

Divine Nobodies Conversation Guide

32 Questions Masquerading as 15

In the two introductions, Jim reveals quite a bit about himself and in some cases, things many people wouldn't admit to others. This sets the tone for the rest of the book. Too often people present a pseudo-self and hide their true struggles, wounds, and hang-ups. People particularly hide their questions, doubts, fears, hurts and struggles with God. Why do we hide from each other? What do we fear? What would it mean to take one step forward in being real? What's the difference between pseudo-community and real community?

Is it possible God's reason for wanting you is better than your reason for wanting him? If Christianity is not a glorified behavior modification or self-help program, or checklist of do's and don'ts to get God to like and bless us, or just a ticket punched to heaven when you die, then what is it!?

In chapter one, Jim describes an intimate encounter he had with God in which Christ expressed a deep love for Jim and his desire to free him from childhood wounds. Jesus said knowing the truth would set us free. Where in your life can you identify the need to be free? What "truth" do you suspect is the key to getting there?

Jim writes, *"For years of my life, my approach to God was akin to the field of astronomy. God was this immense celestial phenomenon, and the Bible was my telescope through which I caught distant glimpses, recording my observations, calculations, and interpretations in Sunday school guides and fill-in-the-blank sermon notes."* What does "knowing" God mean? If it's not the accumulation of facts or correct theology about God, then what is it? How does one "know" God?

How would you answer the question Kit posed to Jim, "What do you know of God from personal experience?" (no Bible verses or nice sounding theological verbiage allowed).

Jim writes, *"God has been trying to free me from the burden of doing something spectacular for him. It has a way of distracting you from the opportunities to be salt and light where you are...I'm starting to recognize that I am immersed in a sea of hurting people every day. If I simply pay attention and follow the promptings of the Spirit in all these little ways, my life is 'ministry.'"* What is at the bottom of our need to do some "great" thing for God? Why do we tend to discount or not value how God works through us along the everyday paths of life? How could you envision or describe your everyday life as a walking "ministry"?

Of all the divine nobodies, topics, or chapters, which one was most meaningful to you? Why? What was God's message to you through it?

Jim often shares that his "shedding religion" journey involved a major shift of tense and location in his Christianity. Jim was conditioned to mostly look outside himself for spiritual life and assumed the big payoff for knowing Christ was a matter of the afterlife. In Luke 17:21, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." In John 17:3, Jesus defined "eternal life" as "knowing God" and in John 8:32 said his truth would "set us free". Paul, in Galatians 2:20, referred to a dimension where "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." What does this stuff mean? Isn't it saying that the key location for a spiritual life is within us and that Christ is in the process of "saving us" now? What does it mean to be free?

Jim tells the story of his experience in traveling with International Justice Mission. In an interview Jim was asked, "You have been to South Asia where you saw little girls who were being forced into prostitution? Where was God in all their pain and suffering?" A portion of Jim's response was, *"I hear in Jesus' words 'the kingdom of God is within you' that the mind and power of God are within us to both conceive and give birth to his will 'on earth as it is in heaven.' I believe Jesus was trying to illustrate this fact in the feeding of the 5,000. A crowd of people following Jesus were hungry, but there was no food readily available. The disciples petitioned Jesus to wave his magic God-wand and miraculously fix it. Jesus essentially responded by saying, 'No, YOU fix it.' In the end, they met the need together. In the face of human suffering, we sometimes look into the sky petitioning God to come down and do his God-thing and solve it. The reply, however, comes from within reminding us that we move in concert with God as he lives his life in and through us. The common question is, 'Where is God in the midst of the pain and suffering of the world?' One day God asked me, 'Where are you, Jim, in the midst of the world's suffering?' The 'God and human suffering' question often drifts off into all sorts of theological, philosophical and theoretical debate, meanwhile little girls stand in long lines at makeshift clinics around the world to receive medicines for any number of sexually transmitted diseases. Confronting oppression wherever it exists and bringing rescue to victims of injustice wherever they are is a reflection of the heart of God in our world. God's kingdom is one of love, beauty, wholeness, freedom, peace, truth, and justice. Some people seem to be sitting around waiting for God to drop it on us. Maybe God wants to give birth to it through us."*

What is your response to how Jim answered the question? Can you discern how God seeks to relieve suffering, confront injustice, bring healing and give birth to his kingdom through you right where you are?

Throughout the book, Jim tells the story of how God used various ordinary and unsuspecting people to free him from religious legalism and know God more deeply. Share an example or story of one of your "divine nobodies"?

A common question people ask is, "Where do you go to church?" The question implies that church is essentially something you "go to" – a location, building, or some configuration of services, classes, meetings, and programs. If that's not essentially what "church" is, then what is it? Are there other more meaningful questions we could be asking one another about our journey with God and our experience of community with other believers?

Is the center of Christianity a book (Bible) or a living person (Christ)? Is there a difference? Is it a false dichotomy or are they two separate and different things? How do the two relate?

Many people feel the need to dissect or deconstruct their present spiritual beliefs in an effort to recover an authentic faith. This can sometimes be a messy process. What ways are you currently deconstructing your Christian faith and relationship with God that you are hesitant to tell others about for fear they might think you are going off the deep end or too far out there?

What religious mentality or conditioning has been broken in you that you feel has made a huge difference in you knowing God and relationship with God?

Jim has said that he believes that love is the most transformational force on earth. Let's say you decided you were going to love all people unconditionally and indiscriminately. This sounds great in theory, but seldom practiced in reality. Why? What hinders us and how do we overcome it?