

## **Conversations With Jesus Study Group Leader's Guide**

*Conversations With Jesus* is a book designed to make you think. It encourages a personal interaction with some of the stories of Jesus, a time to evaluate how that story makes you feel and what that means in your relationship with God.

Because of this, *Conversations* is an ideal book for small study group use. The Conversation Starters at the end of each chapter will generate discussion as each group member responds to the thoughts in the book.

This guide will help you as a small study group leader set the right tone for a spiritual yet personal journey through some of the stories of Jesus.

### **General guidelines**

Small groups can take many different forms. Some groups are small and intimate, and the sharing of personal stories and information increases the bonds among the members. Others are larger and less intimate, with a focus more on study and reflection than personal sharing. Only you as the group leader can decide what kind of sharing and focus will best benefit your fellow members.

This guide presupposes that your group is reading the chapter before coming together to discuss. If you intend to read and discuss as you go, you may want to ask the Conversation Starter questions as you complete the reading of the paragraphs they pertain to.

### **Conversation Starters**

These questions at the end of each chapter are designed to bring out some of the most important points in the book as well as to create interaction between the reader and the content. But don't let them hold back other creative thoughts or ideas.

In this guide, I will highlight some additional questions or thoughts you might want to bring up as you go through the Conversation Starters. This additional material will be in parentheses and bold print.

### **The Sycamore Tree**

This introductory chapter may be something you have individuals read away from the group, but if you do decide to include it in the group discussion, here are some ideas for generating discussion.

1. Invite someone (or several people, depending on the size of the group) to share a concrete connection to a Bible story, like the sycamore tree in this chapter.

Ideas to share if needed:

- A long nail might make the suffering of the crucifixion seem more real,
- A pet sheep might make the sacrificial system or the parable of the lost sheep seem real,
- A rainbow after a storm might bring home the promise to Noah.

2. What are some ways that Zacchaeus' experience is like our own?
  - Many of us have grown up in the church, as he grew up in his religion,
  - In spite of that, we are guilty of greed, hard-heartedness, etc., as he was,
  - He began to change after hearing about Jesus, before they met, as must we,
  - He didn't let anything keep him from seeing Jesus. Do we?
  
3. Where do you go to get away from the noise and stress, to try to get a closer look at Jesus? Ideas:
  - A quiet spot in the house,
  - A quiet spot outdoors,
  - A few moments alone in the car,
  - A walk in the woods,
  - Church.

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### Chapter One: "Lazarus Is Dead, and I'm Glad," Pages 17-23

**For more study: John 11:1-16; The Desire of Ages, chapter 58; Messiah, chapter 58.**

My story of loss at the beginning of this chapter is common to us all. Invite one or more from the group to share a story of a loved one lost to death (or share such a story yourself) as well as the feelings this loss brought to the surface. Don't try to explain why such things happen or downplay feelings of anger or sadness. Allow the shared stories to become a part of the discussion over the first three chapters. There will be times to bring up the personal stories again to see if identifying with Mary and Martha helps bring resolution.

#### **Conversation starters (from page 23):**

1. Why wasn't Lazarus called to be one of the 12 disciples? Was he not interested? Not qualified? Not available? **(There are no right answers here, but invite speculation. Why wouldn't a person want to be a disciple? Why would a good person not make a good disciple?)**
2. We tend to think that those who feel closest to God should become pastors or church workers. With Lazarus in mind, how should we rethink that? **(Is your pastor the most spiritual person you know? How can you tell? What evidence would we see if a person was especially close to God?)**
3. How do you think Mary and Martha felt when Lazarus died, after the message from Jesus said he wouldn't? How would you have felt? **(Would it have sounded like a lie to you? Didn't Jesus know they would misunderstand and be devastated? Is it the same today when we claim God's promises and He doesn't answer?)**
4. Have you ever felt betrayed by God when a loved one died? **(This may have been answered already as stories were shared. Or this may be the time for more discussion of those feelings. Don't let someone shut down the discussion with how we should feel—allow people to share how they really feel.)**
5. Were the disciples right to question whether Jesus would let them suffer and die? **(Does that seem like a normal human response?)** Would you trust God with your life, based on how He has protected others that you loved and lost? **(If you feel like He has failed to keep His promises, how can you trust Him? Is it OK to trust in spite of how we feel?)**
6. If Jesus could have explained the "big picture" to Mary and Martha and Lazarus, do you think they would have understood that Lazarus' death was a good thing? **(Does it help reduce the pain of losing someone if something good comes out of it? Does that make it feel more like they died for a good cause, or made a difference for someone else? How does seeing the "big picture" help?)**

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### **Chapter Two: "If You Had Been Here," Pages 25-31**

**For more study: John 11:17-27; The Desire of Ages, chapter 58; Messiah, chapter 58.**

The idea that it would be easier if God never healed anyone miraculously can seem harsh or faithless. But it is easy to feel that way when others celebrate healing while you are left at a funeral. Invite someone from your group to share a time when they felt that way.

