

# WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, ILLUMINATED BY THE MESSAGE

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND GROUP DISCUSSION

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Read the Introduction. Share anything that strikes you or raises questions and discuss them with others.
2. What do you think of the idea of taking excerpts from famous literary authors and combining them with passages from the Bible?
3. How do you react—positively or negatively—to the contemporary translation of the Scriptures from *The Message* that is paired with each literary passage. Give specific examples.
4. Do you feel that prayer can be triggered in this way? Why or why not? What is your definition of prayer?
5. Who are other authors who have inspired you? Explain why and how.
6. Is art in general a portal to prayer for you? Explain your answer or give examples.
7. What else encourages or inspires you to pray? Name these inspirations.
8. Do you ever get “stuck” trying to pray? What happens when you do? If you are never “stuck,” why do you think that is so?
9. What is the difference for you (if any) between “religious” or “spiritual” writing and “secular” or “literary” writing? Explain your answer.
10. Can you learn how to pray from those who do not share your exact beliefs? Why or why not? Give examples if you can.

### SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

1. Sonnet 17, page 18, says “The age to come would say, “This poet lies, Such Heavenly touches ne’re touched earthly faces.” What do you think Shakespeare means? Job 37 (page 19) asks, “Do you have any idea how God does it all?” Have you ever had an experience of awe at the beauty of another person or thing that knocked your socks off? If so, describe it.
2. “Or in the night, imagining some fear, how easy is a bush supposed a bear?” (A Midsummer Night’s Dream, page 22). What does this image mean to you? Has your imagination ever done this to you? Tell the story. How might this verse from Shakespeare be connected to the passage on page 23 from 2 Corinthians with what is going on in our world today: “The world doesn’t fight fair. But we don’t live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will.”
3. Compare the views of Shakespeare in Sonnet 116 and those of 1 Peter on pages 38-39. Which more accurately reflect your experience of love, prayer, and “encores to the end of time.” Explain your answer with specific quotes from the two passages.
4. Do you ever blame God for something? Do others you know do it? Why? What do Shakespeare in King Lear and Proverbs 19 on pages 46-47 make you think about that practice?
5. “All this I observed as I tried my best to understand all that’s going on in this world. As long as men and women have the power to hurt each other, this is the way it is.” What does this passage from Ecclesiastes 8 on page 75 relate to your experience? Now read Shakespeare’s verses from As You Like It on page 74. How do you react to those?
6. “Hark, hark, the lark at Heaven’s gate sings (Cymbeline II, page 82). What is your favorite kind of music? Can you explain that? Why or why not?
7. What do you think Shakespeare means when he writes in As You Like It (page 98): “Sweet are the uses of adversity”? Have you ever experienced something good coming from adversity? If so, did it lead to “a change from rage and stormy weather” as described in Psalm 55 (page 99)? Describe what happened and, if you can, why and how.
8. See pages 102-103. What does it mean to you to “pray very simply.” Give some examples. Be specific.
9. Read the two epitaphs on page 104. What would you want your own gravestone to say that would “still be there” many years from now as Rachel’s was in Genesis on page 105?
10. “Love never dies,” says St. Paul in 1 Corinthians on page 111. “Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, but bears it out eve thill the edge of doom,” says Shakespeare in Sonnet 116 on page 110 What do you think about these two statements in terms of your own experience of love?