

Four in the Garden

Discussion Questions

This document contains discussion questions for *Four in the Garden* by Rick Hocker. These questions are intended for group discussion although individuals can use them for meditation. These questions are divided into twelve sections that cover about nine chapters or twenty-seven pages on average. Groups can read the book over a span of twelve weeks or twelve months as the questions are designed for twelve group discussion meetings. Or the questions can be grouped to accommodate three, four, or six meetings.

For each set of questions, you are expected to read the assigned chapters, answer the questions, and come prepared to discuss your answers with the group. Some questions are spoilers, so it's best to read the assigned material before looking at the questions. The questions are intended to stimulate meditation and discussion. There are no right or wrong answers, only a person's subjective response to the questions.

A facilitator is recommended to guide the discussion by reading the questions out loud, encouraging others to offer their answers, seeking clarification of people's answers, and keeping the discussion on topic and moving forward. The facilitator should never render judgment on a person's answer or allow others to do so. Thanking people for sharing and affirming others for their insights will create a safe environment for discussion.

These questions are only a guide. Feel free to add your own questions or skip questions you feel don't apply to you or your group. You may copy, distribute, or change this document to serve the needs of your discussion group.

—Rick Hocker

Discussion #1 (Read chapters 1-9)

1. Manna declared that Cherished was “made from love and for love.” What does that phrase mean to you? Describe how love fits into your purpose on Earth. Is your purpose here to learn to receive love or to give love?
2. Cherished wanted to understand who Creator is. Likewise, we try to understand God, but God is a complex being, beyond comprehension. What compels us to try to understand God? What aspect of God do you find the most confusing, frustrating, or contradictory? Do you believe that someday you will obtain satisfactory answers to your questions about God? Why do you think so?
3. Manna presented the concept of choice, but Cherished didn’t like the responsibility. We are bombarded with choices all the time. Do you view choices as freeing, burdensome, or overwhelming? In what ways can choices be freeing?
4. After Manna explained that the squirrels’ simple minds believe in the continuation of their wellbeing, he challenged Cherished to learn to do the same. Why is it difficult for us to believe in the continuation of our wellbeing? When things go wrong, we often tell ourselves that we are not okay, even though we still have the necessities of life. What ingredients are necessary for your wellbeing? How might you adjust your requirements so your wellbeing is less dependent on circumstances?
5. Ennoia said that pain is a necessary part of life. Explain why you agree or disagree with that statement. What is your relationship to pain? Do you resist it, avoid it, deny it, listen to it, or embrace it? What do you believe can be learned from pain?
6. Cherished didn’t get the affirmation he wanted from the Teachers for his handmade sweeper. Why did they not affirm him? How much do you expect or rely on affirmation from others? How well do you cope when affirmation is absent? In what situations do you interpret a lack of affirmation as disapproval? To what degree is approval from others tied to your self-esteem?
7. Manna defined the soul as one’s true self. The soul is a mysterious thing. What is your present understanding of your soul? Are you able to identify it within yourself? What traits or characteristics would you assign to your soul?
8. Cherished was frustrated because Creator was invisible. What is your biggest challenge when it comes to trusting in an invisible God? What limitations do you put on God because he is invisible?

Discussion #2 (Read chapters 10-17)

