

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT, 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. On page 18, Sylvia Yule sits by the bedside of a longtime invalid. Listening to woman share her experience, Sylvia is inspired by the woman's words and is aware of a greater wisdom, one that, as the scripture says “goes deep into the interior of his purposes.” When have you been aware of God's wisdom in your life? Can you share an experience where, like Sylvia, you suddenly became aware that God was speaking to you and imparting his wisdom to you? What did you learn?
2. In Matthew 26 we read of Jesus asking his disciples to keep vigil with him as he prayed for strength to face his suffering on Calvary. Alcott (on page 26) offers the example of the nurse sitting by the bedside of the soldier, John, who was dying and in need of company and consolation. She remarks on “those little cares and kindnesses that... make the heavy hours pass easier.” As a parent, have you kept vigil by the bedside of a sick child? As a grown up child, have you sat with an aging parent in need of company? Describe your experience—how did it make you feel? How do you see keeping this sort of vigil as keeping vigil with our Lord? What kindnesses and consolations were you able to offer?
3. On page 37 1 John 4 says that “God is love” and that since God dwells within us, we can be free of fear. In *Little Women*, Beth overcomes her acute shyness to run to the gruff Mr. Laurence, put her arms around his neck and kissed him in gratitude for his magnanimous gift of a piano; Alcott writes that Beth forgot her fear as a result of her love for her new friend. How has love of God and love for others freed you from fear? Can you describe a specific situation where love for another inspired courage in you? What did you do?
4. Jo March was known for her fierce temper on page 40. In a frightening episode where she nearly lost Amy to drowning, Jo becomes painfully aware of the danger of that temper and begs her mother for forgiveness and advice. The scripture from 1 Corinthians 10 rings true: “[God will] never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.” Think of a time when a certain sin drove you to the edge: what was that sin and how did God pull you back from the edge? Whom did he send to help you? What was your response?
5. Psalm 86 (on page 45) says that God is both “tender and kind, not easily angered, immense in love.” Marmee advises the distraught Jo to go her Heavenly Father as she would turn to her own father, and bring all of her cares and troubles. Do you believe that the all-powerful, omnipotent God cares about your troubles? Do you think he will listen to you and offer you consolation? Take a moment and write a letter to God, describing a problem you are experiencing in your life. Be specific, as if you were talking to your best friend, fully expecting advice and

consolation. How did you feel after writing that letter? Do you believe it to be a prayer to God?

6. During Beth's illness with the scarlet fever, Amy was sent to live with Aunt March (page 48). While there, she set up an altar and prayed devotions which she found very comforting. In a sense, she saw what is described in 2 Corinthians 3—she suddenly recognized God as a living, personal presence. And as the verses go on to describe, she is transfigured, changing her behavior in many lovely ways. In what ways do you spend time with God besides attending Sunday services? How has that time together with him changed you? List specific behaviors that you believe were changed due to time in prayer with the Lord.
7. After Beth's death, Jo goes through a period of mourning (page 72). In the course of that grief, she found her heart opening to new people and experiences. Ephesians 4 says that "God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love." If you have grieved for a loved one lost, what did grief teach you? Did you grow from your time in mourning and if so, how? If you have not yet lost a loved one, is there some other type of grief you have experienced such as a best friend moving away, a love relationship breaking up or a child in trouble? How has such a time helped you to open your heart and grow in love in the spirit of Christ?
8. On page 82, Rose Campbell compares the saint she admires (St. Francis of Assisi) with the soldierly St. Martin that her cousin Charlie looks up to. Matthew 10 speaks of forgetting ourselves and looking to God to find both ourselves and him. Why is Rose's veneration of St. Francis preferable to Charlie's admiration of St. Martin? Is there a saint that you admire and if so, why? What is it about that saint's life that inspires you?
9. Christie Devon went through a difficult time trying to find God in her life. She knew where she could not find him, but did not know where she could. Alcott (on page 84) describes the journey that is a life of faith and that if we continually seek him, we will find him. During your faith journey, what led you to God; how did you find him? What do you do on a regular basis to continue learning about God so that you can draw closer to him and trust in him?
10. On page 88 we meet Mrs. Wilkins. We can tell by Alcott's description that she was not a physically attractive woman. Yet Christie found her to be beautiful. What was that inner beauty described in 1 Peter 3 that Christie found in Mrs. Wilkins? Can you think of someone in your life whose beautiful soul attracts you with its power? How has that person influenced you?