

# **STUDY GUIDE**

**TO ACCOMPANY THE BOOK**

# **SEARCHING FOR A GOD TO LOVE**

**by  
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**Designed for use with  
Interactive Small Groups**

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## Searching for a God to Love Study Guide

### LESSON ONE

*Chapter One: Excuse Me, You're Stepping on My God*

**Chapter Thought:** "For many of us. . . God remains inscrutable and distant. Is a grin playing on the lips, a tear moving, a glint of anger flashing? We try to discern the face of the player by the music, but all we know is the back of a bald head" (p. 13).

**Searching Scripture:** "He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him" (Job 9:8-11.NIV).

#### ***I. Connecting***

- a. Can you think of an experience in your life when you were in amazement of something in the world around you? Share this with the group.
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these experiences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a nonverbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:  
During your childhood, what was your perspective on God?
  1. God was a warm, caring being somewhere "out there."
  2. God was like my father, stern, sometimes frightening, caring in a gruff sort of way.
  3. God was distant, uncaring, and probably not involved in my life
  4. God was not part of my thinking
  5. Other. . .

Blake writes of how "God seekers are turned off to religion more than anybody" (p. 18). How do you see religion turning off people to God?

1. The people who are religious are the most rigid people of all.
2. Religions seem to force people to think a certain way and punish those who don't agree.
3. People can't talk about religion without getting into an argument about the details.
4. Religions seem to be focused mostly on getting more people to join rather than improving the world.
5. Other. . .

Blake lists several ways that we "step on God." What are some ways we do this other than those he lists in his book?

1. Insisting on one's own belief system.
2. Choosing only one name for God.
3. Defining God by the extent of scientific knowledge.
4. Creating a particular image of God—such as male or female.
5. Other. . .

How would you answer the question, "Why are we here?"

1. We are currently the highest life form in the evolutionary process.
2. We exist to bring glory to God.
3. We are to tell others about God.
4. We are to enjoy life to the fullest.
5. We are here to help one another and do good.
6. Other. . .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your results.

**Option 1.** Imagine a conversation between a "God-believing atheist" and an "atheistic believer" as defined by Blake (p. 14). Create a short skit illustrating this conversation.

**Option 2.** A robbery has just occurred. Religion has just robbed someone of God. What does the detective's report include as evidence that this crime has occurred? Create some witness's statements as well.

**Option 3.** If God could be described by music, what song list would best describe your understanding of Him? Create a song list from any and all types of music and be prepared to explain why you chose these particular songs.

### ***IV. Valuing***

- a. Blake writes of ways in which God is "stepped on" or that religion has robbed people of God. How have you stepped on God in your life, and/or how has religion robbed you of God? What would you do differently now to no longer step on God? What would you like to see done to restore what religion has robbed from you?
- b. To close, have each person choose one of the descriptions of "religious" people on page 18. Each should then think of someone (including, perhaps, oneself) who fits that description. Do not mention the name aloud. For closing prayer time, form a circle and do two things: (1) Thank God for that person, and (2) ask for the ability and opportunity to address that particular flaw in that person's life in a caring way.

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### **LESSON TWO**

#### *Chapter 2: Stalking the Wild Truth*

**Chapter Thought:** "What difference does it make what we think of God? Quite literally, all the difference in the world. Our view of reality is anchored in our view of God" (p.25).

**Searching Scripture:** " 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 29:13, 14, NIV).

#### ***I. Connecting***

- a. Think of a time as a child when you deeply believed something to be true and later found out it wasn't. How did you feel? How did you feel about yourself? How did you feel about the others involved?
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these differences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a nonverbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions;

If, as the author states, "Whatever we worship becomes God to us" (p. 25), what would that obeisance look like if the object of our worship were:

1. Financial security?
2. An important human relationship?
3. Perfect behavior?
4. Self control?
5. Independence?
6. Other.. .

Ponder the concept, "We would have no counterfeits without the genuine" (p. 26). Which of the following are the earmarks of a genuine God? Which are counterfeit? Why?