1. When the teachers departed, Cherished felt abandoned by the Teachers and Creator. All of us have felt abandoned by God at some point. How did you work through your feelings of abandonment? How did that experience of abandonment change your relationship with God and your ability to trust?
2. Even though the Teachers had stayed with Cherished in an invisible form, he felt abandoned. His perception, though inaccurate, generated real feelings of abandonment. We tend to dismiss feelings when they aren't based on fact, especially the feelings of others. What makes feelings real or valid for a person? Does there need to be a logical or real cause for feelings to be valid?
3. Manna said that separateness is an illusion. Do you believe we are connected to everything? Why or why not? When do you feel most connected? To what degree do you feel separate from the world and other people? Why do you think so?
4. Creator said, "Everything I have made has purpose." Explain why you agree or disagree with that statement. What creations of God have no purpose in your opinion? If they have no purpose, then why do you think God created them?
5. Ennoia said that rules enable Cherished to learn and grow. Later, Manna said that the purpose of rules is for Cherished to trust Creator. He also said that Cherished shouldn't burden himself with additional unnecessary rules. In what ways are rules good? When can rules be bad for a person or society? What is the result of excessive or unnecessary rules?
6. Manna tells Cherished that his uniqueness does not make him superior, nor does the fact that he is the object of Creator's love. Why do people convert specialness into superiority? In what situations are you tempted to feel superior? How do you escape that thinking?
7. Aable said, "When fear is strongest, you won't trust." What is the relationship between fear and trust? Does your ability to trust require the presence of certainty? Cherished had to step into the darkness and trust he would not trip or fall. Trusting in God is often like stepping into the dark. In what ways do you relate to that analogy? Describe a situation when you trusted God and couldn't see your way.
8. Ennoia asked Cherished, "Will you trust Creator with your life?" God is more than a mental attitude. At its deepest level, trust is a complete surrender of one's life to God. What would be gained by such a surrender? What would be the cost? By what criteria do you judge whether God is trustworthy? What would make it easier for you to believe God is trustworthy?

Discussion #3 (Read chapters 18-26)

1. Creator told Cherished to “follow the flow”. This phrase had a double meaning in the story, referring to the flow of water and the flow of God. Water provides physical nourishment and God provides spiritual nourishment. Describe what following the flow of God might look like in your life? How might you go about finding the flow of God?
2. Ennoia said, “Whenever you resist Creator, you cut yourself off from the flow.” Oftentimes, when we resist circumstances, we resist God. When we resist God, we separate ourselves from Him. What is the opposite of resisting? What are the symptoms of resistance? When you find yourself resisting something, how do you change that?
3. Cherished presumed it was okay to move his bed. Then, he presumed it was wrong. Presumption is thinking we understand what pleases or offends God, when we don’t know. Cherished was exhorted to act from truth instead of doubt. What does it mean to act from truth? What is the best remedy for doubt? Fear of offending God can paralyze us. How might you combat that fear?
4. Cherished believed that since Creator was good, He would do no harm, but the Teachers dissented. Our understanding of God will always be limited, yet we are threatened when our current understanding is questioned or attacked. How fixed or flexible are you in your understanding of God or the truth? Are you willing to be wrong about spiritual matters? Do new spiritual ideas excite you or threaten you?
5. Cherished was so certain he understood Creator that he judged the Teachers as being full of darkness. How does arrogance blind us? How do you see this played out in the world today? Describe a time when you were so sure of something that you harshly judged those who disagreed with you.
6. Creator said, “I create. I destroy. In all I do, I love.” Give an example of how love and destruction might be compatible or coexist? From God’s point of view, destruction might be construed as “cleansing,” such as a forest fire. Give other examples of destruction that could be considered “cleansing.” How might you adjust your concept of God to allow for Him to be Destroyer?
7. Cherished built a tower and became proud of his achievement. Pride is insidious and sneaks its way into our hearts. Does the satisfaction from your accomplishments or possessions turn outward into gratitude or turn inward into self-importance? What is the proper place of self-importance in one’s life? What is the difference between pride and confidence? What is the difference between humility and weakness?

Discussion #4 (Read chapters 27-35)

