the country, how would you answer St. Augustine and Sister Joan?
2. Is there an idea or statement in this chapter that you disagree with? Please discuss which and why?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 15: Faith

### QUESTIONS:

1. Observe your local civic and/or religious communities. Select two or three people therein whom you would identify as having “prophetic faith.” Explain why.
2. “Consciousness commits,” writes Sister Joan. This can also mean “staying awake” or “paying attention.” What spiritual practices do you think will nourish such consciousness?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 16: Confidence

### QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan maintains that to lack self-confidence “is a sin against creation” (119). Are there credible reasons why this may not be a sin for some people? What are they in your opinion?
2. At the same time, Sister Joan wisely lays bare the negative consequences, the six demons, that often become excuses for the “Lord I am not worthy” argument. What are these six demons? Where have you, in your life experience, seen them being used? How did one or more deter the personal or group effort to make peace/do justice?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 17: Tradition

### QUESTIONS:

1. “What are we not doing now that the Tradition, the charism, the first call of Jesus to follow him really demands that we do?” asks Sister Joan. Read the front page of your local newspaper and/or a national one. Then answer the question.
2. Identify one person or group you think is a prophetic voice for a nation or the world today who is under thirty years old. Convey the issue they are challenging people to face and transform. How have they provoked your transformation? Share.
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?

## Chapter 18: Prophets Then, Prophets Now

### QUESTIONS:

1. On page 133, Sister Joan asks the following questions: “So where is society’s prophetic dimension now? Who needs it? What message does it bear as it goes? Most of all, in whose behalf does it function?” How would you answer each of these questions?
2. The closing sentence of this book is a cry from Sister Joan: “Dear Prophet, for the sake of the children, for the sake of the world, for the sake of the gospel, Cry out.” How will you begin or continue to do this?
3. What specific sentence in this chapter stuck out to you? Why did you choose this sentence?