

One Thousand Gifts: A Lutheran Discussion Guide

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Introduction to the Study Guide

Ann VosKamp's best-selling book, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*, draws attention to an often overlooked aspect of Christian sanctification: thanksgiving. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "In everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The Bible is replete with commands to thank God and examples of believers who have done so, no matter the situation. Many Christian women have received great comfort and encouragement from VosKamp's book, which teaches by example how to "count your blessings" even on the most dreary of days. *One Thousand Gifts* chronicles VosKamp's spiritual growth, including her deep emotions, difficult memories and "aha" moments when God's Word finally "clicks" for her, in order that we, too, can share the spiritual joys of thanksgiving and have peace when we "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4).

Some Christians have expressed concern that VosKamp is advocating excess emotion leading to a mystical "higher spirituality," or turning thanksgiving into a work by which we merit God's favor. In several places, however, her book explicitly steers clear of such pitfalls. *One Thousand Gifts* in fact draws much insight from Scripture. In times of hardship, giving thanks does not come easily, but as we learn to view our lives through the eyes of faith we recognize and appreciate God's blessings in the small things, in the difficult things, in the tragic things, in all things! She is not a Lutheran. Her book is not a Lutheran book. Even so, she offers insights that Lutherans can appreciate so long as the reader cross-checks her writing against Holy Scripture—which, of course, is the "Barean" method that ought to be applied to any book concerning theology, no matter who the author is.

This study guide comes in two parts. The first section contains only study questions for each chapter. No answers are given. These questions can be printed off for small groups and distributed all at once, or section by section as needed for discussion. The second part is the leader's guide that includes answers for the questions. If the leader so chooses, he or she may also print off the answers for all participants. If you plan to use this guide without a group, feel free to print off of the first section and record your answers, and then read the second section when you are ready to compare your answers to the suggested responses.

Study Questions

Chapter 1

- 1A. The author's writing style seems much like a journal. Did you expect this? Did you like this?
- 1B. "Ann," the author's name, means "full of grace." She says that she hasn't been full of grace (p. 9). What does your name mean? Have you lived up to it?
- 1C. Ann went through the trauma of the death of her sister as a girl. As a result, she says her family "snapped shut to grace" (p. 10). What does she mean by the word "grace" in this instance? Have you ever experienced a similar "snapping shut"?
- 1D. What does the author surmise as the cause of the fall into sin (p. 15)? Do you agree?
- 1E. If God is working everything in our life for good, what is the danger in saying or living "No" to whatever it is that He may send (pp. 18 and 21)?
- 1F. Explain the metaphor and meaning of "holes in the canvas of our lives" (p. 22).

Chapter 2

- 2A. The author describes her bad dreams as "nightmares plagiarizing life" (p. 25). Even when we are awake, how might our own dreams or goals start to plagiarize our lives?
- 2B. We've probably all have had the experience that Ann describes: "I wake to the discontent of my life in my skin ... to the wrestle to get it all done, the relentless anxiety that I am failing. Always failing. ... I live tired. Afraid. Anxious. Weary." (p. 27) But that day, Ann felt differently. Why?
- 2C. What is the meaning of the word "*eucharisteo* [yoo-kar-is-TAY-o]"? What is its Greek root, and what are other words in Scripture related to it?

- 2D. What is the author's view of communion? Does she believe in the Real Presence in the Eucharist? Does she believe the Lord's Supper is a way that God grows our faith, or something we do for God? Use words from the text to support your answer.
- 2E. Do you agree or disagree with Ann's statement, "I would never experience the fullness of my salvation until I expressed the fullness of my thanks every day, and eucharist is elemental to living the saved life" (p. 40).

Chapter 3

- 3A. What was the impetus for Ann's thankfulness journal? How is it changing her?
- 3B. Talk about Ann's photography of the shredded cheese (p. 56). How is this an allegory for giving thanks?
- 3C. What does the author learn from studying the faith life of Daniel (p. 60)?