1. Manna defined selffulness as an energy that is self-focused. A lot of our negative thinking falls into this pattern. Give an example of negative thinking that is based on being focused on self. How do you identify selffulness within yourself? How do you set it aside?
2. Cherished expressed hope to be found worthy to receive Creator's gift, but his false humility offended Creator. How might Cherished have demonstrated genuine humility? What requirements do you believe make you worthy to receive God's gifts? Why do we seek to "earn" God's gifts when they are already offered?
3. By judging himself unworthy, Cherished contradicted Creator, thus casting Creator as a liar. How does putting ourselves down contradict God? How might you identify lies you tell about yourself? How might you discover the truth about yourself?
4. Creator said, "Because I love you, I correct and discipline you." A parent can love a child, but also be displeased with the child's actions. Are you able to separate God's love from God's displeasure? Is it easy or difficult for you to receive mercy and forgiveness from God? What would make it easier for you? How do you recognize God's discipline in your life? Do you see it as loving discipline?
5. The Teachers revealed to Cherished that they are Creator. Describe Cherished's relationship with the Teachers up to this point. Describe Cherished's relationship with Creator up to this point. How did each contribute to Cherished's development?
6. Ennoia said, "We use your mistakes, so don't despise your failings. Be grateful for them..." What attitude do you normally have toward your mistakes? Give an example of how God used one of your mistakes to help you grow. How might you generate an attitude of gratitude when you make mistakes?
7. Cherished and Creator experienced fun and physical interaction by playing in the lake. Some readers found parts of this passage too intimate. Assuming that God created intimacy, why wouldn't God want to experience intimacy with His Creation? Why might some people find this concept disturbing? Isn't it natural for love to include emotional and physical (non-sexual) intimacy or do some types of love exclude intimacy?
8. Creator told Cherished not to despise delay because it forces one to wrestle with truth and it builds character. How have incidents of delay built character in your life? Describe a time when you wrestled with something over time and how it changed you.
9. Creator said, "Everything is a test of your trust." Give an example when this might not be true. Why would your trust need to be tested all the time?

Discussion #5 (Read chapters 36-45)

1. Creator defined transformation as an inner change that enlarges one's capacity for spiritual abundance. What does transformation mean to you? Why is transformation important to God? If any situation has the potential to transform you, how does that change your view of difficult situations? How might you respond differently to situations in order to reap the benefits of transformation?
2. Creator said, "True understanding comes when We reveal Ourselves to you in response to your trust in Us." This implies that God only reveals Himself in situations where trust is present and that God makes Himself absent when there is no belief in Him. Why might God choose not to reveal Himself when doubt is present? How might this change your approach in seeking God? Describe a situation where God revealed Himself to you because you chose to trust.
3. Creator said, "We won't always protect you from adversity, but Our love will sustain you and your trust in Our love will transform you. You will encounter tempests and tigers, but Our love is greater than any danger or threat." Why won't God always protect us from adversity? If God won't always protect us, then what can we rely on God to do for us?
4. The macaw said, "Fear has power as long as one keeps evading the feared thing." How does facing our fear rob it of power? Identify one feared thing you are presently avoiding? Why are you avoiding it? In what ways does it have power over you?
5. Creator empathetically shared in Cherished's experience of dying from snake venom. To what degree do you believe that God is aware of everything you go through? Why did Creator withhold immediate help? How can we find comfort when God withholds His help?
6. Radiance told Cherished that he was made in Creator's image. What does it mean to you to be made in God's image? In what capacities do you think we are made in God's image? Emotionally? Spiritually? Relationally? How do you reconcile this truth with people who behave without love or conscience?
7. Creator explained that Their decision to love required a willingness to be vulnerable. Why does love require vulnerability? Describe the effects on a relationship when vulnerability is absent. How does your view of God change knowing that your choices can bring delight or grief to God? Express your thoughts on Creator's declaration that vulnerability is strength and fear of vulnerability is weakness.
8. Cherished experienced Creator's passion for him. How does it feel to be the target of God's intense longing and passionate pursuit? How does this expression of His passion change your view of God's love and its purity?

Discussion #6 (Read chapters 46-53)

1. Cherished shared his thoughts with Creator for the first time. Sharing our thoughts with another demonstrates transparency and intimacy. Which do you find more difficult: being honest with a person or being honest with God? Explain why. What do you risk when you are completely honest with God? What do you gain? How might you include God in your thought processes?
2. Creator challenged Cherished to reach beyond himself, to explore the inner landscape of his soul or to explore the depths of Creator. What might it mean to explore one's inner landscape? What might it mean to explore the depths of God? How would one go about doing those things?
3. Illuminos defined rationalism as the supremacy of reason, the power of thinking for oneself. What is the relationship between reason and faith? What is the place of reason in one's relationship with God? Does rationalism hinder faith?
4. Illuminos' past experience with Creator was disagreeable. Why was his experience so negative? Did Creator treat him any differently than Cherished? If so, how might that be a factor? You may have met people who have had a negative experience with God. How did their experience of God differ from yours? Why was it disagreeable for them?
5. Creator said, "We can transform any situation and give it purpose where before it had none." How might you apply this principle to natural disasters or senseless violence? Can you think of an example of a pointless tragedy that turned out to have some purpose after the fact?
6. Creator said that for those who understand it, freewill is liberty. How can freewill be liberating? How can it be destructive? What is its proper place in our lives? How do we balance it with our commitment to God? Can peace coexist with freewill or does freewill always lead to chaos?
7. Cherished declared that he understood evil after having met Illuminos. How do you process the existence of evil in the world? To what do you attribute its source? Is its existence necessary for us to understand its opposite, goodness?
8. Cherished suggested to Radiance that her service might be more meaningful if her thoughts and feelings aligned with her actions. How often is your spiritual service done out of obedience only? How might you align your thoughts and feelings with your service? How might doing so change your spiritual experience?

