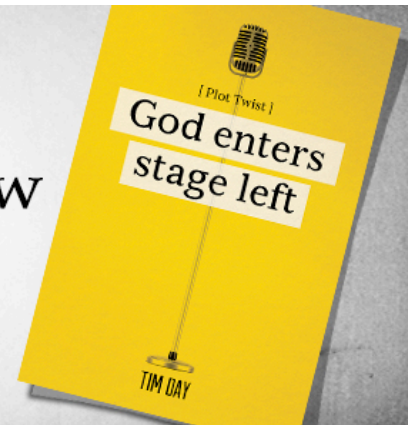


A fresh front row view
to an ancient faith.



BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

These study questions are for those interested in digging deeper into the stories and teaching of the Bible. You can use these questions for person study or for group study. They follow the outline of the book and are designed to help you explore key passages from the Bible.

MEANING

- Read Zechariah 3:1-10 and notice the statement in verse 8, "...who are symbolic of things to come." Now read Luke 1:1-4 and Luke's assertion of his personal research with eyewitnesses.
 - Recognizing the Bible is an ancient library that contains many different literary styles, what principles should a reader keep in mind as she or he works through any particular text?
- Read Luke 1:1-4 and John 20:30-31.
 - What do we learn about the intent of those who wrote the Scriptures? What was the purpose of their writings?
 - What was their perspective on historicity and accuracy?
 - How do these passages influence your thinking as you read the Biblical writings about Jesus?
- Read 2 Timothy 3:16. We see that Scripture is both useful for helping us examine our way of thinking ("teaching and rebuking" focuses on the beliefs we hold) as well as our way of living ("correcting and training" focuses on our actions).
 - How can a story challenge both our way of thinking and our way of living?
 - Can you think of a story, maybe captured in a book or a movie that challenged your way of thinking and living?

PERFECTION

- The author suggests that the opening account of the creation account was first and foremost a scandalous poem against ancient polytheism as it announced that there is only one all-powerful God. Read Genesis 1:1- 2:4.
 - What evidence do you see the account that would support that understanding?
 - If this is the case, what are the different ways that might impact a person's thinking about this passage?
- Genesis 1:26-30 describes the creation of humanity.
 - Make a list of every quality and responsibility that is outlined for man and woman. What strikes you about this list?
 - What are the various ways we might understand the idea of man and woman being made in the image of God?
 - What do you think it means for man and woman to "subdue" the earth and to "rule" over the living creatures?
 - Based on this entire creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:4, do you think that the authority that God gave to humanity meant that God gave them the right to selfishly destroy the created order and environment for their own comfort and pleasure?
 - What evidence do you see that this is not the case but that they were to actually partner with God's created order to improve it?

BROKEN

- Read the account in Genesis 3 in multiple translations if you have that option.
 - What strikes you or stands out to you about this account?
- The author suggests that the traditional translation of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" is better understood as "The tree of 'I'll decide for myself what is right and wrong.'"
 - How does this translation impact your thinking about Eve and Adam's decision to eat the forbidden fruit?
 - Give examples from your experience where people's decision to "decide for themselves what is right and wrong" makes them into their own gods?
 - What impact does living this way have on relationships, for good or for bad?

- Consider Adam and Eve's decision in contrast to Jesus' decision in Mark 14:32-42. What were the consequences Jesus faced for his decision and what lessons can we draw when comparing the outcomes?
- Read through the curses the woman and man listed in Genesis 3:16-19.
 - How do you see evidence of these curses within the world today?
 - How do these impact your life today?

STRUGGLE

The fourth act opens with a series of comparative characters and stories to help the reader discover that there are two ways to live – my way that looks good at the beginning but goes badly and God's way that looks crazy but ends up working out. Select one or more of these comparative stories, read the texts and note what you learn from these stories, particularly those points that align with the themes of the fourth act.

- Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16)
- Noah and the people of Babel (Genesis 6:5-9:17, 11:1-9)
- Abram and Lot (Genesis 13:1-18, 18:16-19:29)
- Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael (Genesis 12:1-5, 15:1-16:16, 21:1-21)
- Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19-34, 32:1-33:11)
- Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37:1-36, 45:1-28)
- Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38:1-30)

RELIGION

- Read through Exodus 20:1-17. Make an outline of the two sets of five commands that make up the Ten Commandments. Review commandments five and ten.
 - What strikes you about these two commands as compared to the other eight commands?
 - In what ways might these two commandments seem surprising to the nation of Israel?
 - Jesus declared in Mark 12:28-34 that the entire law can be summarized in two simple commands. Based on what the author explains about the Ten Commandments and your own reading of these commands, do you agree or disagree with Jesus' summary and why?

KINGDOM

- Read Psalm 51, the song King David wrote after he had committed both adultery and murder (See 2 Samuel 11, 12:1-25). Within the Old Testament religious law, such sins were worthy of death. Forgiveness for sins was offered through the sacrificial system and yet, David in his song suggests something radically different.
 - How do you think fellow Israelites would have reacted to David's song in light of his public and tragic sin?
 - How might you have reacted if you knew of these events and then heard of this song from the king?

CAPTIVITY

Read Isaiah 5:1-4; Amos 4:6-13; 5:18-27 and Malachi 2:17-3:4. Within these Old Testament passages we see the deep pain and failure within Israel to truly live in a faithful relationship with God.

As you read through these passages, what themes do you see?

The author's conclusion is that Israel's story is ultimately the story of "what doesn't work to change the human heart." What parts of these texts support or inform that conclusion?

RESCUE

- Jesus' basic teachings are summarized in Matthew 5:1-7:29 and Luke 6:20-49.
 - How does the teaching of Jesus in these two passages illustrate the points outlined in this chapter?
 - What is your own reaction to these teachings?
 - Which seem easy to accept and others more difficult to accept or practice?
- Jesus outlines in Matthew 23 his perspective on religion and the religious leaders of his day.
 - How does what Jesus says in this passage make it clear that simply trying to control our external environment (give me the rules, give me my space, give me strong leadership to follow, and hold me accountable when I mess up) will never change the human heart?

- What does Jesus say in this passage is the true results of living religiously rather than relationally?
- A key quality of Jesus' teaching and life was calling people into other-centeredness and service. Read Luke 22:24-27 and John 13:1-17.
 - Where in your life have you experienced a leader or someone serving as Jesus taught and modeled and what impact did that have on your life?
 - Can you think of an example where you have served another person in the way Jesus' described?
 - How did that feel to serve in that way and what was the impact on that relationship?
 - What barriers might people feel in either serving this way or being served?
 - In what ways does this approach to relationship undermine the various ways we create social hierarchy whether through religion or social caste or wealth?
- We see in Luke 7:34 that Jesus had a reputation of being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.'" Read Matthew 9:9-13, Luke 7:1-10 and John 8:1-11.
 - What parts of these stories from Jesus' life fly in the face of what religious approach to God?
 - What parts of these stories underscore or illustrate the love ethic, rather than simply a rule-based approach to life?
 - Would you likely have been one of the people partying with Jesus or do you think you would have more likely been a bit skeptical?
- Before Jesus was arrested, he explained to his disciples how they could be changed from the inside out. This is recorded in John 14:5-15:17.
 - What key points of Jesus' teaching in this passage align with summary provided in this chapter?
 - What key insights strike you from Jesus' teaching on the vine and the branches? What practical questions does this raise for someone trying take this approach to their relationship with God?
 - In light of the Old Testament texts that predict the coming of the Holy Spirit (as highlighted in the previous chapter), what questions do you think his disciples may have wondered?
 - How would you describe the daily life of a person doing their best to follow this teaching of Jesus?