Chapter 4

- 4A. Why is the examining of a soap bubble worthy of making the 1,000 Gifts list?
- 4B. The author says, on p. 64, "If anyone should have time, isn't it the Christ-followers?" What do you think she means by this?
- 4C. Do you think it is important to recognize that God is not just a God directing the past, or planning the future, but also the God of the here-and-now present?
- 4D. Discuss savoring dessert as a metaphor for life.

Chapter 5

- 5A. Reflect on the quotation at the beginning of the chapter from Saint John of Avila, "One act of thanksgiving, when things go wrong with us, is worth a thousand thanks when things are agreeable to our inclinations" (p. 79).

- 5B. Answer Ann's deep question, "What is good? What counts as grace? What is the heart of God?" (p. 85).
- 5C. What comfort does the Incarnation of Christ give us? (See p. 87.)
- 5D. The author discusses what the world looks like when we fail to see our surroundings through our Scripture lenses (p. 91). Give an example of something difficult in your life that you can see as a gift when viewed properly.

Chapter 6

- 6A. Have you ever been to a famous cathedral? What was it like? What feeling did it give you? What does the author mean by making "cathedral moments" (p. 102)?
- 6B. Why did Ann run after the moon? What is the difference between her worship and pantheism?

Chapter 7

- 7A. What does toast have to do with giving thanks in the story?
- 7B. Agree or Disagree: "You can't positive-think your way out of negative feelings ... The only way to fight a feeling is with a feeling ... Feel thanks and it's absolutely impossible to feel angry" (p. 136).

Chapter 8

- 8A. What is the root of worry? What is the antidote?
- 8B. Evaluate: "Perhaps the opposite of faith is not doubt. Perhaps the opposite of faith is fear. Anything less than gratitude and trust is practical atheism" (p. 148).
- 8C. Discuss Ann's metaphors of darkness and distance (pp. 156–57).
- 8D. How does giving thanks compare to the Israelites eating manna in the wilderness (p. 158)?

Chapter 9

- 9A. On what occasions have you felt like the author: “Don’t I often desperately want to wriggle free of the confines of a small life? Yet when I stand before immensity that heightens my smallness—I have never felt sadness. Only burgeoning wonder” (p. 167).
- 9B. Agree or Disagree? “Expectations kill relationship—especially with God” (p. 169).
- 9C. Contrast the difference between *lament* and *complaint* (p. 175).
- 9D. Ann posits: “While I may not always feel joy, God asks me to give thanks in all things, because He knows that the feeling of joy begins in the action of thanksgiving” (p. 176). Do you agree with this conclusion? Why or why not?

Chapter 10

- 10A. Is it a stretch for Ann to say, “Eucharisteo means ‘to give thanks,’ and give is a verb, something that we do. God calls me to do thanks. To give thanks away” (p. 193)?
- 10B. How is our service to others a picture of Christ’s service to us? How does Christ help us in our service to others?
- 10C. What do you appreciate about the author’s time of fellowship with her sisters-in-Christ (p. 198)? What does she misunderstand?

Chapter 11

- 11A. Ann shocks her readers with the first line of chapter 11: “I fly to Paris and discover how to make love to God” (p. 201). How might you rephrase this to make the meaning more clear? Or do you think she means exactly what she says?
- 11B. Which important element of Romans 6:1–4 is left out of the quotation, “Don’t all the true believers ... have union from the first moment of repentance, becoming one with Christ in His death, burial, and rising from the dead” (p. 210)?

- 11C. Is Ann teaching decision theology in this statement: “I can’t simply ignore His serenade because I’m unsure, uncomfortable, uninterested, thinking I’ve claimed Christ as my Savior already anyways” (p. 212)?
- 11D. Ann says, “How my eyes see, perspective, is my key to enter into His gates. I can only do so with thanksgiving.” Is she undermining the work of Christ’s atonement in this passage?
- 11E. Find some examples of the Gospel—God’s gift of forgiveness for sinners—in this chapter.

Leader's Guide

Chapter 1

1A. The author's writing style seems much like a journal. Did you expect this? Did you like this?

Answers may vary.