#### **Conversation Starters (from page 31):**

1. What do you think when other people are healed, but your loved ones are not? Were more people praying? Or did God just like them more? **(Is there a formula for getting God's attention? The right words, claiming the right promises, having truly spiritual people pray for healing? Does God only heal those who are living right?)**
2. How would it be easier if God never healed anyone? **(At least we wouldn't feel like He loved us less when our loved one wasn't healed.)**
3. Wouldn't it have been nicer of Jesus to at least stay nearby Bethany to comfort Mary and Martha and help them understand? Why didn't he?
4. Does it make sense to you that Jesus couldn't not heal someone, that he had to avoid people in need in order to carry out his mission? **(What does that say about Jesus? Since He came to put an end to pain and suffering, how hard must it have been to see people suffer? What does this say about what it means to be like Jesus?)**
5. What does it mean that the resurrection is a Person, not a place or a time in the distant future? Does it change how you think about it? **(If Jesus is real, then the resurrection is real. It's not a question of if, only when.)**
6. The pain of loss can feel much more real than the promise of the resurrection. Can we trust that Jesus knows how it hurts? That he knows it's not fair? **(You might leave this question hanging until the next chapter, since it is addressed there.)**

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### Chapter Three: "Didn't I Tell You?" Pages: 33-39

**For more study: John 11:28-44; The Desire of Ages, chapter 58; Messiah, chapter 58.**

Consider starting this discussion by reading the scene of Lazarus' resurrection, starting on p. 36 with "Picture yourself there . . ." Invite the group to add thoughts or elements of the scene as they imagine it. How did the disciples react? How did the Pharisees react?

#### **Conversation Starters (from page 39):**

1. Would the paid mourners and fake friends have upset you like they did Jesus? **(Does this say anything about people who are insincere, two-faced, or behind-the-back gossips today?)**
2. Why did Jesus cry at Lazarus' tomb? What does that tell you about him? **(If He already knew Lazarus was coming back to life, He cried because He felt their pain, He understands the pain of sin and death. He knows how much it hurts.)**
3. Can you picture Jesus crying with you at the loss of your loved ones? **(This is good time to refer back to stories shared at Chapter One. "Bob, can you picture Jesus crying with you at the loss of your mother?" "Ann, can you picture Jesus crying with you at gravesite of your son?")**
4. Jesus will do whatever it takes to stop the pain of sin and death forever. Does the fact that he would let his best friend die, that he would give his own life, makes it easier to bear whatever happens to us? **(You look for a yes answer here, but ask why. If someone says no, let them explain as well.)**
5. Which part of the Lazarus story brings you the most comfort? Which part brings you the most hope?

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### Chapter Four: "A Child's Kingdom," Pages 41-47

**For more study: Matthew 19:13-16; Mark 10:13-17; Luke 18:15-18; The Desire of Ages, chapter 56; Messiah, chapter 56.**

Since your group is likely made up of people from different backgrounds, ask what they remember of church as a child. Do they remember church being fun? Do they remember when they first wanted to be baptized? What influenced that decision?

#### **Conversation Starters (from page 47):**

1. Do you remember when church was fun, when religion was a simple "Jesus loves me"? Do you remember when it got confusing? **(Most people will have trouble identifying exactly when religion went from "fun" to "boring" or all about keeping the rules. Encourage the group to contrast what they remember as fun times with times that made religion seem like a burden. These experiences likely began during their teen years.)**
2. Why is it that we must become like children? What exactly do children have or do that makes them "kingdom-ready"? **(Ideas: unconditional love, unconditional acceptance of those around them, simple faith, total dependence on caregivers, joy in small things.)**
3. Is material wealth a sign of God's favor? Does having wealth automatically make you a good person to serve as a leader in your church? **(Don't let the discussion focus on individuals. Wealth is relative anyway. Focus on whether business or material success is a sign that God is blessing.)**
4. Have you ever been in a place where you're doing all the right things, but you feel like none of it matters? How did you escape? **(Invite someone who may have experienced a time of "going through the motions" to share what brought them out of it. If no one shares, discuss the idea that we can escape that trap by getting involved in serving those in need: short term mission projects; community services projects, visiting the sick or elderly, etc.)**

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### Chapter Five: "Bribery-Based Religion," Pages 49-55

For more study: Matthew 19:17-26; Mark 10:18-27; Luke 18:19-27; The Desire of Ages, chapter 57; Messiah, chapter 57.

