

Study Guide for *Where God Happens* by Rowan Williams

Session 1: *Preface & Chapter 1 - Life, Death, and Neighbors*

Opening Collect

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Questions

- What might a contemplative church look and feel like today, with its intense fidelity to shared silence as well as shared belief and experience?
- How might it reflect the peaceful worthwhileness of each person?
- What might life and death with our neighbors look like?
- What vision and hope does everything begin with?
- What is one of the great temptations of religious life and how might we resist it?
- What is the relationship between connecting with God and connecting with others?
- How can we be both strenuous and relaxed?
- How can you learn to become a means of reconciliation and healing for your neighbor? And what might you learn?

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, we entrust all who are close to us to your never-failing care and love, for this life and the life to come, knowing that you are doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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Session 2: *Chapter 2 - Silence and Honey Cakes*

Opening Collect

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Questions

- What do silence and honey cakes have to do with Christian vocation?
- How can words hurt and silence help?
- What are the different kinds of silence and what difference do they make?
- How is the creative process related to the way of the cross?
- How can sincerity and following your own heart be a problem for us?
- How is our human condition like music?
- How can we be both individualistic and conformist?
- What is the difference between an individual and a person? What difference does it make? And how is that related to choice and effort?
- What does this all have to do with Christ, grace, quirky behavior and bizarre characters?

Closing Prayer

O God, the creator and preserver of all mankind, we humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men; that thou wouldst be pleased to make thy ways known unto them, thy saving health unto all nations. More especially we pray for thy holy Church universal; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Finally, we commend to thy fatherly goodness all those who are in any ways afflicted or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; that it may please thee to comfort and relieve them according to their several necessities, giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

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Session 3: *Chapter 3 - Fleeing*

Opening Collect

O Lord Jesus Christ, you became poor for our sake, that we might be made rich through your poverty: Guide and sanctify, we pray, those whom you call to follow you under the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, that by their prayer and service they may enrich your Church, and by their life and worship may glorify your Name; for you reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Questions

- What might we flee from? Why?
- What does it mean to “become fire?”
- What is the primary responsibility in the desert?
- What is the “insoluble problem,” and how do we solve it?
- How might holy people actually be different from what we would expect them to be?
- What kind of silence benefits community and creativity?
- What kind of speech benefits community and creativity?
- Why do we need a basic education in attention and patience?
- How is running away *from* related to running away *to*?

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, whose Son had nowhere to lay his head: Grant that those who live alone may not be lonely in their solitude, but that, following in his steps, they may find fulfillment in loving you and their neighbors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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Session 4: *Chapter 4 - Staying*

Opening Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Questions

- What might “Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything” mean today?
- How can the present moment and the next task help?
- How can we best deal with boredom?
- What does the example of Jesus and his temptations and his humanity show us about staying?
- What does “confront the challenge of uncomfortable reality” mean and how can we best deal with it?
- Where does our unity really come from, where is it found?
- What might a contemplative church look and feel like today, with its intense fidelity to shared silence as well as shared belief and experience?
- How might it reflect the peaceful worthwhileness of each person?
- So, where does God happen?

Closing Prayer

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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Session 5: *Chapter 5 - The Monastic Wisdom of the Christian Desert: a selection of sayings*

Opening Collect

Merciful God, who sent your messengers to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Questions

- Which saying do you like most?
- What might it teach you to flee from, flee to, and stay with?
- What might it teach our church to flee from, flee to, and stay with?
- Which saying do you like least?
- What might it teach you to flee from, flee to, and stay with?
- What might it teach our church to flee from, flee to, and stay with?

Closing Prayer

Most loving Father, whose will it is for us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing but the loss of you, and to cast all our care on you who care for us: Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which you have manifested to us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*