1B. "Ann," the author's name, means "full of grace." She says that she hasn't been full of grace (p. 9). What does your name mean? Have you lived up to it?

Answers may vary. Be ready with the meaning of your own name. This question may bring out a lot of Law. Comfort with the Name above All Names, Jesus, who saves us from our sin. See Matthew 1:21.

1C. Ann went through the trauma of the death of her sister as a girl. As a result, she says her family "snapped shut to grace" (p. 10). What does she mean by the word "grace" in this instance? Have you ever experienced a similar "snapping shut"?

Discuss whether she means the daily/earthly blessings from God, or God's salvation for us through Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9). She may be implying that after the death of her sister, the family was so bitter that they chose to no longer give thanks or look for earthly blessings in their lives. However, it seems that her father had snapped shut to God's salvation as well.

1D. What does the author surmise as the cause of the fall into sin (p. 15)? Do you agree?

Answers may vary. Certainly disobedience is also the cause, but discontent and ingratitude may have been the fuel for the disobedience.

1E. If God is working everything in our life for good, what is the danger in saying or living "No" to whatever it is that He may send (pp. 18 and 21)?

She says life is a choice. We either choose to accept God's gifts with thanksgiving, or we reject our situation and risk rejecting the One who has arranged the cosmos for *this* moment. We shouldn't propose to change the story because we don't know how the ending may be different. (See Romans 8:28.)

1F. Explain the metaphor and meaning of "holes in the canvas of our lives" (p. 22).

Each of our lives is like a work of art. Normally, we would see a tear in a work of art as a disaster. But, in this case, the holes help us see through the canvas, into the real work of art that God is painting. A similar metaphor is that of a tapestry. If you look at it from underneath, it is full of knots and there is no picture. But from above, you can see the lovely, intricately woven work of art.

Chapter 2

2A. The author describes her bad dreams as "nightmares plagiarizing life" (p. 25). Even when we are awake, how might our own dreams or goals start to plagiarize our lives?

God certainly gifts us each with unique talents and abilities. But sometimes, we don't need to set high and lofty goals to achieve these. He simply wants us to serve those around us, dutifully and faithfully: the Doctrine of Vocation (see www.hausvater.org/component/tags/tag/31-vocation.html). Luther speaks of

this when he commends the mother rocking and nursing her child as a greater good work than “holy” monks serving the Lord in the monasteries. Also, we don’t know what God’s plans may be for the future, or when the End may come. It is good and right to plan for the future, but not at the expense of doing the Lord’s work today.

- 2B. We’ve probably all have had the experience that Ann describes: “I wake to the discontent of my life in my skin ... to the wrestle to get it all done, the relentless anxiety that I am failing. Always failing. ... I live tired. Afraid. Anxious. Weary.” (p. 27) But that day, Ann felt differently. Why?

Although Christians do not have to fear the afterlife, because Jesus’ death and resurrection have made us right with God, our human impulse is to fear death. But her nightmare about cancer reminded her about how precious life is, and how blessed we are, even among trials to enjoy God’s daily blessings.

- 2C. What is the meaning of the word “*eucharisteo* [yoo-kar-is-TAY-oh]”? What is its Greek root, and what are other words in Scripture related to it?

It means “giving thanks.” *Charis* is the root word, which means grace. *Chara*, joy, is also related. Giving thanks expresses our joy in God’s grace. It communicates to our heavenly Father the same message an earthly parent receives when a child opens a birthday give and smiles ear to ear, saying, “Thank you!”

According to *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, the words *eucharisteo* (verb: “to give thanks”), *eucharistia* (noun: “thanksgiving”), and *eucharistos* (adjective: “thankful”) appear a total of fifty-five times in the Greek New Testament. Jesus “gave thanks” when instituting the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:27), which is why the Sacrament of the Altar sometimes is called the Eucharist. The epistles contain 80% of the total New Testament occurrences of the three Greek words just mentioned. The Apostles exhorted the early church to give thanks even in times of tribulation, recognizing by faith that in all things God works for believers’ good (Romans 8:28). God’s grace sometimes is hidden, but it always is there, so give thanks!