You almost have to start this chapter with the discussion found in Conversation Starter #1. Why did Jesus ask the Rich Young Ruler to give up everything when He didn't ask the other disciples to do that? But try to begin the discussion by asking the group, "What did you give up to become a Christian, or an Adventist? Or what have you given up because you are an Adventist?"

#### Conversation Starters (from page 55):

1. Why did Jesus expect the young man to give up everything? He didn't ask the others to do that. **(Are there different rules for different people when it comes to salvation?)**
2. Are we sometimes guilty of a bribery-based religion? What does a bribery-based religion look like in our lives today? **(You might read the quote from Calvin and Hobbes from page 51 to the group as you begin this discussion.)**
3. Do we have to act good (do the right things) or do we have to actually be good? **(What is the difference? Can you act good with being good? Can you really be good and not act good?)**
4. What is the answer when we feel like we're just going through the motions with no real meaning? Is that the same answer Jesus gave the rich young man? **(The answer is surrender. It's about putting Jesus first. But the best way to put that into practice is to reach out to help others.)**
5. If we were honest, how often do we make spiritual decisions on what to do or not to do based on how it will look, or what others will think?
6. What is an example of a quiet evil in a person's life? How can we rid ourselves of the quiet evils in our lives? **(Examples of quiet evil: love of money, being a workaholic, gossip, addictions of all types, etc. We rid ourselves of them by surrendering them to Jesus, recognizing that the right thing to do might be different for different people.)**
7. Is it really almost impossible for a wealthy person to get to heaven? If it is, why does everyone want to be wealthy? If not, what did Jesus mean? **(Sometimes having wealth makes us think we don't need God.)**

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### Chapter Six: "When God Ignores You," Pages 57-63

**For more study: Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; The Desire of Ages, chapter 43; Messiah, chapter 43.**

Ask someone in the group to share some occasion when they felt completely ignored by a parent, a spouse, a friend, or some other person important to them. What does being ignored do to our sense of self-esteem? You may want to follow this up with the question in Conversation Starter #2 at this point.

#### **Conversation Starters (from page 63):**

1. Why would a Greek person have so much faith in Jesus' power when so many Jews didn't believe? **(Does it seem odd that this woman believed that Jesus had the power to heal? Where did she hear about Him?)**
2. Have there been times when it seemed like God was ignoring you? In spite of your great need, in spite of your great faith, in spite of your claiming promises from Scripture? **(Ask some in the group to share occasions when it seemed like God was ignoring them. Why would God not listen when He invites us to pray and ask for his help?)**
3. Why does it seem to hurt worse when God apparently answers other people's prayers, but ignores yours? **(You may not need to discuss this again if you feel the group came to terms with it in the Chapter Two.)**
4. What reasons might the disciples have given as to why Jesus was ignoring the Greek woman? **(He was realizing that the Jews were better than everyone else, He was too important to talk to a woman, He was too busy, He was tired of helping people, He was trying to get away from people like her.)**
5. Did Jesus really call this woman and her daughter dogs? Is there any way that wasn't an insult? What did the disciples hear when he said that? **(What a cruel thing to say! Was Jesus being cruel? Did the disciples think Jesus was mean, or that He was finally treating people the way all Jews were supposed to?)**
6. Have you ever felt like the only dog in church? Like you had been disqualified to receive the bread or blessings of heaven? Does sharing testimonies of answered prayer always cause this kind of pain? Should we share testimonies in church if this is the result? **(Do testimonies have a negative effect sometimes? Have you been hurt by hearing another person's testimony? Should we avoid sharing them?)**
7. Does Jesus really care more for certain people today, treating them like beloved children while ignoring others? Are pastors more blessed? Teachers? Conference presidents? Why would some people think so? **(Are some people more blessed than others? Does God give some people wealth or health or happiness? What makes us think that way?)**



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### Chapter Seven: "Crumbs For Everyone," Pages 65 – 71

For more study: Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; The Desire of Ages, chapter 43; Messiah, chapter 43.

