

A Study Guide for *Saving Jesus*

This is a new opportunity for me and maybe for you to be able to work together as author and reader. The purpose of these materials and the online workbook is to provide a forum to explore some of the issues raised for folks (myself included) in *Saving Jesus: From Those Who Are Right*. Let me tell you a little about how this idea of putting a workbook online came to be.

It took years to write *Saving Jesus*. When I finally turned it into the publisher in March 1999, it was (like the world it describes) still unfinished. Every day, every conversation, every world and local event to catch my attention, called forth some new awareness of something I might have said in the book, or said differently. I tell my students that, at its best, theology is a work in progress. It is never complete, never closed as canon, never a finished dogma or final statement. Good theology is a living, relational project, able to be seasoned and strengthened only as it is shared, studied, and revised.

This is what I am hoping for with *Saving Jesus*. To be true to its relational spirit, the book needs engagement, critique, and ongoing "enlargement" through the lives and responses of its readers. Not that I will rewrite the book, but rather that you and I together will re-frame its meanings as it takes on a life of its own, however large or small, through us.

I hope that this online workbook will become, over time, a collaborative theological adventure. I must confess that I don't understand the mechanics of how this is going to work! My editorial mentors at Fortress Press, as well as my more computer literate friends, will be helping me as we go. These colleagues and I will be including, here at this Web site, some of your contributions to this conversation. We will not be able to include everything, of course, but we will be trying to make space for whatever seems to us to most creatively stretch or challenge the spiritual and political implications of *Saving Jesus: From Those Who Are Right*. You can reach me by e-mail at savingjesus@juno.com.

I know you will understand why I must respond primarily (or maybe only, depending upon the volume of interest generated at this Web site) to those who actually have read the book or are reading it. I hope readers will want to suggest topics, questions, and content for the workbook. I'll be paying attention to what you say and, I'm sure, will learn a lot with you as we go. May we enjoy ourselves along the way!

Carter Heyward
October 6, 1999

Introduction

Hungering for God

"Hungering for God" is a four-week study guide I have prepared for Advent. It is based on the Preface and Chapters 1 ("Origins") and 2 ("Speaking with Authority"), pages xi-54, of my most recent book, *Saving Jesus: From Those Who Are Right--Rethinking What It Means to Be Christian*. The materials here are meant to be simply a guide; they can be adapted or revised as needed.

I look forward to receiving your responses if you wish to send them to me at savingjesus@juno.com, or you can write me at Episcopal Divinity School, 99 Brattle St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

Have fun with this, dear sisters and brothers!

Preparation

1. **Setting:** This is an adult Christian education class that meets once a week for about an hour. (A one-and-a-half to two-hour session would be better but is not necessary).

2. **Number of participants:** As few as two or three or as many as wish to participate (class will involve lots of small group conversation, regardless of how many are in it).
3. **Prerequisite:** If possible, everyone should have read the Preface and Chapters 1 and 2 of *Saving Jesus* prior to the first meeting of the class. This is not absolutely necessary, but it will help participants have a stronger sense of the purpose and direction of the class.
4. **Note about reading *Saving Jesus*:** Except for the Preface, the book is not, for the most part, a fast read. While on the surface, it is not hard to read, its content can be challenging. It is often spiritually and intellectually dense and is best read slowly -- a page, or sometimes a paragraph or so, at a time and digested slowly. Excerpts will be read again during the class.
5. **Materials needed:** Class participants and leaders can decide how much, if at all, to use these materials for artwork and for recording learnings on a board, etc. Dance and movement would also add wonderful dimensions to this study if folks wish. This is entirely optional and up to those who are taking the class.
 - a. Chalkboard and chalk or newsprint, markers, masking tape; variety of art materials (optional);
 - b. Each participant will need a notebook and pen or pencil;
 - c. Every one should have access to a copy of *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right*.
6. **Theological basis:** The theological basis of this study invites participants to make two commitments from the beginning:
 - a. Because all life, including learning about Jesus and hungering for God, is in relation, the study will presuppose that folks are working together, not primarily as individuals throughout. Much of the work each week will happen in small groups (of two, three, or four people).
 - b. Because all theology, like all life, is grounded in God, each session should begin and end in brief periods of silence and/or prayer, invoking the Spirit's guidance in this work.

Week 1

The Social and Personal Bases of Our Spiritual Hunger

1. **Silence/Prayer, following this reading:**

"I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." (Jesus, according to Matthew) 5 mins.
2. **Introduction of participants (in classes with no more than twelve to fifteen members):** Each person gives her or his name plus one hope (briefly stated) for the study. This is always a tricky part of a course, since some folks will talk longer than they realize. The designated leader should stress the need for brevity at this point. A good way of helping people get to know each other is to have a coffee hour, dessert party, or other informal gathering before or after each class meeting. 5 mins.
3. **Setting the theological and pedagogical stage:** Someone presents the two theological bases stated above: that all life is "in relation" and that everything we do and are is "in God," hence the emphasis on working in groups, not alone, and beginning and ending the time together each week in silence and/or prayer. 5 mins.
4. **Interplay of social and personal:** Group reads aloud pages 36-37 (beginning "What we know about God" and ending "It all goes together in God"). 5 mins.
 - a. The whole group talks for a few minutes about the significance of this "dynamic interplay of social and personal forces." 5 mins.
 - b. Break into triads, in which each person names and describes briefly a few of the social and personal contexts of their spiritual hunger (hunger for God). "Social" includes racial, ethnic, class, gender, sexual, age, and other contexts. 15 mins.

- c. Share some of these contexts in the whole group and discuss how they are related to folks' spiritual hunger 10-15 mins.
5. **Silence/prayer and optional closing reading.**
6. **Assignment for next session:**
 - a. Read as much of the Preface and Chapters