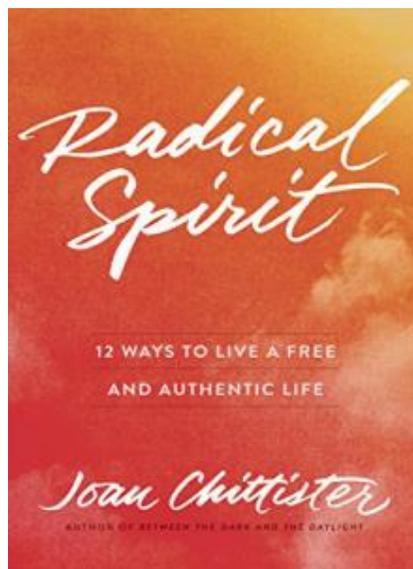


Discussion Questions

Radical Spirit: 12 Ways to Live a Free and Authentic Life



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Introduction

QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan writes on pages 12-13, “Self-understanding, a commitment to spiritual growth, a spiritual tradition that has stood the test of time, and a spiritual guide to companion us on the way are the components of the spiritual journey.” Which of these four do you need to attend to the most? Discuss why.
2. Looking ahead as preparation, examine this website <https://www.alcohol.org/alcoholics-anonymous/> and anticipate, if you can, the connections that may abound between the 12 Steps of AA and the 12 Steps of Benedictine Humility.
3. What sentence in this Introduction most challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 1: The First Step of Humility: Recognize that God is God

QUESTIONS:

1. “It was not the spirituality of humility that was my undoing. It was the image of God I had brought with me to the chapter [on humility] that was my undoing” (27). Can you relate to this admission by Sister Joan? Share how and/or why.
2. “There is nothing to worry about, nothing to fear, once I decide to let God be God in my life,” writes Sister Joan on page 36. Have you come to believe this? Explain why or why not.
3. What sentence in this chapter most challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 2: The Second Step of Humility: Know that God's Will is Best for You

QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, Ph.D, once wrote that “God’s will is our well-being.” Find 3-5 statements in this chapter that you think affirm this understanding of God’s will.
2. Sister Joan writes on page 51 about the first two steps of humility giving emotional stability to life: “They enable me to accept unplanned change with dogged, steadfast equanimity, with imperturbable faith. If God is God and I have learned to trust the God of Surprises, there is little now that can really rock, convulse, or upend my emotional ground. I learn to expect the unexpected. . .” Have you learned this? Explain how.
3. What sentence in this chapter most challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 3: The Third Step of Humility: Seek Direction from Wisdom Figures

QUESTIONS:

1. “Humility is the willingness to trust ourselves to the universe, to the people in our lives, to the wisdom of other,” says Sister Joan on page 59. Share a time in your life when you have demonstrated such humility.
2. Remarking about “. . . holy dissidents who said no when no was the only holy answer,” choose three examples of such dissidents in the United States or world-at-large, in the past or present, who embody this. Share why you chose them.

3. What sentence in this chapter most challenged your worldview?
Discuss how.

Chapter 4: The Fourth Step of Humility: Endure the Pains of Development and Do Not Give Up

QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan admits that “It took years before simply being able to endure became a factor again in my spiritual life” (76). Please share a personal example of how you endured something for your greater good or for that of others.
2. “The ability to say no to myself, to the oppression of others, is the one assurance we have that human beings are teachable, are capable of becoming fully human, can change, can be saved from themselves,” (86). Offer one time you said “no” to yourself and one when you said no to the oppression of another. What did each teach you about becoming fully human?
3. What sentence in this chapter most challenged your worldview?
Discuss how.

Chapter 5: The Fifth Step of Humility: Acknowledge Faults and Strips Away the Masks

QUESTIONS:

1. “There is in each of us a gaping hiatus of the soul, a rupture of the wholeness which we seek. This is the silent secret with which we struggle all our lives. It takes the shape of an unresolved relationship, perhaps, a broken piece of our integrity, maybe, a wound for which there is no balm, a compulsion that holds us captive and limits our growth” (92-93). What is your response to this powerful statement by

Sister Joan?

2. Sister Joan writes on page 94: “Point: Sin, brokenness, as the Church has always said, can be a ‘happy fault,’ an invitation to a new beginning.” Have you experienced this? Please share if you are willing.
3. What sentence in this chapter most challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 6: The Sixth Step of Humility: Be Content with Less than the Best

QUESTIONS:

1. On pages 113-114, Sister Joan refers to Aristotle and then lists what she thinks characterizes true happiness. Are there other examples of what constitutes happiness that you would add to her list?
2. Do you agree or disagree with Sister Joan when she writes on page 117, “If I am content with ‘the lowest and most menial of treatment,’ I can’t be insulted by anybody”?
3. What sentence in this chapter most challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 7: The Seventh Step of Humility: Let Go of a False Sense of Self

QUESTIONS:

1. According to Sister Joan, “Benedict’s chapter on humility, written in a period of decline and transition in Rome, was written for Roman males in a society that had always privileged Roman males. Benedict saw arrogance and narcissism at the center of the empire and discounted both” (128). Do you see any resemblance between this and powerful white males in the United States today? Please elaborate.

2. “When we are willing to take criticism we are able to learn, to develop, to not only come to know the self but be compassionate with others as well” (132). Has this been your experience? Explain.
3. What sentence in this chapter most challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 8: The Eighth Step of Humility: Preserve Tradition and Learn from the Community

QUESTIONS:

1. Share both a personal and communal example of the Benedictine symbol of Monte Casino, “Succisa Virescit,” “cut it down it grows again.”
2. Sister Joan writes that “Individuals join a community to find the models and support it has to offer. . . It’s there that I get a close and personal glimpse of holiness alive and flourishing. It’s there that I become conscious of the glory of God in others” (153). In what community or communities has this been your experience? Explain.
3. What sentence in this chapter most challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapters 9: The Ninth Step of Humility: Listen

QUESTIONS:

1. How have you, how do you, cultivate silence in your life? What has silence taught you?
2. On page 162 Sister Joan lists four examples of when “silence is good.” Add three or four more from you own life experience.
3. What sentence in this chapter challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 10: The Tenth Step of Humility: Never Ridicule Anyone or Anything

QUESTIONS:

1. Recall, if you can, a childhood (or adult) experience of being ridiculed. Discuss it and then share what it did to you and what it helped you to realize.
2. “For those whose laughter is kind and life-giving, the heart is already open to the universe. For them, laughter is the sound of the presence of angels around them,” suggests Sister Joan. Think of someone who makes you laugh and embodies this statement. Share what they have or continue to bring to the quality of your life, of your spirituality.
3. What sentence in this chapter challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 11: The Eleventh Step of Humility: Speak Kindly

QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan maintains that “What we say and the way we say it now has the power to destroy the entire world” (184). Give three or four examples of the truth of this in our world today.
2. “The path is clear: (Sister Joan writes) Know that God is in the here and now. Don’t talk about earning God. You have God” (189). Give several reasons why you think many religious people find this hard to believe.
3. What sentence in this chapter challenged your worldview? Discuss how.

Chapter 12: The Twelfth Step of Humility: Be Serene, Stay Calm

QUESTIONS:

1. “People, hearing what we say, should know what we think. Seeing what we do with our lives, people can infer what we care about and how we think about things” (202). What would someone looking at what you are doing or what you have done with your life, infer what you care most about and how you think about things?
2. Sister Joan offers a 21st century version of Chapter 7 of the Rule of St. Benedict on pages 205 and 206. Choose three you will try to integrate into your life. Share why you chose these three.
3. What sentence in this chapter challenged your worldview? Discuss how.