1. Clearly spelled-out religious requirements.
2. A tailor-made approach to spiritual healing that takes into consideration our past hurts.
3. A no-nonsense approach to misbehavior with hell as the final end for miscreants.
4. Anger with those who inflict pain on others.
5. A love that never gives up in its effort to circumnavigate our pride and soften our defenses.
6. Other. . .

"If we aren't for real. . . God cannot find us to heal us, to save us. When God appears, we aren't home" (pp. 29, 30). Which of the following are the most effective ways we can "check out" and not be "home" when God comes seeking us? Which are the most difficult to recover from? Why?

1. A drive to work continuously—whether for religious or secular purposes.
2. A habit of engaging in illicit sexual thoughts and actions.
3. The need to do everything perfectly.
4. A constant focus on the needs and wants of family and friends to the exclusion of personal examination.
5. Resentment, bitterness, and unforgiving attitudes.
6. Other. . .

"As long as we are convinced we've never done anything wrong, we can never do anything right. We complain to God that we're uncomfortable, and He turns to us with a sad smile and says, 'Good' " (p. 38). What does this say about guilt and about God? God is like a strict schoolmaster with a ruler in hand; He isn't swayed by seeing us squirm.

1. God knows that no true change happens without pain, although it hurts Him too.
2. Guilt is good as long as it isn't based in shame and fear.
3. Guilt is from God no matter what its form and should be used as a spiritual motivator.
4. Guilt can signal an awakening from denial and the first steps toward relationship with God.
5. Other. . .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight or ten minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** Using plain paper and a box of crayons, draw two trees. Label one tree with the words "God is. . ." and the other with the words "God is not...". On the branches of each tree, draw objects that represent to you what God is and is not in your life. Use as many different colors as you can. Explain your drawing to the group.

**Option 2.** Imagine that a co-worker comes into your office and says, "Tell me about God." Formulate your description of God and His impact on your personal life without using any religious terminology. Present your response to the rest of the group. **Option 3.** Write a free-verse poem that describes how you feel about God's presence (or lack of presence) in your life today. Share your poem with the group.

### ***IV. Valuing***

- a. The author states, "We are lonely for God. Our longing goes beyond knowing about God: we want to know God, to find a companionable friend beyond the noise" (p. 34). What form does your loneliness for God take today? What core mis-beliefs about God may be keeping you from trusting Him? What do you need to do with them?
- b. Place a large, comfortable chair in the middle of the room and leave it empty. Imagine God sitting in the chair. Sit comfortably on the floor around the chair and take turns expressing to Him something you learned about Him in this session that you are thankful for. Tell

Him what you want most in your relationship with Him. Close with the song Amazing Grace.'11

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### LESSON THREE

#### *Chapter 3: Beyond Mother Nature*

**Chapter Thought:** "Any Power that creates nature is by definition supernatural. By noting how nature is so precisely and intricately organized we discern that behind this Power is an intelligence" (p. 51).

**Searching Scripture:** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4, NIV).

#### **I. Connecting**

- a. Think of a situation in your life when you thought something happened by chance, but later discovered that it was actually planned intentionally. Share the experience, including how you made your discovery.
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these differences?

#### **II. Sharing**

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a non-verbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:

Kip McGilliard describes his spiritual awakening while peering through a microscope (p. 46). Which character trait would you say is most necessary for a person to make such a discovery? Why?

1. Honesty.
2. Humility.
3. An open mind.
4. Bravery.
5. A combination of knowledge and wisdom.
6. Other. . .

If we come to know God best through stories, why doesn't God just speak to us directly—even with a big, booming voice from the heavens—and tell us what we need to know? Why bother with all these middlemen (Bible writers) who don't always get their facts straight?

1. We would serve out of fear rather than love.
2. It's good to see the human element involved. Through their testimonies, the Bible writers show us, rather than just tell us, about God's relationship with humanity.

3. Faith helps us develop a depth of character. Such a direct revelation from God would remove the element of faith.
4. God will speak with a big, booming voice someday—but only when the time is right.
5. We would still be skeptical if we heard a booming voice from the heavens; we would come up with some "rational" explanation for it.
6. Other.. .