Ask one or more group members to share a story of unanswered prayer. What has been their response? Keeping praying for years? Give up and stop praying? Change prayers to ask for something else? Claim promises? How do we respond when we pray and God doesn't answer?

#### Conversation Starters (from page 71):

1. Why do you think the Hebrews could never break the idol-worshipping habit? Were those false religions so attractive, so enticing? What kinds of things entice us today in the same way? (**materialism, pornography, overeating, seeking excitement or social status?**)
2. How effective was the Jew's attempt to keep evil idol worship out of their culture? How did this help them? How did it hurt them? (**It was quite effective, but turned them completely inward, with no concern for others in the world, no interest in evangelism. Can we do the same to ourselves with our own schools, our own Adventist ghettos? Where's the balance between protecting our standards and beliefs and cutting ourselves off from the world we live in?**)
3. What had Jesus done to try to change his disciples prejudice against outsiders? (**Spoken to the woman at the well, a Samaritan, healed the Roman officer's daughter, etc.**)
4. Jesus didn't lie, but his words "God sent me only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel" were clearly misunderstood. Why did he say that? Did it accomplish his purpose? (**Does it seem like Jesus told a lie? Or was it so obviously not true as to guarantee to make the disciples think about what He was saying? Wasn't this a risky thing to say? What if the disciples took it as proof that they were only to reach out to the Jews?**)
5. Did Jesus answer the woman's request just because he was amused by her cleverness? Would he have healed her daughter no matter what she had said?
6. The woman had to wait for Jesus to respond because something bigger was at stake. Do you suppose this is the case sometimes when we make a request of God? What can we learn about prayer from this story? (**Invite group members to share a story of prayer that turned out better because it wasn't answered. Ideas: prayed for a certain job but got a better one, prayed that a relationship work out but later learned it would have been a mistake, etc.**)

7. What is the only way to maintain faith and hope when our prayers don't seem to be answered? How did the disciples know something wasn't right about the situation? (**The disciples knew something wasn't right about the way Jesus was treating this woman because they had spent so much time with Him. We can maintain our faith when our prayers don't seem to be answered by spending time with Jesus. When we do, we'll know that we can trust Him to do what is best for us.**)

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### Chapter Eight: "A One-Sided Conversation," Pages 73-79

For more study: Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26; *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 27; *Messiah*, chapter 27.

This chapter opens with a miracle story. Use Conversation Starter #1 here and invite one or more of the group to share miracle stories they have experienced or witnessed.

#### Conversation Starters (from page 79):

1. Have you ever seen a miracle? Or experienced one in your own life?
2. Many of us have lived a lifestyle that eventually caused us pain. Have regrets ever led to depression in your experience? Is it worse when you only have yourself to blame? **(Most of your group will have made lifestyle decisions that caused regrets at some point. Be careful how much sharing you take time for. It will be too personal and uncomfortable for some, and can degenerate into bragging or glorifying a sinful lifestyle for others.)**
3. If you could choose to be completely healthy or completely forgiven—no burden of guilt for anything you've ever done—which would you choose?
4. Do you think God's sympathy for our illnesses—and His likeliness of healing us—is different if it's something we brought on ourselves? Does He heal and/or comfort people who get cancer for no apparent reason more often than people who get lung cancer from smoking? **(This may lead to a discussion of whether some illnesses are a punishment from God, or whether God allows us to suffer the natural consequences of sin. This question might prove helpful: Does God love those who follow Him faithfully more than His sinful children?)**

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### Chapter Nine: "Yours for the Asking," Pages 81-87

**For more study: Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26; The Desire of Ages, chapter 27; Messiah, chapter 27.**

As Conversation Starter #1 highlights, friends are often very important influences in leading a person to Jesus. Ask the group members to share the names of one or two people who were important influences in their acceptance of Jesus and joining the church.