Discussion #7 (Read chapters 54-62)

1. Creator said, "Any mistake you entrust to Us, no matter how terrible, We can transform into something that benefits you." What is the relationship between trust and transformation? What steps would you take to entrust your mistakes to God?
2. Cherished revealed his inner self to Creator and felt known in a deeper way than before. How might you disclose your inner self to God? What does it mean to you to be "known." Creator said, "Mutual disclosure is the basis for intimacy." This implies that intimacy with God goes both ways. Has God ever disclosed Himself to you personally? If so, describe the experience. Express your thoughts on how disclosing yourself to God can lead to Him disclosing Himself to you.
3. Creator provided food for Cherished, but he overlooked it because he was expecting it to arrive in a certain way. In what ways do we confine God to act according to our expectations? If God doesn't behave the way you expect, do you discount it? How might you manage your expectations of God so you don't miss His provision?
4. Creator said, "Some events are random and some are intentional, but in every case, you must trust Us." We invest a lot of time trying to make sense of situations, when God asks that we simply trust. Why do we need to know whether an event is God's will or not? When you are trusting God in difficult situations, what are you trusting God to do for you? Rescue you? Strengthen you? Give you peace or wisdom?
5. Creator said, "We can insert Our intention into any unintended situation, no matter how unpleasant, and cause it to transform your soul... If you fail to trust, then the effect is lost." How might God transform a situation by inserting His intention? What might God's general intention be for most situations? Why might choosing not to trust result in needless suffering for us?
6. Creator said, "In your time of need, look to Us, not to Our help." It's easy to put our faith in God's help and forget to put our faith in the One who gives the help. We can set ourselves up for disappointment if we expect God to do something specific for us, such as a healing He hadn't promised. How can we shift our trust in outcomes onto God Himself? What should be our attitude toward outcomes we hope for? What should be our response when desired outcomes don't happen?
7. In the sprout story, the main lesson was that hardship enables one to overcome adversity. How does hardship prepare us for adversity? Give some examples. In what ways does storm or drought reveal one's true nature?
8. Radiance learned that disclosing parts of herself to Creator connected her to Creator and to herself. How might that work? How do we uncover and retrieve the deeper or hidden parts of ourselves? What does it mean to be connected to oneself?

Discussion #8 (Read chapters 63-70)

1. Cherished discovered that what he most needed was peace, not patience. Why is peace a better remedy than patience? How is peace defined in this story?
2. Cherished's resistance was making him frustrated and miserable. Why do we resist what we can't control? Do you generally view unpleasant situations as something to be fixed, avoided, or accepted? In what ways do you resist situations? Describe a situation where you made your circumstances an adversary. What is your biggest obstacle to being able to accept undesirable situations?
3. When Cherished focused on the present moment, his situation became more manageable. Why? If God only dwells in the present moment, then what result would you get if you focus on the past or future? Describe the effect that the past and future have on your wellbeing. Identify your difficulties in being able to dwell in the present moment.
4. Cherished acknowledged that his preferences didn't align with Creator's will, but his hope was that the gap would close over time. How should our preferences relate to God's will? To what degree should our lives be guided by God's will? How much autonomy do you think you ought to have?
5. Cherished complained that devotion was too hard. How had Cherished failed to understand true devotion? How did Creator define true devotion? How did Creator define false devotion? What possesses us to make further demands on ourselves beyond what God asks of us?
6. Creator said, "Let your actions be congruent with your authentic self." What does that mean to you? Why is it important? Give examples of some actions being incongruent with one's true self. What effect does incongruity have on us?
7. Creator warned against actions that come from a need to impress, prove, or gain. Which of those three needs do you most relate to? What drives your need to please? What do you find yourself trying to prove to others? To God? To yourself? What would it take for you to be content in your primary area of need?
8. The knowledge of right and wrong changed Cherished. Why did Creator forbid that knowledge? In what ways did it change Cherished? In what ways did it change his relationship with Creator?
9. In place of Creator's guidance, Cherished is given a conscience. Do you consider your conscience as something to be trusted, distrusted, or ignored? How is conscience influenced by upbringing, personal experience, bias, and culture? Can it change over time? How well does it reflect absolute right and wrong?

