



faith + culture

BOOK CLUB

Questions for the Small-Group Study on *Jesus and the Disinherited*

Forward–Chapter 1

1. Thurman's expectations for disinherited people are to love your enemy, to abandon fear, and to fear only God. Are these expectations too high?
2. In Thurman's day, disinherited people were religious people who found solace and connection within their own churches. Where do the dispossessed today—the homeless, the jobless, the alienated, and the socially isolated—find faith and connection?
3. There is a difference between Christian charity and pity. Charity is synonymous with the highest, noblest form of love. Pity involves a sense of superiority. Can charity or help given to the dispossessed, even when executed with missionary zeal, actually stimulate pride and arrogance and contribute to a sense of racial superiority on the part of the giver? Is pity actually the opposite of seeing your neighbor as a brother or sister in need of help?
4. The Hindu principal initially calls Thurman, a Christian, a traitor to the people of color on the earth. How does Thurman respond?
5. How important is it to consider Jesus' social status as a minority, a poor Jew in the Greco-Roman world? How did that affect his life and teachings?
6. Thurman argues that the disinherited can choose to resist or not resist, much the same as Jesus did. What are the ramifications of each choice?
7. Can those who resist measure their significance by how much force and energy their oppressors must use to keep them down?
8. Can Christianity be a technique of survival for the oppressed? Can it preserve the quality of one's inner life?
9. How easy can it be to turn to violence when you exist in a climate of deep insecurity and danger and feel no protection from society or authorities? Why didn't Jesus turn to violence?
10. What did Jesus say to his followers to cut through the fear?

Chapter 2 & 3

1. How does Thurman differentiate the fears of the dispossessed from the fears of society as a whole?
2. Thurman says it's not the fear of death that causes the poor to fear violence, but the fear of something else. What?
3. We often hear about Black families giving their sons "the talk." Thurman's writings are more than sixty years old, but isn't he essentially giving "the talk" to the oppressed—instructing them in the ways to act in order to save themselves from senseless violence?
4. Can fear have physical side effects?
5. Can the sense that you have personal worth or believing that you are a child of God help to banish fear?
6. How can deception act as a protection for the weak against the strong?
7. Can you successfully compartmentalize deception so that its ill effects do not infiltrate and poison your entire being?
8. Why do the powerful keep the disinherited from a meaningful place in the social process?
9. Must we only be sincere to God?
10. Does true honesty break down the barriers between people?



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Chapter 4

1. During times of war, why is it common and often acceptable for hate to be displayed openly? Does this occur during other times?
2. Can lack of fellowship and the lack of opportunity and place for people to engage in warmth and genuineness be a contributing factor to the germination of hatred?
3. Describe how understanding can be hard, cold, and deadly.
4. How can hatred from the ruling culture cause the disinherited to hate themselves?
5. What does Thurman mean when he says the logic of the strong-weak relationship places all moral judgment out of bounds?
6. What did Jesus understand about feelings of hate among the oppressed? Is this why he counseled us to love our enemies?
7. Once set in motion, is hatred easy to control?

Chapter 5 & Epilogue

1. Can you understand how Jesus was perceived as a traitor for preaching love for the Romans?
2. What are the three types of enemies?
3. When we segregate our worship, do we make it extremely hard to love one another?
4. Have we gotten better or worse in integrating our worship communities?
5. How do the disinherited recognize fear, deception, and hatred and become immune to their domination?
6. What does Thurman mean when he says a person's working paper may be negative but never wrong?
7. Although the book was written more than sixty years ago, it remains extremely relevant. What are some of the areas where we still have work to do?

Further Reading:

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, by Michelle Alexander

The Cross and the Lynching Tree, by James H. Cone

Please be advised that while this book contains strong faith and social justice themes, some readers may find the use of mature language or situations offensive.