#### **Conversation Starters (from page 87):**

1. How important were the paralyzed man's friends in stirring up his faith and his interest in seeing Jesus? **(Remember, this man had no other way to hear about Jesus, no television or radio, no books to read.)**
2. Jesus knew what the man on the stretcher wanted. He didn't say "You are healed." He said, "You are forgiven." If Jesus were to give you exactly what you most wanted, what would it be? **(Don't press, but allow time for each person to answer if possible.)**
3. Jesus responded to the faith of the whole group of friends. What does that say about the value of family and friends and their impact on our faith development? **(We are always influencing those closest to us, either drawing them closer to God or leading them away.)**
4. What does that say about the value of a church family? Could that be the reason why church fellowship is so important? **(Sometimes it's easy to give up on church fellowship and stay home to study on our own. But there is a blessing from being with those who share our faith.)**
5. What does it say about our responsibility to build each other's faith, to share stories of faith and hope? **(You may want to ask this as a general question or ask it specifically to one or more members: Who are we responsible for as friends or family? Who will need us to bring them closer to God?)**
6. Does this story demonstrate the positive value of a positive testimony? **(What other types of communication might have the same value? Books? Sermons? Songs?)**
7. Does unresolved guilt contribute to the stress that makes people ill? What impact has guilt had on your life or the lives of others you know? **(This might be too personal for direct answers, but some in the group may know individuals who suffered directly as a result of guilt.)**
8. When was the last time you asked for a miracle—the miracle of forgiveness? **(Depending on the comfort level within your group, you may want to invite them to kneel and ask for forgiveness silently or aloud.)**

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### Chapter Ten: "Forgiveness With a Towel," Pages 89-95

**For more study: John 13:1-10; The Desire of Ages, chapter 71; Messiah, chapter 71.**

Ask the group, "What's the dirtiest your feet have even been? Covered in mud? Septic tank overflow inside your boots? Boot comes off in a crowded cattle yard after a rain? Wading through sludge after a flood? Then invite the group to imagine the scene of the last supper with the dirty feet. The first two pages of the chapter will help.

#### **Conversation Starters (from page 95):**

1. How is it that the disciples were so slow to understand what Jesus said plainly over and over about his death? **(It didn't fit into their plans for the Messiah. They still wanted a powerful earthy kingdom to smite their enemies. Might we be in danger of missing signs of the end because they fit exactly into our plans and understanding?)**
2. How do you think the disciples felt as Jesus approached their filthy feet with his towel and bowl of water?
3. Jesus said, "If I don't wash you feet, you are not one of my people." What do you think he meant? **(If you don't accept my forgiveness, you aren't a true follower. If you don't hear what I'm saying, you won't be ready for what is going to happen.)**
4. What do you think he meant when he told Peter that only his feet needed to be washed for him to be clean? **(That Jesus had not rejected him in spite of his sins. That he didn't need to be rebaptized, only forgiven.)**
5. What did the disciples signify by allowing Jesus to wash their feet? **(They accepted His forgiveness and rededicated themselves to following Him.)**
6. Could you have stretched out your legs and put your dirty feet in Jesus' hands? **(If you haven't done so, consider reading the section "Can you put your feet in His hands?" from page 92 aloud with the group.)**
7. Why didn't Jesus say, "If your feet get dirty, you are not one of my people"? **(He doesn't reject us when we fall, as long as we get up again. He doesn't sever the relationship when we sin, only if we refuse to let go of that sin.)**
8. How had Judas justified his plan? Was it a good plan, from a human perspective? **(He had all his bases covered. We view Judas as an evil person, but he wasn't so different from us. Self-focused, scheming in the background, always working a situation to benefit himself.)**

**Bonus:** How do you understand the foot washing service today? Does it meet a similar need to the one the disciples had that night? Can it have the same meaning without Jesus' presence?

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### Chapter Eleven: "The Identifying Mark," Pages 97-103

**For more study: John 13:12-35; The Desire of Ages, chapter 71; Messiah, chapter 71.**

We often talk about the mark of the beast as a visible symbol that a person has chosen to follow Satan in the last days. What are the visible signs that we have chosen to follow Jesus today? Clothing style, attitude, helpfulness, caring for others, etc.

