

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Seasons of a Family's Life Cultivating the Contemplative Spirit at Home

By Wendy M. Wright

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How do we nurture the contemplative spirit amidst our busy family lives of daily demands and obligations? Author Wendy Wright offers a reflective, story-filled, and inspiring examination of the spiritual fabric of domestic life. The author is a parent of three young adult children, a Catholic theologian and Church historian at Creighton University, and a follower of the contemplative tradition. This book is the fruit of her life – as a parent, a teacher, and a pilgrim. When she writes the stories of her family's joys and struggles, when she writes about ancient traditions and practices of prayer, and when she writes about contemplation and discernment, she stands with us. She tells those stories with honesty, clarity, and grace. When she tells those stories, we can see our own stories more clearly, and can begin to see how the contemplative life can be a possibility in our own lives. For those of us seeking a contemplative life in the midst of ordinary life, this book is a treasure.

Consider using this book in a parenting class, a parents support group, or a family covenant group. The following reflection/discussion questions can help your group engage in meaningful interactions that touch the heart, inform the mind, inspire the spirit, and build a sense of companionship among parents and/or families.

Description

This insightful book explores family life as a context for nurturing contemplative practices in the home. In her previous book *Sacred Dwellings: A Spirituality of Family Life* and in this book, Wright uses her knowledge of the spiritual traditions of Christianity to illuminate family dynamics. These books represent a dialogue between classical spiritual tradition and contemporary experience in the home. *Seasons of a Family's Life* challenges us to wrestle with the universal abiding questions that shape our lives – Who are we? Who are you? Is God with us? Where have we come from? Where are we going? Do justice and mercy meet? Is there a season for everything?

Seasons of a Family's Life offers hope and encouragement to those who yearn to be attentive to the wonder in their lives and to glimpse the sacred in everyday living. This book is different because it links the language of family and the spiritual life that is not crisis management or self-help or a conservative agenda wrapped in biblical references. In the author's words: *There is a need for works on family spirituality that are rooted in an appreciation of the deep and wise spiritual traditions to which we are heir..... There is a need for works that do not confuse the spiritual life with techniques for tension reduction or with leisure time activity but instead probe human experience in family and challenge readers to wrestle with the great religious questions.*

About the author:

Wendy Wright is a professor of theology and holds the John C. Kenefick Chair in the Humanities at Creighton University. She contributes frequently to spiritual journals such as *Weavings* and to family journals such as *Family Ministry Journal*. She is a workshop/retreat leader, a contemplative Christian disciple, and a mother of three young adult children. Her book *Seasons of a Family's Life* is the second book in the Families and Faith Series edited by Diana Garland and Bradley Wigger.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever thought of yourself as having a vocation or calling? Has parenthood ever seemed like a “call” to respond more generously to the mystery and abiding questions of life?
2. Keep a log for a week. At the end of each day, record ordinary moments that occurred that day that connected you to the depth and expanse of love. Does silence or prayer help you link the sacred with the ordinary?
3. What are the specific sacred spaces in your family experiences where you sense the “more” or the holy of your life together? What happens in those spaces? Do you have special rituals that occur there?
4. With members of your immediate or extended family, spend time together going through old photo albums. What do they say to you? Focus on the photos that connect your family story with the larger story of faith – child dedications, weddings/unions, memorial services, Coming of Age ceremonies, Civil Rights marches, Gay Pride parades.
5. How do you or might you and your family consciously honor Sabbath times of rest and rejuvenation?
6. What places do you call home? Why?
7. What rituals from your Unitarian Universalist faith tradition have given shape to your family’s spiritual life? How have these rituals created identity and belonging?
8. If welcoming and letting go might be said to be the twin arts of family spirituality, how have you practiced these arts?
9. In a family meeting discuss the ways in which you live, or might live, the countercultural arts of a Unitarian Universalist life.
10. Reconciliation requires that we first experience ourselves as loved; only then can we see each other through the eyes of love. Recall a time when you knew yourself loved by another or by God/Sacred Mystery. Bring this memory to any needed healing in your family at the present time.

11. Bring to mind your children and your parents, practice holding your hands shut tight and then opening them. Imagine what it is that you are holding onto, then imagine the new gifts your open hands might be filled with.

12. What did you learn about yourself from this book? What did you learn about your family from this book?

In the final section of the book author Wendy Wright offers many questions for reflection, dialogue, and discussion.