Why is it easier for some people to believe in UFO's and evolution, rather than the Bible's depiction of a Creator God?

1. We are uncomfortable with anything that we can't explain or understand.
2. We are uncomfortable with anything that we can't control.
3. Evolution burdens us only with the physical laws of nature, not moral laws such as the Ten Commandments.
4. UFO's excite our love for technological fantasy—spaceships. Star Wars, etc. . . .
5. A lot of it depends on what you are raised with—religious or secular education, Bible stories or science fiction.
6. Other. . .

How can you explain the remarkable accuracy of the transmission of the Bible, as evidenced by the comparison of the Dead Sea Scrolls with later manuscripts?

1. Those who copied the Scriptures took their role very seriously and did their best.
2. Copy editors checked their work and discarded manuscripts that contained errors.
3. The Holy Spirit directed the copyists to write each word accurately.
4. The Holy Spirit influenced the copyists to be as accurate as possible.
5. It is the result of a fortunate coincidence.
6. Other.. .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** Find something that is close at hand (in the room, in your pockets, etc.) that you can refashion into something other than its intended use—for example, change a piece of writing paper into an origami figure. Explain to the rest of the group the difference between modifying an existing substance and creating it from nothing.

**Option 2.** A friend, who has always resisted the idea of the existence of a Divine Creator, is diagnosed with a terminal illness. How would you speak to this person about God, the Savior, and the option of eternal life?

**Option 3.** You have the task of organizing a "Creation Symposium" in your community to open a dialogue on the topic of creation ("purpose") versus evolution ("accident"). Where would you conduct these meetings? Whom would you like to make these presentations? How would you advertise it for maximum exposure?



#### ***IV. Valuing***

- a. For the next two to three minutes personally meditate on the following: "Life is godly. Life glows. Life is vibrant, spicy, and liquid" (p. 47). How is this true in your life today? What is the best way for you to worship the God who has given you such life?
- b. Gather the whole group together for prayer. As you pray, let each one thank God for some aspect of creation that is most meaningful to him or her and ask for God's help to share the wonders of creation with someone this week.

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### LESSON FOUR

#### *Chapter Three: Beyond Mother Nature*

**Chapter Thought:** "Prayer is breathing for eternity. Prayer is propping open our hearts to a friend. We search for God, and when we find Him, we are the ones who have won the sweepstakes. God is personal" (p. 83).

**Searching Scripture:** "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:7, 8, NIV).

#### ***I. Connecting***

- a. Who was your best friend in the third grade? In the seventh grade? In high school? Did you have the same best friend, or different best friends, as you progressed through school? Why, or why not?
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these differences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a non-verbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:

God somehow maintains an appropriate sense of humor even though He personally experiences our heartaches in this world. How can you maintain an appropriate sense of humor in the midst of this world of sin?

1. Intentionally look for the humor in life—even to the point of renting old Marx Brothers or Abbott & Costello videos.
2. Try and imagine the humor God sees—just how much did He enjoy creating monkeys, anyway?
3. You have to shut out the pain sometimes.
4. It's okay to acknowledge, or even embrace, the pain in this world, as long as you remember that Jesus is coming again to end all pain and suffering.
5. There may be times when any humor is inappropriate, depending on the situation.
6. Other. . .

What is your personal response to the statement on page 76: "Better to leave theology to the theologians"?

1. Amen!

2. It depends on what aspect of theology is being considered—some things are too deep for the average person.
3. It's better to play it safe since there is nothing more dangerous than wrong theology.
4. Most theologians are too out of touch with the real world to fully trust their conclusions.
5. We are all theologians to some extent, and so we have a right to our own personal ideas about God.
6. Other. . .

Read the Alden Thompson quote on page 79. What does it take for you to "get real" with God?