- 2D. What is the author’s view of communion? Does she believe in the Real Presence in the Eucharist? Does she believe the Lord’s Supper is a way that God grows our faith, or something we do for God? Use words from the text to support your answer.

The author never explicitly denies the Real Presence. Throughout the book, she references frequently reading her Bible, so it could be that she has a proper understanding, but never states it in the book. There are a few clues, though, which indicate that she may not believe the Real Presence: she’s non-denominational (p. 24); she calls the Lord’s Supper “bread and wine” (p. 24); she says partaking of communion is “enacting my thanksgiving,” rather than a means of grace (p. 37); she calls the eucharist “risen again wheat” (p. 37). Later in the book, however, she says that we are “fed by His body, quenched by His blood” (p. 213).

- 2E. Do you agree or disagree with Ann’s statement, “I would never experience the fullness of my salvation until I expressed the fullness of my thanks every day, and *eucharisteo* is elemental to living the saved life” (p. 40).

Answers may vary, depending on reader’s interpretation of the word “salvation.” The author doesn’t seem to be promoting “works righteousness.” Instead she’s talking about a full and rich life here on earth. James says that faith without works is dead (James 2:14–26). Thanksgiving is both a fruit of faith and a particular kind of good work that constantly refocuses our attention on the Giver, thus affording us opportunities to grow in faith as we marvel at His blessings.

Chapter 3

3A. What was the impetus for Ann's thankfulness journal? How is it changing her?

Her friend dared her to write down her gifts from God. This brought her joy as she "hunted" for God's gifts. Even others could see this change on the outside. The act of writing down her blessings helped her to practice thanksgiving daily. She's "unwrapping" God's love. She also talks about her pen as a "hammer" that is shaping and changing her life.

3B. Talk about Ann's photography of the shredded cheese (p. 56). How is this an allegory for giving thanks?

The author says, "Do not disdain the small," and "I discover that slapping a sloppy brush of thanksgiving over everything in my life leaves me deeply thankful for very few things in my life" (p. 57). Photographing cheese, or explicitly naming specific gifts, helps us to slow down and enjoy those gifts, instead of glossing over them. It does the soul good to rejoice in the little things.

3C. What does the author learn from studying the faith life of Daniel (p. 60)?

The author reminds us that thanksgiving fueled his prayer life. She states that "prayer without ceasing is only possible in a life of continual thanks" (p. 60).

Chapter 4

4A. Why is the examining of a soap bubble worthy of making the 1,000 Gifts list?

Pausing to look carefully at the bubble and reflect on its Maker helped her to slow down and enjoy life. Normally, a person doesn't have time to appreciate a soap bubble, but Ann did because she was hunting for God's gifts, "slow[ing] time down with the weight of full attention" (p. 69).

4B: The author says, on p. 64, "If anyone should have time, isn't it the Christ-followers?" What do you think she means by this?

We humans always feel strapped for time, and are always tempted to hurry and get everything done. But, "In Christ, don't we have everlasting existence? Don't Christians have all of the time in eternity, life-everlasting?" Time is one thing none of us can create for ourselves, but by drinking deeply of God's gifts all around us, we can slow down in the moment itself.

4C. Do you think it is important to recognize that God is not just a God directing the past, or planning the future, but also the God of the here-and-now present?

God reveals Himself as I AM, in the present. This certainly doesn't limit Him to the present, though. Sometimes, living in the present is so very hard because it "asks us to do the hardest of all: just open wide and receive (p. 69)." Each moment of our lives can be a cathedral, where we pause and notice and honor our Lord. Also, Ann states, "Here [in the present] is the only place I can love Him" (p. 70). Knowing God is I AM of the present also helps us remember that we can give thanks even in the direst of circumstances, because God is here with us, guiding even our desperate moments.

4D. Discuss savoring dessert as a metaphor for life.

It feels good to slow down and savor a delicious treat. If we are always rushing through life, we will

miss the joys and gifts of now. “Wherever you are, be all there’ is only possible in the posture of *eucharisteo*. I want to slow down and taste life, give thanks, and see God” (p. 77).

