The Imitation of Christ

Thomas à Kempis · c. 1380 – 1471 · Text: trans. William Benham

Who wrote it

Thomas à Kempis spent most of his long life as an Augustinian canon at the monastery of Mount St Agnes near Zwolle in the Netherlands, copying manuscripts and guiding novices. He belonged to the Devotio Moderna movement of practical, inward devotion. The Imitation, written in the early fifteenth century, became one of the most widely read Christian books.

What to look for

- Short chapters meant to be read slowly and prayed over, not rushed.
- The theme of humility and a low opinion of one's own learning (Book I).
- The inner life: peace, a good conscience and friendship with Jesus (Book II).
- Book III's dialogue between Christ and the disciple.
- Book IV's preparation for Holy Communion.

Reading plan

Session 1	Admonitions for the spiritual life	Book I
Session 2	The inner life	Book II
Session 3	Inward consolation, part one	Book III, Chapters I–XXX
Session 4	Inward consolation, part two	Book III, Chapters XXXI–LIX
Session 5	The Sacrament of the Altar	Book IV

Discussion questions

1. Why do you think Thomas puts so much weight on humility and self-knowledge?
2. What does he mean by the "inner life", and how is it built?
3. How does the dialogue form of Book III change the way you read it?
4. What does the book say about suffering and carrying the cross?
5. Which chapter felt most personal to you, and why?
6. Is the book's distrust of "the world" helpful or difficult for a modern reader?

Tips for a group

Read each session's pages before meeting. Bring one sentence that struck you and one question. Keep discussion to 45–60 minutes and end by sharing one thing to carry into the week.

Read it free

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ancienttalks.com/books/imitation-of-christ.html