1. It takes a traumatic experience that shakes me emotionally.
2. It takes a traumatic experience that shakes me spiritually.
3. It takes a realization that it is okay, that God won't strike me dead for saying what's really on my heart.
4. I already get too real with God. I probably need to be more polite.
5. Why should I, since God already knows my heart anyway?
6. Other...

If prayer is like breathing—inhaling and exhaling, see p. 80)—how can we develop proper breathing styles?

1. Just as you have to inhale before you can exhale, you have to read God's Word before you can pour out your problems in prayer.
2. Yes Bible study is important, but you also have to quietly meditate in prayer and let God speak to your heart in the stillness.
3. If you inhale enough—feeding your soul through Bible study and communion with the Spirit—you may never have to exhale. Life will always be good.
4. There will always be problems to deal with, no matter how spiritual you are.
5. We have to make sure that our faith quotient is equal to or greater than our worry quotient.
6. Other. . .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** Draw a set of scales (as in weights and balances). On one side, write every negative emotion you can think of that damages a person's relationship with God.

On the other side, write God's antidote for each negative emotion (example: fear/peace). Can you balance the scales?

**Option 2.** Think of people you know (without mentioning names) who see God as humorless, robotic, and judgmental. Come up with ways of convincing each person otherwise—that God is vibrant, lively, dynamic, and even fun.

**Option 3.** Using the concepts presented in this part of the book, design a prayer meeting that celebrates the personality of God. What Scriptures would you emphasize? What songs would you sing? How would your prayers sound? What other creative activities would you include?

#### ***IV. Valuing***

- a. For the next two to three minutes meditate on the personality of God. What aspect of God's personality do you need the most right now? How can you best reflect God's personality to others?
- b. Gather together the whole group for prayer. As you pray, try to spend equal time "inhaling" (listening to God, either silently or by reciting favorite Bible promises), and "exhaling" (talking to God).

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### LESSON FIVE

#### *Chapter 4: Freedom's Mortgage Payments*

**Chapter Thought:** "In the summer of 1969 humans first walked on the moon, a crowning achievement for our race. But thirty years later we cannot stop poverty and sexual abuse here at home. Nothing has quelled bigotry. All the accurate-to-a-pico-second, CD-ROM- genius of humankind is weaker than the instinct of human selfishness" (p. 87).

**Searching Scripture:** "And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Rev. 12:7-9,NIV).

#### ***I. Connecting***

- a. Have you ever been angry at God? Tell about your experience.
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these differences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a nonverbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:

The Bible says that God sees and knows all that is happening on the earth (see, for example, Psalm 94:7-11). How do you think God deals with all the pain and ugliness He sees?

1. He chooses not to look at it.
2. He comforts Himself by looking at the good things.
3. He cheers Himself up by talking with His good friends.
4. He hurts all the time.
5. He jumps in and fixes things wherever He can.
6. Other.. .

Is Scott Peck right when he says, "The central defect of evil is not the sin but the refusal to acknowledge it" (see p. 89)? Why or why not?

1. No, the real problem with evil is that it hurts.
2. Yes, if you won't admit you've sinned, then the evil can't be fixed.
3. No, the problem is that we don't care for each other properly.
4. No, what is wrong with evil is that it isn't obedient to God.

5. Yes, if you put yourself out of contact with reality, then nothing in life can work properly.
6. Other. . .

What part do you and your group play in the problem of human evil?

1. I'm a Christian so I'm part of the solution now.
2. Every thought and action I engage in works for good or for evil.
3. God is counting on me to combat evil in the world.
4. I can't always tell what is evil and what is good.
5. I wish I knew.
6. Other.. .

The author tells the story of an atheist who admitted that he would rather be free than have a God get rid of suffering by controlling each person's thoughts and words (see pp. 93, 94). Is this really a worthwhile trade? Wouldn't there be some values in life that we could continue to enjoy even without the privilege of freedom?

1. Love?
2. Art?
3. Discovery?
4. Creativity?
5. Friendship?
6. Other. . .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** If God could write your group a letter right now about what you have been discussing, what would He say. Write the letter you think He would write.

**Option 2.** Design a flowchart, of not more than six steps, which graphically demonstrates the origin, challenge, and solution of evil in the world.

