

# MARCUS BORG

## Beyond Belief

Featuring Rev. Marianne Borg

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for [livingthequestions.com](http://livingthequestions.com)





# Beyond Belief with Marcus Borg

## 1. Centered in the Spirit

*"I don't think being Christian has very much to do with believing at all. And I think the emphasis upon believing is one of the modern distortions of what the Christian life is about."*

*-- Marcus Borg*

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### Questions for Reflection or Discussion

#### Chapter 1

How do you compare Borg's childhood belief system with your own?

Describe the difference between a belief-based faith and a relational faith.

#### Chapter 2

What's your experience of traditional Christological language being used in triumphant, exclusive ways?

How does Borg understand the focal point of Jesus as a mystic teacher of wisdom?

Where do you see the Divine at work in your relationships?

### **Chapter 3**

If Jesus is a “decisive disclosure of a life full of God,” what does that say about the importance of compassion?

According to Borg, how do we take Jesus seriously?

Where would you like to see your life being “more transformed into the likeness of Christ”?

Marianne Borg speaks of presence and wonderment, intellect and the academy, head and heart. Where are you in the journey towards wholeness?

### **Further Questions**

Which ideas from this session did you resonate with? Which did you find challenging?

What are the implications of this material for you personally? For your community? For faith-based institutions as a whole?



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## 2. Meeting Jesus Again

*"Whenever we emphasize the divinity of Jesus at the expense of his humanity, we lose track of the utterly remarkable human being he was. [South African Jesus Scholar Albert] Nolan puts it this way, 'Jesus is a much underrated man. To deprive this man of his humanity is to deprive him of his greatness.'"*

*-- Marcus Borg*

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### Questions for Reflection or Discussion

#### Chapter 1

What is the "Quest for the historical Jesus" and how has it shaped our understanding of Jesus?

What specific characteristics of the historical Jesus does Borg highlight?

#### Chapter 2

Borg suggests that the historical Jesus was more of a social prophet than a moralistic Bible-thumper. What of Jesus' values/priorities lead Borg to think that?

Who comes to mind as examples of contemporary social prophets?

The historical Jesus clearly had a passion for the economically disadvantaged and "least of these." What might a Christian's concern for economic justice look like today?

#### Chapter 3

How does Borg understand the two meanings of the Kingdom of God?

How does the personal understanding of the Kingdom of God become “the basis for the transformation of self”?

Why were the ruling elites right to kill Jesus?

#### **Chapter 4**

Why is Jesus’ use of “Kingdom” language so important?

What are some of the revolutionary and politically radical elements of the Lord’s Prayer?

Considering how foundational non-violence is to Jesus’ program, why do you suppose that it’s so seldom mentioned in our churches?

What was it about the rhetoric of Amos that so changed Borg’s understanding of our work as Christians?

#### **Further Questions**

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## 3. Followers of the Way

*"God's dream for the earth is for a world of justice (meaning primarily economic justice) and peace. And the way to justice and peace, in terms of Jesus' own message and incarnation, is the path of non-violent resistance to oppression and an affirmation of a non-violent world. That's one way of talking about...following the Way of Jesus."*

*-- Marcus Borg*

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### Questions for Reflection or Discussion

#### Chapter 1

How does Borg distinguish between the pre-Easter and post-Easter Jesus?

What's your gut response to Borg's assertion that the Resurrection isn't so much about an empty tomb as it is experiencing the risen Christ?

#### Chapter 2

What does Borg mean by:

Sacrifice

Anti-Temple Theology

Institutional Monopoly

In its context, why is Hebrews so subversive?

Taken out of context, how has Hebrews been misused to promote substitutionary atonement?

How do you understand what Borg calls the "metaphorical proclamation of radical grace"?

What are the implications for the Christian life if Jesus' death means "the abolition of requirements as the basis for our relationship to God"?

How would you describe the difference between religion based on requirements and religion based on relationship?

### **Chapter 3**

How does Paul's experience of the risen Christ illustrate the proclamations "Jesus Lives" and "Jesus is Lord."