Discussion #9 (Read chapters 71-79)

1. Cherished lost all sense of Creator after being severed from Them. When God feels absent, what do you tell yourself to help you get through those times? At what times does God feel more real to you?
2. Even though they were separated, Cherished hoped Creator would hear his prayer. Do you believe that God hears your every prayer? Do you believe that God answers every prayer? How can you know if an answer requires a waiting period? How long must one be willing to wait for an answer? How can you tell the difference between a delayed answer and an answer of no?
3. Creator was in the cave shelter with Cherished, but Cherished couldn't sense it. Do you believe God is always that close, even when you don't feel Him? What makes you think He is not that close? How important is it to you to feel Him?
4. Cherished doubted Blaze's intentions because Blaze was ugly and smelly. All of us have judged others by their appearance before we had a chance to get to know their character. Which physical traits are a quick turn-off for you? What associations or assumptions do you make when those traits are present? Why do we draw conclusions about character based on appearance?
5. Creator sent Blaze to help Cherished, but Blaze seemed an unlikely choice. God sends people into our lives who have undesirable traits, and yet they have a role to play in our lives. On what basis do you choose who can be in your life? How do you decide when someone should no longer be in your life? Do you think it's possible that God might want you to maintain a relationship with someone whom you dislike?
6. Cherished's conscience disapproved of his eating meat. The story makes no assertion that eating meat is wrong, but explores the validity of conscience. When is it appropriate to go against one's conscience? Describe a time when you went against your conscience because you had a compelling reason. Which has the most weight for you in decision-making: conscience, reason, or intuition?
7. Cherished was reminded that he lived in the world of do's and don'ts, the world of right and wrong. What advice would you give Cherished about how to live in such a world? To what degree do you feel governed by rules? Explain how having a relationship with God might help someone transcend the world of rules. What is the role of rules within any relationship?
8. Cherished said, "Knowing right and wrong isn't the same as knowing Truth." How might they be different? What does truth give us that the knowledge of right and wrong cannot? How do you define truth?

Discussion #10 (Read chapters 80-87)

1. Cherished felt a connection to Creator through nature and dance. In what ways do you experience God through nature? In what ways do you experience God through movement? Through ritual? Through music?
2. Cherished felt betrayed when he learned that Blaze had lied to him. Betrayal is most painful when we are betrayed by those we have trusted. By what criteria do you choose to trust others? Why is it harder to forgive those we have trusted? What does it take for your trust to be restored when someone you trust lets you down?
3. Cherished caught Blaze burning himself. Why did Blaze believe that burning himself would help manage his pain? What reasons might people give to explain why they engage in self-destructive behaviors? What do you believe is the greatest need for people who are self-destructive?
4. Cherished decided to keep his pain in the open rather than hiding it deep inside. Why does hiding things inhibit our spiritual growth? Give an example of what holding one's pain in the open might look like. How might that be conducive for healing?
5. Blaze lied in order to protect himself. What was Blaze trying to protect? What was he afraid of? In what situations do people lie to protect themselves? When you are tempted to lie, what are you trying to protect?
6. Cherished realized that both he and the wolf had been wronged and deserved justice. If justice were to be meted out for the wolf, what would be the implications? What did Cherish conclude about justice? Why did Cherish decide that mercy was a better option?
7. Cherished told Blaze that he released him. What did Cherish release Blaze from? What did releasing Blaze not mean, according to Cherished? By forgiving Blaze, what did Cherished indirectly release himself from? What have you learned about forgiveness from this passage?
8. Blaze said, "I was content serving Creator, doing what They had designed me to do." For what purpose do you believe you were made? How does your search for fulfillment tie into that purpose? Based on your answers, what one thing could you start doing that would cause you to be more content or fulfilled?

