

ELIZABETH GASKELL, 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 the first page of the book and again on page 78, Elizabeth Gaskell describes the secret to the transformation of a lonely young woman: “She has a purpose in life; and that purpose is a holy one.” What is your holy purpose? How do the suggestions in Romans 12 on page 79 help you discover and sustain that purpose?
2. On page 14 Captain Brown astounds the women of Cranford by helping a poor woman carry her dinner. Have you been challenged to perform an act of mercy when it has been inconvenient or when others have objected to your course of action? If so, describe what happened.
3. What do you think of the interaction of the parson and the poacher on page 24? How do the tenets of Matthew 25 on page 25 inform your life? Identify a person or group who is “overlooked and ignored.”
4. On page 26 young Nelly evangelizes John Middleton with her “rote-knowledge.” What scriptural gems—“better than a diamond”—have others shared with you? What are your favorite passages when offering encouragement or comfort to others? Share them.
5. On page 48 Margaret Hale examines her life as never before and resolves always to speak the truth. When has it been difficult for you to admit the truth about yourself? To speak the truth with love? Be specific.
6. How does our own suffering and grief prepare us to alleviate the suffering of others? Consider the transformation of the relationship of John Barton and Mr. Carson on page 60, 62, 64, and 66. Chose at least one of the accompanying Scripture passages to support your answer.
7. Nature is a balm for weary souls in the story of Libbie Marsh on page 72. How does the psalm on page 73 reflect the passage on page 72? What is your favorite hymn of praise?
8. In a time of shared grief, Libbie Marsh discovers that Margaret Hall’s bible falls open to John 14. Describe the comfort St. John gives us in the passage on page 77. Would your Bible fall open in this way? If so, to what pages or passages? Or simply try it and see what happens.
9. What do you do and to whom do you turn when you sense danger or someone gives you a warning? What wisdom do you find in the excerpt from 1 Peter on page 91.
10. On page 100, Ruth’s heart is smitten and she admits her brokenness before God. When in your life have you come face to face with your own failings, your sinfulness? Tell the story. Consider the passage from the parable of the Good Samaritan on page 101.