Early followers of "the Way" experienced the risen Christ in ways that healed, transformed lives, and created new forms of community. Where do you see that in the world today?

With what false alternative has "modernity's preoccupation with factuality" burdened us?

### **Chapter 4**

There are two dimensions to "the Way": an internal/metaphorical way and an external/"worldly" way. Explain.

### **Further Questions**

Which ideas from this session did you resonate with? Which did you find challenging?

What are the implications of this material for you personally? For your community? For faith-based institutions as a whole?



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## 4. Reading the Bible

*"To use a phrase from the contemporary Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy, the Bible is a 'religious classic.' By definition, a religious classic is a book that has a surplus of meaning – meaning that goes beyond what the ancient author or the ancient community intended."*

*-- Marcus Borg*

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### Questions for Reflection or Discussion

#### Chapter 1

What do you find most helpful for your journey in the way Borg describes the Bible as a human product?

What are the advantages to reading the Bible metaphorically instead of literally?

#### Chapter 2

Define:

De-literalization

De-absolutism

"surplus of meaning"



According to Borg, what are the reasons the Bible has such significance?

### **Chapter 3**

Borg details three Biblical “macro-stories.” Describe each.

1. Exile and Return
2. Bondage and Liberation
3. Priestly Story

What disadvantages do you see in Christianity having emphasized the Priestly Story (to the exclusion of the other stories)?

### **Further Questions**

Which ideas from this session did you resonate with? Which did you find challenging?

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## 5. An Emerging Way

*"Marcus wanted to make possible a re-engagement with faith for those for whom intellectual or emotional obstacles prevented them from going any further. As he would say, 'There's no right way to be a Christian. But there are many wrong ways.'"*

*-- Marianne Borg*

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### Questions for Reflection or Discussion

#### Chapter 1

Define:

Pre-Critical Naïveté

Critical Thinking

Post-Critical Naïveté

Share an expression of Christianity that you've encountered outside of your own tradition.

What do you suppose some of the differences are between a "believing understanding" and a "relational-Sacramental" understanding of Christianity?

#### Chapter 2

Why is the "belief-based" understanding of Christianity problematic for modern sensibilities?

Why is “faith as belief” impotent?

Share how your relationship with the Divine has transcended beliefs of the tradition in which you grew up.

### **Chapter 3**

How is American Christianity’s obsession with sin, guilt, and forgiveness an expression of misplaced individualism?

Define “systemic justice.”

According to Borg, what are some of the marks of the emerging (yet ancient) Christian Way?

How is thinking about Jesus’ message as “subversive and alternative wisdom” different from the message you grew up with? How might it be helpful going forward?

How would you describe the two focal points Borg says were central in Jesus’ own life?



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## 6. Beyond Belief

*"You can believe all the right things and still be a jerk. And to soften that, you can believe all the right things and still be miserable or still be in bondage or still be untransformed. And so the emphasis upon belief is, I think, modern and mistaken. It's also very divisive. And once people start thinking that being a Christian is about believing the right things, then anybody's list of what the right things are to believe becomes a kind of litmus test."*

*-- Marcus Borg*

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### Questions for Reflection or Discussion

#### Chapter 1

How does knowing that each of us goes through various "stages of faith" foster an understanding of our own doubts and struggles?

How much does this knowledge persuade you to have patience with where other people are in their faith development?

How would you describe what Borg calls the "deep yearnings" within most human beings?

#### Chapter 2

What are the implications of moving away from a supernatural theism toward a mystical, panentheistic understanding of the divine?

If the guarantee of a "blessed hereafter" is a "terrible, terrible motive for Christianity," what, then, is being a Christian all about?

### **Further Questions**

Which ideas from this session did you resonate with? Which did you find challenging?

What are the implications of this material for you personally? For your community? For faith-based institutions as a whole?

### **For Reflection**

What one idea from the entire series will you take with you as constructive or transformational for your spiritual life?

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*"Being a Christian is about a relationship with God and the transformation of our lives in the present into more and more compassionate beings. It's about our transformation – here and now."*

*-- Marcus Borg*