**Option 3.** An acquaintance at work lost his son in a car accident last week. He approaches you at lunch and asks, "Why?" Act out the scene.

### ***IV. Valuing***

- a. Can the increased understanding you have gained about the reasons for suffering make a difference for you next time you are going through difficulties? How?
- b. Stand in a circle to pray. Give people the opportunity to tell God briefly of the suffering that troubles them—and thank Him for dealing with it in His own wise way.

## Searching for a God to Love Study Guide

### LESSON SIX

#### *Chapter 5: The World's Greatest Lover*

**Chapter Thought:** "The highest love is loving God. Unless we are in love with God, we are settling for mundane, pallid days. Jesus says, 'I have come so that you may have life, and have it to the full.' He arrived to present the fundamental importance of love, and to expose God as the greatest lover of all" (p. 112).

**Searching Scripture:** "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8,NIV).

#### ***I. Connecting***

- a. Think of a time when you knew you were truly loved by another person. What was the situation? How did it feel? How did you know you were loved?
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these differences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a nonverbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:

Chris Blake refers to the romantic comedy Groundhog Day (see p. 109). If you were the main character, Phil Connors, who was reliving the same day over and over, what would you do to make life fulfilling?

1. Work on my own character traits.
2. Become a counselor to help people sort through their problems.
3. Become a social worker to invest in people's lives.
4. Spend plenty of time getting to know God.
5. Become financially able to make an impact on my community.
6. Other...

According to the author there is a difference between making love and making sex (see p. 112). What are some ways we can "make love" with other people in our lives?

1. We can listen to people.
2. We can spend time with people.
3. We can accept people as they are—no strings attached.
4. We can trust and believe in people.
5. We can forgive people.
6. Other. . .

A real lover is one who takes risks (see p. 116). What risks does God take with us?

1. He offers His Son's life for ours.
2. He forgives us.
3. He trusts us with His reputation.
4. He allows us to serve Him with the gifts He gives us.
5. He loves others through us.
6. Other. . .

Forgiveness seems to be a key to having the ability to love (see p. 123). What hinders us from being able to forgive? How can we overcome these hindrances?

1. I want the other person to pay... I will allow God to keep the record straight.
2. I don't want others to think I'm weak... I will leave my reputation in God's hands.
3. I'm too proud to ask forgiveness... I will ask God for the ability to ask.
4. I'm right... I will let go of the need to be right.
5. I know the other person will do it again. .. I will ask God to allow me to forgive over and over.
6. Other. . .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** Sharing with others about a God who loves us is the whole point of the gospel. How would you tell a relative, who doesn't know about God, that the God you serve is a loving God? What proof would you use?

**Option 2.** Love is a decision. What decisions do we make that indicate our love?

**Option 3.** Love is a feeling. What feelings do we feel that indicate our love?

### ***IV. Valuing***

- a. Ask yourself if you truly believe in a loving God who loves you personally. What proof have you accepted from God to prove His love to you? What proof do you still need?
- b. Share a proof and a need from the previous question with two other people. Join in prayer together, thanking God for the love you have experienced and asking for the love you still need.



## Searching for a God to Love Study Guide

### LESSON SEVEN

#### *Chapter 6: A Path of Astonishment*

**Chapter Thought:** "Jesus. .. knows that, if left to itself, humankind will perish. But the awesome power of sin stuns Him. 'Oh My Father,' He says a third time, 'if possible, let this cup pass from Me.' He pauses, and eternity hangs in the balance... 'Your will be done, Father. Your will be done.'<sup>1</sup> The choice is made. He will save humanity at any cost to Himself"(p. 159).

**Searching Scripture:** "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering" (Isaiah 53:3, NIV).

#### ***I. Connecting***

- a. Think of a time when you lost something or someone very important to you. Share how the experience affected your life.
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these differences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a nonverbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:

Analyze the statement, "Unselfish acts, often unseen, stand highest in God's sight" (p. 152). Which of the following scenarios in Jesus' ministry best teaches the lesson of unselfishness? Why?