#### **Conversation Starters (from page 103):**

1. Just for discussion's sake, if Jesus had been setting up a kingdom, who do you think he would have chosen to be second-in-charge? Why?
2. Of all the things Jesus could have told his disciples that last night, why did he focus on this? **(Because nothing was more important. If they didn't understand this, everything else would fall apart.)**
3. How would we respond to a call to be the servant of our fellow members? Do we struggle with similar issues of pride and love of power? How do those things show themselves in our churches today? **(Arguing over carpet color? Arguing over church offices? Demanding to sit in a certain pew each week?)**
4. What are the identifying marks of a true Christian or Christian church? Which are most critical, most important? **(The love we have for each other. Be sure to review what it isn't on page 100.)**
5. How can you tell if your church is truly following Jesus? How can you tell if you truly have a Christian marriage, home, or school? **(Ask for examples of how your church or school shows that it is truly following Jesus. Ask for examples of how a Christian marriage might be identified. Always speak to each other politely, watch out for each other's needs, care for the other in times of sickness or injury, always speak kindly about the other, etc.)**

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### Chapter Twelve: "The Way," Pages 105-111

**For more study: John 13:36-38 and 14:1-15; The Desire of Ages, chapter 73; Messiah, chapter 73.**

Last words. Ask this question: If you were on your deathbed tonight and only had one more opportunity to speak to your family and friends, what would you tell them? What advice would you give them? What would you want to be certain they heard and understood before you were gone?

### **Conversation Starters (from page 111):**

1. What else might Jesus have taught his disciples if they had been ready to learn? **(This is a wide open question. Encourage speculation. The secrets of the universe? How to walk on water? The prophecies He later gave to John on Patmos? More information about creation and the flood?)**
2. Peter was so sure that he would stand by Jesus to the death. Why did he lose his nerve so quickly? **(Ideas: he was overwhelmed with fear, he was confused by Jesus' arrest, everything happened so quickly, he hadn't thought about standing up for Jesus without Jesus next to him.)**
3. What is the secret to overcoming worry and anxiety? **(Trusting God and His plan to save us.)**
4. What do you think Thomas was really asking with his question, "How can we know the way?" **(I think he was asking for a map, directions to a place, but others may have different thoughts. He wanted to know how to get where Jesus was going to be, how to be with Jesus again. Isn't that what we want?)**
5. What do you think Jesus really meant with his answer? **(He meant that His way was the way to heaven—His example, His life, His death.)**
6. How does Jesus show us "the way"? **(By the way He lived, by the things He taught, by the way He handled temptation.)**
7. Have you ever felt that God the Father was the angry one, while Jesus was the nice one? What made you think that? **(Invite members to share experiences that led to this feeling.)**
8. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands." Is it appropriate to apply that to the commands he gave that night? **(It might also apply to the Ten Commandments and the commandment to love thy neighbor, but it must first apply to His command to "love one another.")**

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### Chapter Thirteen: "Almost Unthinkable Thoughts," Pages 113-120

**For more study: John 15; The Desire of Ages, chapter 73; Messiah, chapter 73.**

Use Conversation Starter #1 to open the meeting. If it is possible to use a video projector, you can find some astounding beautiful images from space to show by going to these web sites: Astronomy Picture of the Day (<http://antwarp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/>), The Best Hubble Telescope Images ([www.space.com](http://www.space.com)), Jet Propulsion Laboratory (<http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/>).

#### **Conversation Starters (from page 120):**

1. Have you ever seen the Milky Way? What is the most awesome sight you have seen in the night sky?
2. How far above us, above our understanding, must God be to have created the universe we see. And yet we argue about what he is like, or what he knows, or what he does, or what his heaven is like. How arrogant are we?! **(This might be a good time to point out that with all we know, we know very little. And we certainly comprehend very little about God's true nature and existence.)**
3. The idea that the Father is in Jesus and Jesus must be in us can be confusing. Does the vine and branches illustration help you understand? Can you explain it? **(Let the group discuss this, but make these points if they aren't otherwise covered: The parable of the vine and branches helps us see that we must stay connected—relationship-wise—with Jesus if we are going to grow. Jesus was able to complete His mission on earth because He stayed connected to His Father at all times. It's a matter of letting what Jesus would do rule our lives.)**
4. Can you think of a time when you experienced pruning? How did it help you grow? **(Pruning would be times of difficulty or pain when we learn to depend more on Jesus. It might include having to give up certain things or relationships that are keeping us from growing in Jesus. Members of the group may have specific experiences they wish to share.)**
5. Imagine what it meant to the disciples to be called "friends" of Jesus. What would it mean to you if Jesus said that to you personally?
6. What does it mean to have free will? How are creatures with free will more valuable than robots that always do the right thing? Wouldn't it have been easier for God to create new companions than to save the ones he made on this earth? **(A good example would be the difference between the idea of a friend or spouse who is programmed to love and obey you without question, and one who chooses to love you. Which would you prefer? One is easier, less trouble, but the other is infinitely more rewarding to be with.)**