

Stability

*How an ancient monastic practice
can restore our relationships, churches
and communities*

Nathan Oates

BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE



A TRUE STORY & INTRODUCTION

1

Have you ever heard the story of the martyrdom of the French monks in Algeria or seen the movie, “Of Gods and Men”?

What is being communicated with the statement, “You are the branch.”

2

What is this book about
(and what questions do
you have about this
thesis)?

3

What is the author's
hope for the book
(p. 11)?

4

Review together the “Quick Roadmap” on page 11 and share which of the upcoming topics feels the most critical or interesting to you.

5

Review the six occurrences of the word *stabilitas* in the Rule of St. Benedict (p. 14).

6

What was Benedict's
frustration and
Benedict's solution?

What was a Gyrovague?

Is there a modern
equivalent?

7

Discuss the three layers and three images of stability?

Which layer is most challenging for you?

Which image of stability is most helpful for you?

STABILITY AND GOD

God is not somewhere else

CHAPTER ONE

1

What was your initial response to the phrase, "God is not somewhere else?"

CHAPTER ONE

2

What emotions and/or questions accompany the assertion, "if God is to be found, He is to be found right where you are?"

3

Discuss the ramifications of the truth of God's omnipresence - the fact that God is always everywhere, including right where you are.

4

What are your thoughts about this passage (p. 33-34)?

There is no example in the Bible of a person who leaves in search of God and finds him. But there are several examples of people who encounter God right where they are and are consequently sent. It is precisely the experience of becoming aware of God's presence here that births the faith that he will also be there—the place to which he is sending us. The confidence to move to another place is rooted in our experience with God in this place.

5

Does your spiritual practice reflect a genuine belief that God is always here, now... that “God is not somewhere else?”

If so, how?

(Consider the two suggested practices for experiencing the omnipresent God on pages 36-37).

STABILITY AND SELF

The Need to Not Run

CHAPTER TWO

1

Discuss the three layers and three images of stability?

Which layer is most challenging for you?

Which image of stability is most helpful for you?

2

Do you have a personal story of a time you stopped running and allowed/welcome God in?

3

The author argues that the “core hindrance to true spiritual transformation” is “the impulse to leave; to respond by running (p. 44).

How have you battled that impulse?

What about staying is so unattractive?

CHAPTER TWO

5

On page 48, the author tells the story of his son's leukemia diagnosis. He writes, "Because I was in pain, I wanted to escape. But escaping wasn't the answer. We had to learn how to live in the pain."

Share a response to this statement. Do you agree? If so, how does one learn to live in pain?

CHAPTER TWO

6

What point was the author trying to illustrate with the baseball story?

Was the image of the catcher initiating contact at the plate helpful to you?

What other images of facing pain (not running away from it) would you add?

7

The Apostle Paul says, “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

How did he learn the secret?

CHAPTER TWO

8

The author offers three practices of being present (p. 55-56).

What practices have helped you not run?

STABILITY AND RELATION- SHIPS

Monks Helped My Marriage

CHAPTER THREE

1

The first section of this chapter (p. 62-63) focuses on community as the critical context for personal spiritual formation.

Why is there a need to hammer on this point?

2

The next section (p. 63-67) focuses on problem of consumerism in the church.

In what ways do we naturally relate to the church as consumers?

Do you see this approach to church as problematic?

CHAPTER THREE

3

One of the forces feeding our consumerism is our avoidance of conflict.

Have you ever worked to successfully restore a broken relationship?

What helped that effort succeed?

CHAPTER THREE

4

Discuss this quote from the late Trappist monk, Francis Kline:

“How can anything produce something else if the connections are pulled away? If we pull away emotionally from our unpleasant situation . . . we must leave and begin again, working very hard to accomplish no more than we did the last time. A similar situation will form itself a second time, and the cycle will begin all over.”

5

How did monks help the author's marriage?

6

What do you, personally, understand to be the costs and benefits of relational stability?

(The author reflects on this questions on pages 75-77).

7

How are the author's journal excerpts influencing your reading of this book?

Are they helpful? If so, how?



STABILITY AND PLACE

Shaped by the Land

CHAPTER FOUR

1

What is it about "place"
that makes it such a
powerful teacher?

2

In pages 85-93, the author reflects on five things "place" teaches us. Which of these five resonated most deeply with you?

Which of the five would you like to more thoroughly understand?

3

Consider the parable of soils from Matthew 13:3-9 in light of the idea of remaining in one place for a long time.

Take note of the forces that limit fruit (or growth) and the one essential element that enables it.

CHAPTER FOUR

4

Discuss this quote from page 100:

"In staying they had gained the insights, developed the values, and lived the disciplines that would enable their moving to bring healing to another place. They were not moving to get. They were moving to give. This was not an exercise of consumerism. This was restoration in action."

STABILITY AND CHANGE

You Are the Branch

CHAPTER FIVE

1

Some may not be familiar with "rites of passage."

How can rites of passage launch new movement which is rooted in stability?

2

Consider the two big Biblical themes of staying and going.

How does Jesus' parable of the Vine and the Branches (John 15:1-8) reflect each of those themes?

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How does Jesus' parable of the Vine and the Branches (John 15:1-8) reflect each of those themes?

4

Read this:

The conclusion of this teaching, which may startle those of us influenced by movement-addicted spiritual subcultures, is staying results in being fruitful. The normal thing for a branch to do when it remains connected to the vine is to produce much fruit. That's what happens. That's what we should expect because that's the way it's designed. Fruit is the result of sustained connection.

CHAPTER FIVE

5

How do you see our culture "wanting" or "admiring" the fruit of stability but repudiating stability itself?

6

What is the posture of stability?

What is the purpose of stability?

PRACTICES OF STABILITY

CHAPTER SIX

1

In this short chapter, the author suggests four ways to practice stability. Briefly discuss each of these and offer ideas of your own.

CHAPTER SIX



WHERE SHOULD WE STAY FROM HERE?

CHAPTER SEVEN

1

In this final chapter, the author adds to the typical choices of "stay" or "go" a third option.

What is this option and what might embracing it look like in the context of your faith, your marriage, your community, your work, etc.?

CHAPTER SEVEN

2

What is the difference between an "extremist" and a "radical?"

Why does the author believe monks to be radicals?

CHAPTER SEVEN

3

Share an observation
about the monks' view
and practice of prayer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

4

How has your desire for comfort become an obstacle for spiritual growth?

Respond to the section called "Comfort is overrated" (p. 135-138).

CHAPTER SEVEN

5

In the section "Guidance and Spiritual Discernment" (p. 138-143), the author offers some traditional Christian wisdom on finding your way.

How have you been guided by God's Word, God's Spirit, or God's Community?

CHAPTER SEVEN

6

Share a comment about good - and not so good - reasons to stay or go.

For what reason have you stayed or gone?

If you had to make that decision again, would you change anything?

CHAPTER SEVEN

7

What is your primary
takeaway from this book
and group discussion?

CHAPTER SEVEN



THANK YOU!

Your effort to embrace the value and practice of stability is an essential ingredient in the restoration of all things. May God produce much fruit in - and through - you, as you abide in Him. You are the branch!

**for more stability
resources, visit
NathanOates.com**