1. Cursing the fig tree.
2. The kernel of wheat that falls to the ground and dies.
3. Jesus' tears as He overlooked Jerusalem.
4. Overturning the moneychanger's tables.
5. Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.
6. Other. . .

"Peter could stand up to the point of a sword, but he could not stand up to the point of a finger" (p. 163). What do you think Peter feared most as he faced his accusers at Jesus' trial? Explain your answer.

1. Personal physical danger.
2. The disapproval (rejection) of the crowd.
3. Facing his own shame and fear.
4. Appearing foolish.
5. Abandonment by Jesus.
6. Other. . .

When asked by Herod to perform a miracle for him, "Jesus stands silent, ignoring the request. God doesn't perform for the sake of curiosity; He knows that shallow belief is short-lived. Sensationalism sells tickets, but saves no souls" (p. 167). What methods did Jesus use to reach deep into the hearts of each of the following people, and what were the results?

1. Mary Magdalene.
2. Malchus, the high priest's servant.
3. Peter.
4. Judas.
5. His mother, Mary.
6. Other.. .

"At the center of the solid darkness, the sin-bearer cannot sense His Father's presence. Pinned under humanity's free choice to separate from God, Jesus is experiencing the ultimate separation, the second death, the void of eternal nothingness" (p. 175). Explain how Jesus, in His last weeks of ministry experienced each of the following stages of the grief process:

1. Denial.
2. Anger.
3. Bargaining.
4. Sadness.
5. Acceptance.
6. Other.. .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** Compose a Psalm that chronicles Jesus' experience in the Garden of Gethsemane and how that experience affects your life (see Psalm 38 for ideas). Recite your composition to the group.

**Option 2.** Think of a time when you experienced great loss in your life. Draw a series of simple pictures, using crayons or colored pencils, that show how you felt in each of the stages of healing from that loss (see Question 4 above for the stages of grief). Explain your drawings to the group.

**Option 3.** Create a short skit that depicts Peter, after the resurrection, discussing his betrayal with Jesus. Enact the skit for the rest of the group.

#### ***IV. Valuing***

- a. In what ways are you experiencing the astonishing depths to which Jesus is willing to go in order to reach out and heal your life? In what ways would you like to experience His healing in your life?
- b. Kneel and hold hands in a circle. Choose two people to pray—one to thank God for the specific lessons learned in this session, and one to ask God for the insight to apply the principles of true sacrifice in each person's life. Close by softly singing together, "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus."

## Searching for a God to Love Study Guide

### LESSON EIGHT

#### *Chapter 7: The Worst Lie Ever Told*

**Chapter Thought:** "In my spiritual journey, I reached the conclusion that if God would fry people forever, keeping them alive to saute' without hope or relief, all the while His chosen children enjoy the blissful pleasures of paradise, I'd have nothing to do with that God" (p. 188).

Searching Scripture: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15, NIV).

#### ***I. Connecting***

- a. Think of a time when you were very afraid. Describe that experience.
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these experiences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a nonverbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:

What are the thoughts about death that you grew up with?

1. Death is the end of life as we know it.
2. Death is when you go to heaven or hell.
3. Death is like falling asleep and then later waking up.
4. Death is moving to a different level of consciousness.
5. Other. . .

If God desires "personal, authentic interaction" (p. 192), what question would you ask if you had the chance?

1. Why do children starve to death every day?
2. Why do "evil" people get what they want, while "good" people finish last?
3. What does the future hold for me?
4. Why is it taking so long for You to fix this planet?
5. Other. . .

If fear is only a short-term motivator (see p. 190), what makes for long term motivation?

1. Trust.
2. Respect.
3. Guilt.

4. Love.
5. Sense of duty.
6. Other...

Based on your understanding of God, what is your definition of heaven and hell?