Chapter 5

5A. Reflect on the quotation at the beginning of the chapter from Saint John of Avila, “One act of thanksgiving, when things go wrong with us, is worth a thousand thanks when things are agreeable to our inclinations” (p. 79).

There is no sacrifice of praise when we give thanks during times of ease. Certainly, we should still give thanks, but the challenge of stretching and growing our faith comes from looking for good in the dark times.

5B. Answer Ann’s deep question, “What is good? What counts as grace? What is the heart of God?” (p. 85).

This is perhaps the most difficult question to answer when talking to both believers and unbelievers. The author talks about our perspective when looking at our “curse moments.” “All God makes is good. Can it be that, that which seems to oppose the will of God actually is used of Him to accomplish the will of God?” (p. 88). “My pain, my dark—all the world’s pain, all the world’s dark—it might actually taste sweet to the tongue, be the genesis of new life? Yes” (p. 97).

5C. What comfort does the Incarnation of Christ give us? (See p. 87.)

God is not some distant deity off in the clouds, unaware of the pain we are going through. He knows personally all of our hurts, because He Himself experienced them. He became a man, took our sins upon Himself and died. Because He rose from the grave, so shall we (1 Corinthians 15:20–22).

5D. The author discusses what the world looks like when we fail to see our surroundings through our Scripture lenses (p. 91). Give an example of something difficult in your life that you can see as a gift when viewed properly.

Answers may vary, but could include stories of coming to a better understanding of an event after time has passed, or of recognizing good that may not of come about if the event had not taken place.

Chapter 6

6A. Have you ever been to a famous cathedral? What was it like? What feeling did it give you? What does the author mean by making “cathedral moments” (p. 102)?

Answers may vary, but should focus on the awe-inspiring, humbling, holy characteristics of the cathedral. By a cathedral moment, she probably means slowing down and appreciating each moment, even if it may be full of craziness.

6B. Why did Ann run after the moon? What is the difference between her worship and pantheism?

Her internal circuitry, like everyone’s, is wired to worship something or someone (p. 110). As St. Augustine said, “Our souls are restless until we rest in God.” Luther, when writing of the First Commandment in his *Large Catechism*, explained that every person loves or trusts someone or something—whether the true God or an idol. Pantheism makes an idol out of creation, instead of worshiping the Creator.

Chapter 7

7A. What does toast have to do with giving thanks in the story?

The story of the author's son throwing toast at his brother is an example of working through a difficult situation to give thanks. It may seem that we are powerless in a given situation; however, thanksgiving is a tool we can use at any time. Do we actually prefer our negative emotions to the hunt for joy?

7B. Agree or Disagree: "You can't positive-think your way out of negative feelings ... The only way to fight a feeling is with a feeling ... Feel thanks and it's absolutely impossible to feel angry" (p. 136).

Answers may vary. Focus could be given to the power of the Holy Spirit to help us grow in spiritual fruit to choose the right emotions. (See Galatians 5:22–23.)

Chapter 8

8A. What is the root of worry? What is the antidote?

Sin is the root of worry. Worry is feigned control. Giving thanks is an immediate antidote to the emotional feelings of spiritual worry and anxiety (of course, there may also be underlying medical reasons, as well). But giving thanks is also difficult work in the context of a sinful heart that wants to have control, and often we fail. The ultimate antidote is remembering and giving thanks for Jesus' perfect sacrifice on our behalf, for even our sins of worry and ingratitude. "If God didn't withhold from us His very own Son, will God withhold anything we need? ... The counting of all blessings is ultimately summed up in One. ... All gratitude is ultimately gratitude for Christ, all remembering a remembrance of Him" (pp. 154ff).

8B. Evaluate: "Perhaps the opposite of faith is not doubt. Perhaps the opposite of faith is fear. Anything less than gratitude and trust is practical atheism" (p. 148).

