

Formed for the Glory of God

Study Guide

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This guide is designed for use by a group of people meeting regularly to discuss *Formed for the Glory of God*, but the questions can be fruitfully used for personal study as well.

What follows is a series of questions for each chapter. Each set of questions starts with the same general invitation to focus on a personally arresting thought from the chapter.

Please use this thought as a springboard to whatever issues and topics strike you as most important. Under several of the questions you will also find subquestions designed to expand your responses. Only use the questions that most fruitfully engage you and the group.

My hope is that these questions will strengthen the quality of your interaction with Edwards's spiritual insights. Toward that end, it may be best to choose 2-3 questions per chapter in addition to the initial arresting thought and focus on generating deep interaction over those rather than trying to cover more ground superficially. In addition, the appendixes at the end of the book may add practical material to the discussion. Ultimately, the goal is not to simply answer questions but to open your heart to whatever the Lord is doing, by his grace, through this process.

Chapter 1. A Journey to See Clearly

Choose an idea or illustration from this chapter that struck you as particularly important. Describe it and explain why you feel it is important.

1. "Journey" is a helpful metaphor for the Christian life. What would be an accurate metaphor to describe your life with Christ now?
 - How does that relate to the idea of journey?

2. When you think about life after death, what do you think about?

- What are you anticipating? How does this form how you live?
- What are some vices you have that point to a misunderstanding about eternity?

3. Define *hope*. When you think of hope, where do your thoughts take you? What do you hope for?

- Does your view of hope lead you to trust in Christ or in yourself?

4. In what ways do you see God “through a glass darkly”? What are the central features of the Jesus you see? How does our sight of God, even though it is “through a glass darkly,” influence or impact our formation?

Chapter 2. Mapping the Way of Love

Choose an idea or illustration from this chapter that struck you as particularly important and prepare to discuss that with the group.

1. Has your understanding of conversion matched up with your expectations of the Christian life?

- Do you accept that you are *saved* by grace but believe you are sanctified through your own hard work?
- Reversing that, does your approach to the Christian life highlight that you have subconsciously adopted a self-help approach to salvation?

2. Think about the concepts of union and communion with Christ. How does each concept shape your understanding of salvation?

3. Edwards defines *glory* as the fullness of God—his inner life of love and knowledge that overflows in Son and Spirit. How does this match up with how our Christian culture defines *glory*? What does “glorifying God” mean to you?

4. Everyone is captivated by beauty. What captivates you?

- What ugliness does your heart desire as “beauty?” Another way of asking this is, Are there aspects of your fantasy life that are counterfeits for the abundant life Jesus promises?

5. Think about the various aspects of your devotional life. How do these activities serve to harmonize your heart with God’s life of love? Do they?

Chapter 3. Walking in Affection

Choose an idea or illustration from this chapter that struck you as particularly important and prepare to discuss that with the group.

1. In what ways is your faith starkly rational or overly emotional?

- What might it mean to have an affectionate knowledge of God? How does this relate to seeing Christ as beautiful?

2. What sorts of desires arise in your heart in devotional matters, in church or in everyday activity? How do you respond to these desires? Why?

- Do you assume that desires are things to rid yourself of, or do you allow desires to unveil the truth of yourself before the God who knows all?

3. In your own life, do you hold head and heart in tension, having to choose one or the other? Or, with Edwards, do they act in unison?

- What impact might this have on growing in an affectionate knowledge of God?

4. What “taste” are you growing accustomed to in your current Christian life? Are you developing a taste for glory or a taste for a certain social group or status?

5. How does the summary on page 66 reframe your understanding of the nature and goal of the Christian life? How might this change your practices?

Chapter 4. Spiritual Disciplines as Means of Grace

Choose an idea or illustration from this chapter that struck you as particularly important and prepare to discuss that with the group.

1. Before reading this chapter, how would you have described spiritual disciplines?

- What role did you think they played in your growth? How did that form your understanding of spiritual practice?

2. What are some areas in your life that you tend not to hand over to God?

- As you think about the metaphor “recalibration” around Christ by the Spirit, how do you see that forming your practices?

3. Compare your own understanding of grace with how grace is discussed in this chapter. Before you read this chapter, how would you have defined grace?

4. Choose one of the three biblical descriptions of means of grace on pages 76-77 and explain which one was the most helpful and why.

5. Look at the list of means of grace on page 83. What do you think about this list? What might it mean to discern, in community, which of these the Lord is calling you to integrate into your life?

Chapter 5. Knowledge of God and Knowledge of Self

Choose an idea or illustration from this chapter that struck you as particularly important and prepare to discuss that with the group.

1. What drives you? What is your driving motivation in the Christian life?

- Try to name both vices and virtues that act as motivators as you follow Christ.
- What sins do you try to turn into virtues?

2. Do you have practices and relationships in your life that help you know the truth about yourself?

- If not, why?

3. How can you be more strategic in engaging with practices and in relationships that reveal areas of self-deception?

4. Re-read Edwards's description of his spiritual journey on page 101. How does this contrast with your thoughts about how the Christian life should go?

- How have you experienced this?

5. How does a notion like sovereignty lead you in humility?

- Have you seen ways that someone has tried to uphold sovereignty and yet allowed it to fuel pride? How might this have been protected against?

6. On page 106 we see four ways envy shapes our interactions with others. How have you seen this in your own life? Have you seen other ways envy and other vices blind you to treat others as less than yourself?

Chapter 6. Meditation and Contemplation

Choose an idea or illustration from this chapter that struck you as particularly important and prepare to discuss that with the group.

1. What is your initial reaction to the terms *meditation* and *contemplation*?

- Are these aspects of how you understand the Christian life or are these foreign to your practice? Why do you think this is?

2. Talk through some ways you could integrate occasional and deliberate meditation in your life.

- As you look back on your life, were there times you engaged in these activities on your own without realizing it? What were the contexts?
- What is the status of your heart when you try to focus on God and his truth? What might be the reason for this?

3. Walk through Edwards's meditation on pages 122-25. How might a meditation like this be used in your own devotional time? What fruit might you see in following this practice?

4. Talk through contemplation and how this could be a regular practice in your life. Spend some time discussing the temptations in contemplation and how one might navigate those.

- Contemplation is "setting our minds on Christ" by faith, but is also connected to our call to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. Talk about how you think contemplation could be a means of grace that forms your heart after this calling to love.

Chapter 7. Jonathan Edwards's Spiritual Practices

Choose an idea or illustration from this chapter that struck you as particularly important and prepare to discuss that with the group.

1. Choose 2-3 practices to talk through and ask the following questions:

- What was your initial reaction to reading about these various practices? Do any of these practices stir something in you? Which ones?

- Did or do you have concerns about these practices? Has that changed? If so, why?

If not, why not?

- Has anyone had any experience practicing these? If so, have them share their experience.

2. Take one practice, and using the format in appendix 2, do the practice and plan on sharing your experience with the group the next time you meet. Then ask the question, Is this something that should be a regular part of my life? Could any of these practices benefit me in decision making, grieving or during other seasons of life?