COMMUNITY

- Read Acts 2:41-47.
 - What qualities do you see in this account of the first Christians that would fit well with Jesus' approach to life as described in Luke 7:34?
 - When you think of going to church, what comes to mind? How does your own idea of church align with or not align with this description found in Acts?
 - Why do you think people who faithfully attend gatherings of Christian community may not want to follow this example of the first Christ-followers?
- Paul the irreligious revolutionary experienced a radical life change when the resurrected Jesus appeared to him. First read this story in Acts 7:54-8:3, 9:1-31, 13:1-5 and then read his own personal retelling in Acts 22:1-21, Galatians 1:11-2:10 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.
 - What can we learn about Paul's experience of meeting Jesus in these passages?
 - What aspects of his life and personal transformation do you think best equipped and motivated him to share the message of Jesus with others?
 - What key insights might the first Christians learned about loving your enemies through Jesus' appearing to Paul?
 - What inspires you most about Paul's personal journey and experience?
- The author maintains that God's love frees us to not hide our true selves but to be real as we grow in loving, authentic community. Read Galatians 2:11-16, an account of a Paul confronting Peter.
 - How does this passage model the commitment to relationships as described in Ephesians 4:14-16?
 - What benefits would the first Christ-followers gain by the leaders being so open and honest about their struggles?
 - In your experience, which of the following three are most common in relationships: 1) speaking the truth in love, 2) attempting to show love by downplaying the truth; or 3) speaking the truth with no concern about showing love in the process? Do you think most people find it easier to do option 2 or 3 rather than to consistently practice option 1 and why?
 - Where can you simply be yourself and experience people speaking the truth in love as a part of personal growth?

RENEWAL

- The book of Revelation ends with a vivid account of the renewal of all things. Read Revelations 21:1-22:5.
 - List all of the key descriptions or images of the renewed earth found in this passage. Remembering that these are prophetic images or pictures, what key insights about the future can we glean from these images?
 - What encourages you most in this vision?
 - What questions or concerns does this vision raise?
- One of the key questions of the first Christ-followers was about the role of the resurrection in their experience of life after death. Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-58.
 - List the key insights we discover about Paul's teaching on the resurrection?
 - What parallels do you see between Paul's understanding of the resurrection of people and the accounts of Jesus' resurrection in Luke 24:1-53 and John 20:19-21:14?
 - If a person embraces the teaching on the resurrection, how would that impact their perspective on death and life after death?
- In Israel, they as a nation looked forward to the day when the world would be renewed under the Rescuer. Read through Isaiah 65:17-15.
 - List the qualities of the new world that are captured in this prophetic vision. How are these similar and dissimilar to the vision in Revelations?
 - What similarities are there between the accounts of the garden in Genesis 1:27-2:25, Isaiah 65:17-15 and Revelations 21:1-22:5?
 - How would you describe God's perfect world based on these passages to someone else?
 - What would excite you most about living in a world like this?

WAR

- We find within two of the prophetic writings of Israel, accounts that seem to have a double meaning. There is an immediate context and yet there also seems to be an allusion to the history of the fallen angel called Satan. Read these accounts found in Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-19.
 - What evidence do you see in these passages that the writers may also have been speaking about Satan?
 - What key insights do you glean about this fallen angel from these texts?
- Read Jesus' statement in Luke 10:18.
 - What would one of Jesus' listeners have concluded about Jesus based just on this statement?
 - What does this statement suggest about Jesus?
- Paul the irreligious revolutionary made a number of statements about the spiritual forces in the unseen realm. He at times would call them the rulers of this age or the principalities and powers of heaven. Read 1 Corinthians 2:8 and Colossians 2:13-15.
 - Based on these texts, what was Paul's perspective on what Jesus accomplished in his death on the cross, particularly as it relates to Satan and the fallen angels who are loyal to Satan?
- Revelation 12 is entire chapter devoted to the story of Satan. It is a passage rich in symbolism as it tells in brief the history of Satan or this one called the dragon.
 - What do key points about Satan can the reader take from this passage?
 - What points in this passage align with the other passages we have looked at in this study?