A: GENERAL QUESTIONS
1. What one thought or idea from today’s lesson especially intrigued, provoked, disturbed, challenged, encouraged, warmed, warned, helped, or surprised you?

2. See other questions in back of each chapter under heading, “Engage.”

3. How has this chapter and the biblical readings influenced or furthered your journey of faith this Lent?

B: CHAPTER 27: A NEW IDENTITY (Matthew 5: 1-16)
1. What words, titles, or adjectives would you use to describe yourself to a stranger? What has helped to shape your identity?

2. What is your initial reaction to the beatitudes of Jesus (Matt. 5: 3-12)? Which beatitude seems most like a blessing to you? Which the least?

3. Which beatitude surprises you the most and why?

4. How do you react to Brian McLaren’s translation or paraphrase of the beatitudes? How comfortable are you in identifying with all these kinds of people? Did Jesus in sharing these beatitudes intend us to be comfortable? Why or why not?

5. What new identity is Brian claiming Jesus is calling us to claim as his disciples? It calls for us to pay a price (see # 4 above) but Brian also claims it offers several priceless rewards. What are some of these rewards? Which would you claim as priceless and why?

6. Who do you know that you would characterize as a salt of the earth or light of the world kind of person? What makes them so? What are some of the key qualities of salt and light that we should seek to emulate?
7. Closing Possibilities:
   a. See Q6 at the end of the chapter and meditate on light and darkness.
   b. Say the beatitudes in some form.
   c. Give each person a card with the final sentence of this chapter;
      “If I accept this identity, everything will change for me.
      Everything will change.”

C: CHAPTER 28: A NEW PATH TO ALIVENESS

1. What are some of the cherished traditions in your family? Which, if any, need to be modified or revised? Are there any that need to be discontinued? If so, why?
2. How do you feel about tradition? In what ways is tradition a help to us on our faith journey? When can it be a hindrance?
3. How would you characterize the Jesus you encounter in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount? What third way to approach tradition does Brian claim Jesus is advocating?
4. Which of the “traditions” that Jesus expounds upon in this section of the Sermon on the Mount do you find most troublesome as a pathway to aliveness (murder, sexuality, oaths, revenge, marriage, love of enemies). Why?
5. Brian claims that Jesus is calling for us to practice “preemptive reconciliation.” How have you practiced such preemptive reconciliation? What is the goal of such reconciliation?
6. Brian asserts that true aliveness focuses on transforming our deeper desires. How realistic is this? What can the church as a community of faith do to help you (us) transform such desires?
7. What practical actions does Jesus suggest people use to reduce the desire for retaliation? (5:38-42) Did they work? Would you agree with Brian’s treatment of these actions and which would be the hardest for you to undertake? (see Activity #5)
8. What, according to Brian, did Jesus mean by the concluding sentence of this portion of the sermon, calling one to “be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”? Does this, from your perspective, make perfection seem easier or harder to aspire to and why?
9. Closing: Refer to #6 Meditate.
D: CHAPTER 29: YOUR SECRET LIFE

1. What are some of the rewards you hope to receive from God?
2. Jesus describes God in these verses from the Sermon on the Mount as one who sees you in secret. How do you react to this image of God?
3. How can we best change the world according to Brian? Can you think of some examples on how you have seen this in action?
4. Which of the three spiritual disciplines Jesus lifts up on Matthew 6:1-18 do you find the easiest to practice? Why? Which is for you the hardest?
5. Jesus, McLaren maintains, calls upon us to plot goodness in secret, i.e. to do good and beautiful things without getting caught. Pause for a few moments and so some pondering on one way you can plot goodness in secret this week.
6. How do you respond to the four part summary Brian gives of Jesus’ model prayer (The Lord’s prayer)? Would you agree with Brian’s contention that through prayer we can “either strengthen your soul in private or raise your public profile but not both.”? (p. 137). What do you see as the advantages of private prayer? Of public prayer?
7. How would you define cheap forgiveness? What is whole forgiveness according to Brian?
8. What is the fundamental purpose of right practices (disciplines) with right motives according to Brian? What is one step that you can take this Lent to in solitude draw closer to the presence of God?
9. Closing: Read together the final paragraph and then join together in praying the Lord’s Prayer.

E: CHAPTER 30: WHY WE WORRY, WHY WE JUDGE

1. What image of God is Jesus presenting in these verses from the Sermon on the Mount? How does this image with your image of God?
2. Are you more guilty of the core problem of anxiety or of judgment? Why?
3. Would you agree with Brian’s (Jesus) contention that our anxieties are unnecessary? Can we really totally rely on God to take care of us?
4. Brian points out that anxiety is not just on the individual level but can affect communities as well. How have you seen examples of this in the
communities that affect your life? What anxieties, if any, do you see Immanuel facing that we need to be aware of?

6. Brian asserts that the promise of Jesus makes sense that God will meet all our basic needs through a faith sustained system of God’s Kingdom and justice. What examples does he give to back up this claim? Are they realistic?

7. Brian stresses that the antidote to judging is self-examination. When have you found this true for you?

8. How do we differentiate between judgment and discernment?

9. How do you respond to the idea that our deepest problem is that we don’t know we are loved? In what ways does it help you to think of God’s love as fatherly, and in what ways does it help to think of God’s love as motherly? Are there ways that imagining God as a loving friend helps you in ways that parental images for God don’t?

10. Closing:
   a. Share together the words in italics on the top of p. 143.
   b. Challenge each other to work on the Activate suggestion (#5) under Engage.