If we consider thankfulness to be a fruit of faith, that faith without works is dead (James 2:20), and that Christians ought to not only be hearers of the Word, but doers (James 1:22)—we must conclude that if we refuse to give thanks, our hearts are in danger of hardness to God. Of course, there may also be those with very weak faith, or moments of weakness for all of us, in which we do not give thanks (Isaiah 42:3). We are saved because of faith in the merits of Christ, but on the outside, the ingratitude of a Christian very well may appear the same as that of an unbeliever. This is a statement of shocking Law, though, and someone experiencing anxiety may need a good dose of the Gospel, instead.

8C. Discuss Ann's metaphors of darkness and distance (pp. 156–57).

The author believes that when dark and troubled times come for us, God is tucking us into a cleft and protecting us. All we can see is the darkness, but God has planned all that He is protecting us from. Also, there are situations in which we cannot see any good or God's purposes until much time has passed. In fact, on earth, we may never understand His purpose—we must only trust His goodness. (See also a parallel example of clouds and shadows on p. 88).

8D. How does giving thanks compare to the Israelites eating manna in the wilderness (p. 158)?

The Israelites had the choice to reject God's gift of food in the wilderness, but if they did, they would starve. In the same way, we have the choice to dwell on our troubles rather than give thanks, but if we do, we walk on a road of spiritual starvation. The Israelites, instead, could eat of the unknown food, strange as it may have been, with trust, and be nourished. We, too, can give thanks through the Holy Spirit in every

circumstance (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and find nourishment in the goodness of God. This isn't referenced in the book, but the manna account in the Bible reminds us that we needn't take more than we need for each day. God provides us with daily bread.

Chapter 9

9A. On what occasions have you felt like the author: "Don't I often desperately want to wriggle free of the confines of a small life? Yet when I stand before immensity that heightens my smallness—I have never felt sadness. Only burgeoning wonder" (p. 167).

Answers may vary, but will probably include individual disappointments contrasted with awe-inspiring experiences. Often, when we achieve something we've been working for, it isn't nearly as fulfilling as we expected, and comes with new hardships.

9B. Agree or Disagree? "Expectations kill relationship—especially with God" (p. 169).

When we expect anything of God, we are asking Him for more than we deserve. Therefore, anything good (and even that which we perceive as bad) can be received with thanksgiving, because we do not deserve even one small blessing. "Humility is the only posture that can receive the wondrous grace gifts of God" (p. 171). However, we can hold God to His promise of forgiveness of sins through His Son. Thankfully, that's an expectation of God He tells us we should have!

9C. Contrast the difference between *lament* and *complaint* (p. 175).

"Lament is a cry of belief in a good God ... who transfigures the ugly into beauty. Complaint is the bitter howl of unbelief" (p. 175). Thankfully, even when we complain, or fail to have gratitude, God forgives us and "holds us in the untamed moments, too" (p. 175).

9D. Ann posits: "While I may not always feel joy, God asks me to give thanks in all things, because He knows that the feeling of joy begins in the action of thanksgiving" (p. 176). Do you agree with this conclusion? Why or why not?

Answers may vary, but should be supported by evidence in the book. Some readers may question whether the goal of thanksgiving should be a feeling, namely joy, rather than something more cognitive, like better knowing God's unchanging grace. The author herself admits later, on p. 176, that true joy is beyond simple feelings, but is dependent on the presence of God and knowing Him. Truly, the only way to know the mind of God is through His revealed Word, the Bible, and through the person of Christ, who lived and died and rose to make us right with God.

Chapter 10

10A. Is it a stretch for Ann to say, "Eucharistean means 'to give thanks,' and give is a verb, something that we do. God calls me to do thanks. To give thanks away" (p. 193)?

By giving thanks away, the author means to bless others with Christian love. Her play on words (thanks-give-ing) works in English, but not in Greek; even so, the underlying premise is still true: Christians are called to lovingly serve others—and if we must do it, why not do it with thanks? It is also reflective of Luther's explanation to the Second Commandment, that we should "pray, praise, and give thanks." Consider also how the doctrine of vocation, mentioned in 2A, applies here: we each can be thankful that God has placed us in the midst of particular people whom He has called us to serve in various ways.

