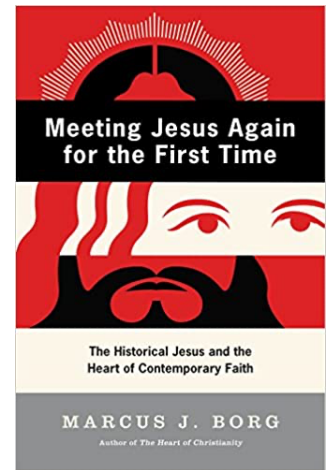


Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time

by Marcus Borg

Study/Preparation Guide: Session 1



1. Read the following pages from *MJAFT*
 1. Preface (pp vii-ix)
 2. Chapter 1: Meeting Jesus Again (pp. 1-19)
 3. [Summary on reverse – if you don't have the book]
2. After reading the material, work on the following exercises:
 1. Identify your personal images of Jesus and, if you can, when they first developed on your imagination. What influences helped shape those particular images of Jesus? How have those images of Jesus shaped your faith and life?
 2. Draw a simple timeline for your life, noting significant phases and turning point. Are there times in your life when your faith has been particularly relevant or less so? Have specific people made a difference to the significance of Jesus to you at these times?
3. Check out this on-line reference for a biography of Borg, a list of his books, as well as some supplementary information for our discussions:
<http://www.aportraitofjesus.org>

Focus Questions for our discussion:

1. Why do images of Jesus matter? What are the two dominant images?
(p. 1-3)
2. How does Borg's own story resonate with your spiritual journey thus far?
(p. 3-15)
3. Why does Borg use the terms pre-Easter Jesus and post-Easter Jesus?
(p. 15-17)
4. What do you think about his distinction between belief and relationship?
(p. 17)

Summary of Preface & Chapter 1

Preface:

- “[T]hough we have all met Jesus before, meeting Jesus again can be like meeting somebody new” (vii)
- “This book is the product of thinking and talking about Jesus in the secular contexts of a state university and professional academy, and of thinking and talking about Jesus in the Christian context of the church and my own life journey.” (viii)

Chapter 1—Meeting Jesus Again:

“Most of us first meet [Jesus] when we were children”, and “for many, the childhood image of Jesus remains intact into adulthood”. (1)

Images of Jesus and images of the Christian life

“Images of Jesus matter. The foundational claim of this book is that there is a strong connection between images of Jesus and images of the Christian life, between how we think of Jesus and how we think of the Christian life. Our image of Jesus affects our perception of the Christian life in two ways: it gives shape to the Christian life; and it can make Christianity credible or incredible” (1-2)

Most common image (the “popular image”) of Jesus: Jesus as divine savior.

Image of Christian life: *believing* (i.e., *fideistic*)

Slightly less common image: Jesus as teacher

Image of Christian life: “being good” (i.e., *moralistic*)

Christian life ultimately is not about believing or being good, but about a relationship with God that involves us in a journey of transformation. (2-3)

Meeting Jesus Again: My own story

Childhood:

Grew up Scandinavian Lutheran in 1940’s North Dakota. Fairly typical post-war Christian upbringing. Learned that “believing in Jesus, and telling others the tidies of Jesus, were the most important things in the world” (5).

‘By the end of childhood . . . Jesus was the divinely begotten Son of God who dies for the sins of the world and whose message was about himself and his saving purpose and the importance of believing in him”. “I received this image of Jesus in what I have since learned to call *testate of precritical naiveté*” (6).

But . . . how could God be everywhere present, AND up in heaven?

Adolescence:

Doubts about existence of God, accompanied by anxiety, guilt and fear

Belief is not a matter of the will

Collision between modern worldview and childhood beliefs

“What does it mean to speak of Jesus as the Song of God when one is no longer sure that God is?” (7)

College:

Religion Course exploded much: “A college ended, the images of Christianity and Jesus that I had received as a child were not longer persuasive or compelling My childhood understanding of Christianity had collapsed, but nothing had replaced it” (8).

Seminary and Beyond:

First semester NT course on historical Jesus!

Gospels not divine documents or straightforward historical records, but rather represent the developing traditions of early Christian movement: (1) traditions about Jesus were adapted and applied to the changing circumstances of the early Christian movement; (2) the movement’s beliefs about Jesus *grew* during those decades.

Distinction between “Jesus of history” and “Christ of faith”. “Christ of faith” is pretty much what we encounter in the Gospels

So what was Jesus’ message?

In his mid-30’s, Borg had some “nature mystical” experiences that helped him see that there was an inner experience of God. He changed “definitions” of God away from “up there” or “everywhere” to be “the shared at the center of existence, the holy mystery that is all around us and within us.” (14). “God was no longer a concept or an article of belief, but had become an element of experience” (15)

How I See Jesus Now:

“I began to see Jesus as one whose spirituality—his experiential awareness of Spirit—was foundational for his life [I]n addition to being deeply involved in the social world of the everyday, he was also grounded in the world of the Spirit” (15).

The Pre-Easter and the Post-Easter Jesus

“There simply is a major difference between what Jesus was like as a figure of history and how he is spoken of in the gospel and later Christian tradition”.

Pre-Easter Jesus = Jesus as a figure of history before his death

Post-Easter Jesus = Jesus of Christian tradition and experience

Central meaning of Easter: “Beginning with Easter, the early movement continued to experience Jesus as a living reality after his death, *but in a radically new way*” (16).

Beyond Belief to Relationship

“I no longer see the Christian life as being primarily about believing (not believing in God, or the Bible, or the Christian tradition) Rather, the Christian life is about entering into a relationship with that to which the Christian tradition points, which may be spoken of as God, the risen living Christ, or the Spirit. And a Christian is one who lives out his or her relationship to God within the framework of the Christian tradition” (17)