

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *The Awakened Heart*

by

Gerald G. May, M.D.

1. Gerald G. May begins by describing three meanings of bearing love: enduring it, carrying it, and bringing it forth (p. 1). How have you experienced these three meanings in your life?
2. Have you ever run away from a desire for love? Why did you run, and how did it turn out (p. 3)?
3. “No one is incapable of loving. When it comes to love, *capability* is the wrong word entirely. . . . Love is not a function. It is a quality of being that exists beneath and before all our functions. The word we must use is *capacity*” (p. 10). How might using the word *capacity* to describe love be more accurate than *capability*?
4. May encourages his readers to try to understand what love is by appreciating how it has been present in each person’s life. Thinking about your own experience, con-

sider the following questions. “Recall some experiences of love for people, places, possessions. What did those experiences of love feel like? How did they affect you? What is your experience of love right now? How do you sense yourself loving, being loved, being in love? And what are your desires for love: your hopes, dreams, and fantasies?” (p. 21).

5. May states that we have all, at one time or another, given up our freedom for love (p. 31). How might you have done this in your life? Why did you do it?
6. If each choice we make involves choosing between loves, how might a person’s character be revealed by the choices he or she makes (p. 40)? For example, when a person chooses to spend his or her time alone rather than with friends, what might this choice reveal about this person? What might be revealed about a person’s character when he or she chooses to forgo dessert?
7. If you pray, why do you do it, and how do you go about it? If you do not pray, does May’s writing on page 58 show you how it might be valuable?
8. Consecration “requires that we trust more in grace than in our personal capabilities” (p. 65). Why is it sometimes difficult to trust more in grace than in our own capabilities?
9. Try the breathing exercise May describes (p. 66). Are you able to separate intention from control? If not, how might you work toward that? If so, how might you

extend this distinction between intention and control into other aspects of your life?

10. May describes a mental clarity that some people experience as the effect of contemplative practices (p. 74). Have you ever experienced such clarity? How did you respond to it?
11. To May, space is the “pauses between things, in the brief contemplative spaces of just being” (p. 44). Have you been “so conditioned by efficiency” that you feel unproductive or lazy when you sit in a time of spaciousness (p. 94)? How might you combat that feeling in an effort to embrace space again? Do you find it easier to embrace space in the morning or evening? How can you go about keeping it fresh (p. 108)?
12. “Popular religion promises peace of mind if only we will believe correctly. If we are not completely happy, it maintains, it is because we are somehow not right with God” (p. 102). Do you think popular religion teaches this? If so, how might you get away from this myth?
13. Where, or during what activities, are you most likely to remember or forget your desire for God? How can you make these times reminders of the source of love (p. 154)?
14. What word or phrase would you choose as your “heart prayer” (p. 161)? What is its significance?
15. Three common ways people experience God are as a companion, as a romantic lover, or as a cosmic pres-

ence. Which way do you tend to experience God? Have you experienced all three (p. 180)? Do you feel one is more accurate than the others, or are they all viable ways to understand God?

16. May asserts that the distinctions we draw between areas of our lives (for instance, work and family) can be detrimental when we attempt to incorporate contemplation into our lives (p. 196). Why might it be better not to draw these distinctions?
17. May describes returning home after a week of giving lectures and workshops and feeling strange because his family members did not seek his advice as the people at the lectures had (p. 222). Is there anything your friends and family reveal about you that you forget to notice elsewhere?
18. Thich Nhat Hanh said, “While washing the dishes, you might be thinking about the tea afterwards, and so try to get them out of the way as quickly as possible in order to sit and drink tea. But that means that you are incapable of living during the time you are washing the dishes” (p. 227). Are there any activities during which you are incapable of living? How might you become more present in those moments?
19. Each person tends to have a “helpfulness style,” by which he or she tries to help others with their problems. Styles include using hugs to cover everything or providing food to friends in times of struggle (p. 238). What helpfulness style do you use most often? How

might it look if you waited for discernment before responding?

20. How has this book changed your views on love, space, and presence? Is there anything practical you can take away to incorporate into your daily life?