10B. How is our service to others a picture of Christ's service to us? How does Christ help us in our service to others?

Christ himself says that He came to serve others, and redeem them. When we serve, we “need never serve in [our] own strength” (p. 196). Jesus still lives and equips us to serve others. “*Eucharist* has taught me to trust that there is always enough God” (p. 197).

10C. What do you appreciate about the author's time of fellowship with her sisters-in-Christ (p. 198)? What does she misunderstand?

Ann willingly and humbly submits to serving her fellow women. They are right to give thanks before eating and remember Christ's sacrifice. She also is “communing,” in the common use of the word, by sharing fellowship with her friends. However, it seems that she overlooks the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament when it is rightly administered, and that the Lord's Supper is primarily about Christ strengthening our faith, not solely about us remembering His sacrifice.

Chapter 11

11A. Ann shocks her readers with the first line of chapter 11: “I fly to Paris and discover how to make love to God” (p. 201). How might you rephrase this to make the meaning more clear? Or do you think she means exactly what she says?

Perhaps “making love” could be interpreted as “generating love” or “learning to grow closer to God.” However, she really may be referring to an intimate union with God, much like husband and wife. The whole idea of intimacy with God comes from the Biblical allegory of Christ and His bride the Church, whose consummation will be complete when He comes to gather us to Himself, and also in the picture of the Trinity, three in one. The mystical marriage of Christ and the Church is depicted romantically in Song of Songs, and the New Testament refers in several instances to our entrance into heaven as a wedding feast.

Quotations from a variety of respected theologians (including a number of Puritans!) reveal that Ann's language, while unsettling at first, is not beyond the bounds of how the church has discussed these Bible passages throughout the ages. (See annvoskamp.com/intimacy-with-god.) Even so, this may be uncomfortable language for most Lutherans, and one should be sensitive to the audience before choosing to repeat her phrasing.

11B. Which important element of Romans 6:1–4 is left out of the quotation, “Don't all the true believers ... have union from the first moment of repentance, becoming one with Christ in His death, burial, and rising from the dead” (p. 210)?

This quotation is a paraphrase of Romans 6:3–4, but she leaves out the sacrament of baptism, in which we first receive union with Christ, and through which we receive his death, burial, and resurrection—unless she is considering that “the first moment of repentance” is, in fact, baptism.

11C. Is Ann teaching decision theology in this statement: “I can't simply ignore His serenade because I'm unsure, uncomfortable, uninterested, thinking I've claimed Christ as my Savior already anyways” (p. 212)?

It could be that she does believe in decision theology. But, perhaps we can consider that the phrase “[God] woos us to relationship” shows some understanding that the Holy Spirit first works in our hearts to create faith before we can respond in any way toward God. In any case, the point of this passage is that even though we already have faith, we should continue to grow in faith as Christians. Sometimes that is hard and scary, and we back away from it.

11D. Ann says, “How my eyes see, perspective, is my key to enter into His gates. I can only do so with thanksgiving.” Is she undermining the work of Christ’s atonement in this passage?

This is a paraphrase of Psalm 100:4. If she is answering the question of how we are saved, then she would be taking credit for salvation through our own works. But she is instead answering the question, “How does a justified Christian grow closer to God in faith, and find joy and happiness here on earth?” Her answer is that we regenerate Christians can step out in obedience, giving thanks, and will ultimately better see God’s blessings in our lives. She is not preaching about salvation from sin, but rather merely explaining how to enter into the blessings of God (or “the full life”) here on earth, when we stop and give thanks.

11E. Find some examples of the Gospel—God’s gift of forgiveness for sinners—in this chapter.

Answers may include:

- Page 204: God says, “You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you ... For you are a chosen people ... God’s very own possession.”
- Page 205: “The most fundamental thing is not how we think of God but rather what God thinks of us.”
- Page 209: “This releasing of sin and self wasn’t an act of will or effort, but the act of Christ and His grace all-sufficient.”
- Page 211: “He lavishes His love, the uncontainable riches, and I can trust His love.”)

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