



God Of Surprises

Gerard W. Hughes

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Recognised as one of the great books of spiritual guidance. It is a lovely, wise and lucid book of deep humanity. Above all, it is a useful book - a book to be read by those who find it hard to forgive themselves: the stumblers and agnostics who hardly dare believe that God is within them.

God Of Surprises Details

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Jodi says

This book broke my heart by teaching me more about the goodness of God and His regard towards us.

Ian says

This is a guidebook for the journey of life which began at conception and will end at death. It is written especially for bewildered, confused or disillusioned Christians, who have a love-hate relationship with the Church. God is a 'God of Surprises' because He is not remote or distant, dwelling only in tabernacles and temples of stone, but near to us. Smiling and waiting to embrace us despite our confusion, bewilderment, anger etc. This book aims to suggest some ways of detecting the hidden treasure in what may be considered a most unlikely field, oneself.

The treasure is within us. The First Chapter illustrates this premise. The treasure lies hidden in our inner moods and feelings. Many people live without getting in touch with their inner selves. Our inner selves can tell us the direction our lives should take and supply the inspiration and energy to take it. If the inner life is ignored, violence erupts in some form or the other. Religion, as it is often presented and understood, not only fails to give importance to the awareness of one's inner self, but even actively discourages it.

The Second Chapter shows us how we can get in touch with our inner selves. The author presents von Hügel's analysis of the three main stages of human development-infancy, adolescence and adulthood-describing the predominant needs and activities which characterize each stage. The growth of faith and its connection with these stages is also presented.

The Third Chapter deals with the ups and downs of our inner selves and false images of God we may have. Our inner life is at times chaotic and seemingly dangerous. Some of the feelings and emotions we discover could wreck us if we let them take control of us. How do we deal with them? We need to go to God and let him illumine our darkness. False images we may have of God, constructs of our upbringing, experiences or ideas can disturb and stifle us. Becoming aware of these false images is vital for our growth.

In the Fourth Chapter, the author suggests some methods of prayer. These methods help us meet the God who is actually out to meet us. Each of us has our own unique way of praying and hence may find one or the other method suitable. The suggestions of the author however could be a useful tool for those struggling to pray. He gives a good variety of methods to choose from.

Chapter Five shows how the journey is not only made with our minds and with the religious part of ourselves, but involves our whole being and affects every aspect of it, our relations to other people, our attitude to health, wealth, reputation, power, and our reactions to the economic, social and political structures in which we live.

Repentance is a must if we are to discover the treasure. Failure to repent is the root cause of many evils. The Sixth Chapter dwells on this theme and its pivotal role in Christian life. At the end of the chapter, the author makes a wonderful comparison between the marks of true repentance vis-à-vis false repentance.

In the Seventh Chapter, the author gives some exercises that will help us recognize the action of God in our

lives and give him praise, thanks and glory for it. He suggests reviewing one's consciousness and imaginative contemplation. At the end of the chapter, he presents some biblical texts which could be useful for imaginative contemplation.

The Eighth Chapter is devoted to learning to recognize the treasure when you find it. God is the answer to our inner restlessness and emptiness. When we approach Him we experience peace, tranquility and joy, but when we move away from Him the opposite feelings envelope us. The author presents seven guidelines that help us interpret our moods and feelings.

Chapter Nine is about Christ our treasure, whom we often take for granted and fail to recognize. The Jews did not recognize him and sometimes neither do we. This truth is illustrated in a letter written by an imaginary parish priest complaining of the disruptive behaviour of one of his parishioners.

Chapter Ten is aptly titled 'Knowing Christ'. When people imaginatively contemplate on the Gospels, they are often surprised by the Christ they meet. The author gives us some guidelines for reading or contemplating Christ in the Gospel.

Chapter Eleven focuses on the passion and resurrection of Christ. Faulty understanding of these two important events in Christ's life contribute to producing a distorted image of God and deter us from our spiritual journey.

We move towards the field and dig towards the treasure through the decisions we make in everyday life. Chapter Twelve is not a treatise on decision-making, but offers some basic guidelines for individual and group decisions.