1. Heaven is where God is; hell is where God isn't.
2. Heaven is existing as a spirit out in the cosmos; hell is not a literal place.
3. Heaven is state of higher consciousness; hell is coming back as a lower life form.
4. Heaven is place of eternal bliss and inactivity; hell is place of active torment and constant pain.
5. Other. . .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** Many obituaries are written from the perspective of the deceased being in heaven or "a better place." Write an obituary for one of the following situations from the perspective of death as a sleep:

- a. A child who is killed suddenly in an accident.
- b. A teenager who is killed in a drunk-driving accident.
- c. An elderly man who dies after long disease.

**Option 2.** Assuming that the dead are in heaven watching us on earth (or watching those in hell), create an imaginary diary entry for one day in Paradise.

**Option 3.** The chapter spoke of a woman buried in her casket with a live phone connection (see p. 199). Create a short skit depicting four separate phone calls to this woman based on the following beliefs about life after death:

- a. The dead are beings of higher consciousness.
- b. The dead are in heaven or hell—with full knowledge and communication between one location to the other.
- c. The dead are asleep.
- d. The dead come back as other life forms.

### ***V. Valuing***

- a. How has your concept of God changed after reading this chapter? How would you speak to a relative after a loved one has died? What would you tell your child about a relative who has just died?
- b. If there are group members who are willing share with others their experience with a recent family loss to death, incorporate that experience in the closing prayer with a group prayer specifically for each person who has shared his or her loss. Ask God to strengthen each as they deal with grief.

## Searching for a God to Love Study Guide

### LESSON NINE

*Chapter 8: I Got No Time For God*

**Chapter Thought.** "A direct relationship exists between busyness and spiritual dryness. We have crowded God out of our lives—there's no space left for Him on our 'things to do' list. No energy. No time. No room at the inn. What comes as a startling revelation is that God has anticipated this and made a weekly provision for us, a relief package. Sabbath" (pp. 215, 216).

**Searching Scripture:** " 'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.' The mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 58:13, 14, NIV).

#### ***I Connecting***

- a. Think of what it takes to recharge your life batteries. Name three sure-fire ways that work for you. Consider the different aspects of your life including intellectual, emotional, and spiritual.
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these differences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a nonverbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:

Chris Blake says that in our daily living the important often gets squeezed out by the urgent. That the urgent is seldom important, and the important is rarely urgent (see p. 210). How can we decide the difference between what is urgent and what is important in our lives?

1. What has the most lasting effect?
2. What will be important to me when I'm sixty-five years old?
3. WWJD?
4. What can wait?
5. What will disappear if I forget about it for two weeks?
6. Other. . .

Exodus 31:13 tells us: "You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy" (NIV). According to this verse, what is the purpose of the Sabbath for us today?

1. It is a sign of who is Lord.
2. It is a sign of who isn't Lord.
3. It is a sign of who makes whom holy.
4. It is a sign of who doesn't make anything holy.
5. It is a sign of eternal relationship.
6. Other.. .

Jesus used the Sabbath to set people free (see Mark 2:23-3:6). He told us, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). What principles can we glean from His statement that apply for us today?

1. The Sabbath is a good time to liberate people.
2. The Sabbath is a time to recreate (re-create).
3. The Sabbath is not more important than people.
4. The Sabbath gives us permission to restore life.
5. The Sabbath is a gift, not a regulation.
6. Other.. .

The author shares how he uses the Sabbath to recharge his batteries (see pp. 222-224). How can we use God's gift of the Sabbath to recharge our batteries?

1. We can give ourselves permission to take time to be with God (sitting at Jesus' feet).
2. We can give ourselves permission to stop the rat race for twenty-four hours (importance over urgency).
3. We can discover what service to others "energizes" us and make time for that on the Sabbath (ministry).
4. We can enjoy relationship-building time (family—either personal or extended).
5. We can give ourselves permission to take personal time to be alone (solitude that refreshes).
6. Other.. .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** Your coworker is a high-stress person. She desperately needs a "Sabbath rest" each week. How will you share the concept of Sabbath with her? What lines of discussion will you use?

**Option 2.** The Sabbath is an emotional experience with God. Describe the feelings and emotions that Sabbath creates for you by making simple "faces" on a sheet of paper.

