

Deeply Formed Life

Group Discussion Guide

(introduction)

This guide is a resource for you and your group. Feel free to work through all the questions in order, or just the ones that feel most helpful. And be aware, there are more questions here than you can get through, so pick the ones that connect most for you or your group... Keep in mind that the goal isn't merely to cover the material, but to come to know God, ourselves and one another more – so start with prayer and ask God to lead you where you need to go.

Introduction: Formed by a Shallow World

1. Drawing on the story of the Titanic as a metaphor for our lives, Rich writes (p.xii) – “Sooner or later the issues on life’s lower decks, though we remain oblivious, will nevertheless rise to the top.”
 - How do **you** connect with his use of this metaphor? How does this relate to your own desire as you enter into this study together?
2. On page xiii, following up on this, Rich concludes, “It is in those... lower decks where our spiritual lives take true shape and texture. But notoriously, we won’t take time to go deep down within because we have often been **disciplined into superficiality** – and in the name of Jesus, no less. This **superficiality works against us** as we try to navigate some of the complex issues of our world, whether related to our emotional health or the complexities of race, sexuality, and justice.”
 - Is Rich naming something here that we’ve seen in our own lives at times? If so, how?
3. On p.xiv, Rich maps out three ways that different Christian communities oversimplify the goal of Christian maturity. He writes,
 - “In some conservative traditions, transformation is about *getting the right theology* in one’s head while overlooking the inner work God wants to do.”
 - “In some progressive traditions, transformation is about *right action and engagement within the world* but often at the expense of personal humility and mercy.”
 - “In some Charismatic and Pentecostal traditions, transformation is about *getting the right experience* but without the deeper work of loving well and exploring our inner worlds.”
 - Which of these is familiar for you? Explain.
4. On pgs.xv + xvi, Rich describes an experience where he was challenged that his natural teaching gifts could be a dangerous foil for a lack of true spiritual maturity.

- What have been some of the dangers for us - ways of "presenting" spiritual maturity in a way that actually hid our lack of spiritual formation?
5. With Paul's letter to the Galatians in mind, Rich argues that "we are not transformed from the outside in; we are transformed from the inside out." (p.xvii)
 - What's the difference between these two & what does this look in action?
 6. As part of this introduction, Rich shares some of his own "story of being formed" - the experiences, environments and influences that have shaped his vision of God, church and the Christian life.
 - Looking back on your own life's journey - how would you finish the following statements in this season of your life and how have your answers changed over the years (childhood, early adult years, etc).
 - God is...
 - The church is...
 - The Christian life is...
 7. On pgs.xxv + xxvi, Rich introduces the themes (or *root system*) that this book will explore:
 - **Contemplative Rhythms** for an exhausted life
 - **Racial Reconciliation** for a divided world
 - **Interior Examination** for a world living on the surface
 - **Sexual Wholeness** for a culture that splits bodies from souls
 - **Missional Presence** for a distracted and disengaged people
 - Which theme do you most feel the need for help in, or simply most want to explore with others?
 8. Lastly, note that Rich has written this book with not only ideas to be considered, but **practices** to be engaged (personally and together). The reason for this being that "we are more than brains on sticks" (as James K.A. Smith says). If we want/need a deeper way of living and being, we need more just *new ideas*.
 - How could we support one another in not just reading this book, but actually engaging the practices? (it might be worth starting or ending each session with some sharing about what practices have been most helpful to us and how.)

PRAY: Take a few minutes to pray for one another and for our church in the light of what's been discussed and shared tonight. Consider committing to pray for one another between meetings.

Before You Leave: clarify the date of the next meeting and chapters to be read.