Discussion #11 (Read chapters 88-94)

1. Cherished said, "I hunt, I swim, I garden, but none of those activities touch my soul." What was Cherished hoping to experience by having something touch his soul? What types of experiences touch your soul? How do they touch your soul?
2. Saub urged Cherished to return to innocence and die to willfulness. Why would Saub ask Cherished to do something so seemingly impossible? Why was it important to return to innocence? Why did Cherished need to die to his willfulness? What meaning do they have for us?
3. "I need more than words," Cherished said when asked to believe. Words are often not enough for us to believe something. By what criteria do you decide whether to believe something about God or the spiritual world? If something is not mentioned in the Bible, do you reject it? What makes a spiritual concept real for you? Does a spiritual reality need to be validated before you can accept it?
4. Saub said, "Creator can transform a situation meant for evil by adding Their purpose to it, so that good can come from evil for those who trust Creator." This statement implies that God is greater than any evil that man can inflict and can transform that evil into divine purpose. To what extent can you believe that? If the above statement is true, then what role might evil have in God's universe? Suggest a scenario where divine purpose can transform an evil situation. Is there something we must do that facilitates God in transforming evil into divine purpose?
5. The story of the mother elephant and her beloved calf was an allegory. What similarities do you see between the mother elephant and God?
6. Saub said, "What is impossible for you is possible for Creator. Acknowledging your powerlessness makes an opening for Creator's power." How does acknowledging our powerlessness open the door for God to do the impossible? What door do you want opened for you to experience more of God?
7. Saub said that the way back to Creator was through brokenness. Brokenness is the recognition of the utter futility of our own resources to live a spiritual life. Usually, people have to reach the end of themselves to arrive at a state of brokenness. How does brokenness make us open to God? What aspect of brokenness threatens you? How might we cultivate a state of brokenness within ourselves?
8. Blaze said that his mind only allowed what it already believed regarding Saub. Sometimes, we make up our mind about something and stubbornly maintain our opinion even when new facts become available. In what areas are you most unlikely to change your mind? What can you do to be more open to new information?

Discussion #12 (Read chapters 95-103)

1. Cherished attended the meeting of the Society of Independents. Why? Later, he went back to get a leaf, even though he had to lick Illuminos' nodule to get it. Why did he want a leaf so badly?
2. Manna explained to Cherished why he had to become human. What parallels do you see between Manna (Saub) and Jesus Christ, and their respective missions? How has this allegory given you new understanding regarding Christ's death, resurrection, and salvation through Him?
3. Cherished realized that everything in life was intended to be an opportunity to trust in Creator and for Creator to show Their love. Explain how life's challenges can be an opportunity for God to show His love. In what ways do we sabotage those opportunities?
4. Creator said, "Every trial is bearable when you trust in Us. Fear and worry turn a trial into a torment." How does fear and worry make us miserable? How does trusting in God make life's challenges more bearable?
5. Creator said that love is never wasted. Cherished concluded that if he trusted in Creator, Their love would never disappoint. To what extent do you agree with those statements? Is love wasted if it is never returned? What might it mean for God's love to not disappoint us in the midst of life that does disappoint us? What is the relationship between expectation and disappointment? What is your expectation of God's love?
6. Radiance said that her inner and outer are the same now. By that she meant she is now fully herself, outwardly expressing her inner self completely. In what ways do you hide your inner self? What adjectives would you use to describe your inner self? What would it take for you to reveal more of your inner self to the world?
7. Cherished explained that when we receive love, we are able to give love. From whom did you learn to love? Are you able to receive love easily? Do you feel that you can love deeply? Do you find it easier to give or receive love? How might you expand your ability to do both?
8. Creator sacrificed everything to bring Cherished into intimate communion with Them again. Intimate communion with God is our final destination. Describe what you imagine that ultimate communion might be like. Presently, how do you want God to connect with you? How can you make yourself more open to intimacy with God? What might be the risks?