The Final Chapter applies the insights of the book to a very real situation- the threat of nuclear war. In this chapter the author expresses his inner feelings regarding nuclear war and beautifully presents the Christian approach to nuclear weaponry and warfare.

The book was well received and was awarded the Collins Biennial Religious Book Award 1987. The author must be commended for his down-to-earth presentation and penetrating insights. His Jesuit spirituality permeates the entire book. Every chapter has the breath of the spiritual exercises. Ignatius is often invoked as a model. The exercises given at the end of each chapter helps to interiorize and work on the insights gained. Spiritual growth is aimed at and if one is serious, one will surely benefit.

Ron W. says

For those who prefer "theology - lite," this book is great. Hughes centers on Jesus's teaching regarding a hidden treasure, and how we may obtain it. The Kingdom Jesus spoke so much about is not that far away at all, and is the most priceless thing ever.

Barbara says

One of the best.

Mike says

If Gerard Hughes had expressed during the Inquisition what he'd written here, he would surely have been branded a heretic. Hughes openly challenges many of the most commonly-observed pillars of organized religion but productively offers solutions for churches progressing with the times to serve modern humanity.

As a baptized Catholic who seeks meaning in life and spirituality, yet feels alienated by organized religion, I found this book to be a great comfort. Perhaps it was because Hughes wrote things that validated my own views. I'm sure some of the more conservative Catholics would say he is way off, but, well, he's a priest too and views like his will do a lot more to help people and the Church.

It's a great book for people who dismiss spirituality out of hand because of prominent religious extremists and lumping most of the world in with them. I don't have a lot of patience for the "coolness" in dissing people for believing in something bigger but that's my own problem to get over.

Laura says

a book to read slowly over and over again

Paul Taylor says

True to its title it has surprised me. If like me you seek a better understanding of God, this will be a very useful guide. Well reasoned, sequential and for me at least; inspiring.

Janet Brown says

This book took apart what I thought I knew, challenged my apathy, correctly anticipated most of my doubts and areas of weakness, and gave me a new way to explore my faith. Genuinely thought-provoking; a kind, loving book.

Tim Crabtree says

A fantastic little book about prayer, our inner lives, and how we grow (taking steps forward and backward) in interacting with God. Also has many helpful practical suggestions on how to take ideas about prayer and make them applicable.

Henry Tegner says

As one who is, more likely than not, within a decade or two of his demise, I ponder often on spirituality and the question of 'life after death'. This book was recommended. I had a Christian education (Anglican, not Roman Catholic) but Christianity never really 'caught' for me. I am, by nature, a Humanist. This book seemed to accept the Gospels as a 'given' - an axiom if you like. This is problematic for me, because I am also a scientist and more inclined to accept things according to the evidence supporting them than on a premise of faith. If I have got the wrong end of the stick, perhaps someone would enlighten me or direct me to another book that might have a better chance of starting me on a journey. I have in the past been advised that I should 'pray', but have not done so since childhood, and in fact lapsed as a consequence of my own experiences in childhood.

Richard Ryan says

A wonderfully powerful, deeply spiritual book.

Jessica says

Inspirational reading. Well-written.

Stuart Jennings says

A book that combines psychological and spiritual insights into both our own humanity and the goodness and love of God, a transforming book whose message can be liberating for the reader who takes its message to heart

Jonathan says

Definitely a book to read slowly and probably one to be re-read multiple times to get the full effect. The exercises were very useful though they felt unevenly spread throughout the book with some chapters having several large meaty exercises and some having none at all. In terms of content and presentation the book is very good and will give you an awful lot to think about, it certainly changed my view on a lot of topics, especially the seeking guidance chapters. The only thing that is a bit jarring is the final chapter on Nuclear War. It feels like an enormous handbrake turn for the book to take as it should be concluding and as a result it doesn't really feel finished. Other than that I would recommend the book but be prepared to read it quite slowly and really take the time to dig into the exercises if you want the full benefits.