**Option 3.** The Sabbath is a legal requirement from God. Explain logically why that is so.

***IV. Valuing***

- a. Do you find the Sabbath refreshing or exhausting? Why? Explain your answer. What needs to happen in your personal life that will allow the Sabbath to be the spiritually-recharging experience God wants it to be for you?
- b. Share with one other person the changes you need and want to make in order for the Sabbath to be a "delight" in your own experience. Take time to pray together over the changes you have shared.



## Searching for a God to Love Study Guide

### LESSON TEN

#### *Chapter 9: Heaven Is Not My Home*

**Chapter Thought:** "Heaven is really freshman orientation, a spectacular boot camp where we learn the language of God and unlearn much of what we learned on old earth. Our forever home base is new earth (with travel visas that are out of this world), this planet made over without a trace of separation from God" (pp. 241, 242).

**Searching Scripture:** "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Revelation 21:1,2, NIV).

#### ***I. Connecting***

- a. Do you have a wish that you want to realize in heaven? Share your wish with the others in your group.
- b. Analyze each person's experience. How are they similar? How are they different? What can be learned from these differences?

#### ***II. Sharing***

- a. Summarize your primary view on this topic with a nonverbal picture. Either draw a simple sketch or use an object to capture your personal view. Try not to use words.
- b. Thought Questions:

Chris Blake states that although many people expect heaven to be extremely different from this life, "in reality, eternity may be quite familiar" (p. 236). He suggests that eternal life won't be made up simply of harp-playing or of having our greatest desires fulfilled, but of working and playing and even dealing with problems together. How do you feel about this?

1. Sad, because I was looking forward to all kinds of amazing things.
2. Excited, because I can relate to that kind of heaven.
3. Confused, because I hear so many different theories about what heaven will be like.
4. Relieved, because I like a quiet life.
5. Upset, because I don't want to have to deal with any more problems.
6. Other. . .

Consider the statement, "I used to think Jesus was so narrow, precise, and strict that I'd have to limit myself severely enough to please Him. Now I realize Jesus has been limiting Himself for my sake" (p. 243). How do you think Jesus limits Himself for us?

1. By not showing us the whole ugly truth about ourselves at one time.
2. By not taking us straight to heaven today.

3. By making heaven familiar enough so we won't feel totally out of place there.
4. By not showing up on our doorstep.
5. He doesn't.
6. Other.. .

Chris Blake demonstrates that controls are an essential part of freedom. He also suggests that in heaven there won't need to be any laws posted because people there will already know and want to do the right thing (see pp. 245, 246). Will the control in heaven all be inside of the individual?

1. Yes, we will automatically do what is right.
2. No, sometimes we will do what is right just because we know that it is what God wants.
3. Yes, God wouldn't take anyone to heaven that couldn't or wouldn't control himself.
4. No, sometimes we'll need to help each other figure out what is the right thing to do.
5. Yes, we'll understand everything then and want to do what works out for the best.
6. Other. . .

Next to knowing God, what do you look forward to most in the kind of heaven Chris Blake describes?

1. The peace.
2. The challenges my friends and I will work on.
3. Knowing that everything is OK.
4. The surprises I will find there.
5. I'm not at all sure what to look forward to.
6. Other. . .

### ***III. Applying***

Gather in groups of two or three. Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. Then, after eight minutes, report back to your group with your findings.

**Option 1.** If you were given the opportunity to portray heaven through famous creative works, without using any of your own words, what piece of music would you choose? What painting? What photograph, sculpture, or piece of architecture? Make a list.

**Option 2.** Your five-year-old comes home from school positive that she doesn't want to go to heaven because someone told her she would be sitting on a cloud playing a harp forever. What do you do?

**Option 3.** Plan and carry out a way to demonstrate to God (and to your small group) how you feel about heaven.

### ***IV. Valuing***

- a. If you really believe what this chapter has said about heaven, will your life be any different? How?
- b. For a closing prayer, demonstrate your thankfulness to God by joining with the group that did option three (above).