

# THE STORY OF GOD STUDY QUESTIONS: St. John's Richmond

## PART 1: Our God Speaks

### Study 1 - The God Who Creates: [Genesis 1:1-2:3] "Is There a Purpose to Life?"

1. Look at each time the passage says "God" and list the verbs that describe what he is doing. What do they reveal about his personal involvement in creating his world?
2. The passage begins with an earth 'without form and void', and ends with a beautifully formed and full creation.
  - a. How does God accomplish this?
  - b. What forms does he create?
  - c. How does he fill them?
  - d. How will they continue to be filled?
3. What do we learn about ourselves and how we are related to creation and to our Creator? How did humanity's creation differ from the rest? How does this give meaning to life?
4. God not only spoke his creation into being, he created it to "pour forth speech" (Ps. 19:2).
  - a. How does creation speak to us about the Lord?
  - b. How does it testify to his glory?
  - c. As God's people, we are also called to speak. Where in Scripture do we hear words of praise to God as the Creator and Sustainer of the world? (See Psalm 104 as an example).
5. God is still speaking in his Gospel, calling us to be reconciled to himself through his Son. How would you summarize that message? How does it re-create us?
6. God is speaking through his creation but we need more revelation than creation can give us.
  - a. What other ways does he speak?
  - b. How has he spoken to you through his Son? (see Hebrews 1:1-2).
  - c. How might you explain this to someone who feels that God is silent or far away?
7. What in creation calls forth your praise and thanksgiving to God? What do you see of his wisdom, generosity, love of beauty, provision, etc? How can you receive it personally as a gift and give thanks?
8. How do people try to answer the question "why am I here?" How does God's creative act in this passage help you respond?

## Study 2 - The God Who Reveals: [Deuteronomy 4:32-40] "How do we Know God?"

1. What are the Israelites to ask? Why?
2. What did the Israelites see and hear?
3. What are the Israelites to know? For what reason?
4. Verse 32 begins with "For...", pointing us to the verse before. How does what follows connect to what came before?
5. Make a list of all of the references to God as the *actor* in verses 32-40. How is He described? What does he do?
6. Why is God unique, according to these verses?
7. Read Exodus 34:6. What does this tell us about the *character* and *nature* of the God who makes himself known?
8. Read Hebrews 1:1-3. Who is Jesus?
9. Why is the giving of the law a good gift of God's revelation to us? Why can we trust God's word?
10. How has God made Himself known to you personally? What Scriptures have been personally revealing to you about who God is and who you are?
11. How do people you know who don't know Jesus try to "know God" (or know spiritual things in general)? How would you explain to someone how God has made Himself known to you?

### **Study 3 - The God Who Promises: [Jeremiah 31:33-34] "How Can Things be Made Right?"**

1. What did God do for his people in the past? Who was he in relationship to them? Why is there a need for a New Covenant? (see note on the meaning of "covenant")
2. What does God "declare" he will do in this New Covenant?
3. God made a covenant with Israel after he led them out of Egypt, promising to make them his treasured possession if they would obey his voice and keep his covenant. How quickly did they break the covenant? (Exodus 32:1-9). What was missing in their hearts?
4. What does it reveal about God that he makes covenants with his people? What does it reveal about us that we break them? How do God's promises in the New Covenant provide the answer?
5. God promises in the New Covenant that his people will know him, from the least to the greatest. How has that promise been fulfilled in Christ and the gift of the Spirit?
6. God promised to write his Law on the hearts of his people. What does this mean? How has that promise been fulfilled in Christ and the gift of the Spirit?
7. At the last supper Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." What promise(s) of the New Covenant did he fulfill through his death?
8. List each promise God made in the New Covenant. How has He kept them for you? How can you live differently because of what He has done?
9. How would you describe God's love and commitment from this passage? How might you share the Lord who makes and keeps his promises with someone who is feeling the pain of broken promises?

## PART 2: Our God Dwells

### Study 4 - The God Who Becomes: [Luke 2:22-38] "Why did God Become a Human Being?"

1. Make note of the characters and their reactions in this passage. Who are they? How are they alike and different? What are they reacting to?
2. What is being emphasized by Luke's references to "the Law" in verses 22-27?
3. How does the Holy Spirit work in and through Simeon? What is emphasized by the Hebrew origin of the name of Jesus means "God Saves" or "God's salvation" (see Luke 2:21). How is this significant in our passage?
4. When Simeon turns to Mary and Joseph, why is it good news and bad news that God became human and is now in their midst in Jesus? Who is it good news for? Who is it bad news for?
5. Both Simeon and Anna were waiting for something. What were they waiting for? What is the connection between what they were waiting for and Jesus?
6. Colossians 1:15-20 tells us that in Jesus "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." What did Simeon and Anna recognize about Jesus, through the Holy Spirit? Who is Jesus?
7. Augustine is quoted as saying, "Christ is hidden in the Old, revealed in the New." Simeon's blessing is full of references to the Old Testament (Isaiah 52:10, Psalm 98:2, Isaiah 49:6, Isaiah 46:13). How does the incarnation - God coming to dwell with them - point to God's plan of salvation?
8. Read Simeon's words to Mary. How does the reality of who Jesus is - fully God, fully human, come to dwell with us - give us hope? How does it serve as a warning? What thoughts from your heart are revealed to you by this passage?
9. What does the world around you think about Jesus? Only a great teacher and good example to follow? Merely human? How could you use this passage to tell someone about the nature of Jesus, God with us?

## Study 5 - The God Who Saves: [Hebrew 10:1-18] "How is My Guilt Paid For?"

1. What is the problem described in verses 1-4? What is "impossible" and why?
2. In verses 11-14, how is the role of Jesus described? What is it contrasted with?
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in verses 15-18?
4. Verse 5 begins with "Consequently." How do verses 5-10 explain verses 1-4? Note how the author unpacks this in verses 8-10.
5. The word "atonement" is a way, in English, of describing the Hebrew word to "cover" or "purge" in order to reconcile ("make one"). Where do you see this idea described in this passage? How is it accomplished and what is the result?
6. What does our passage tell us about why Jesus died? Why is this the only "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation [thing presented to God], and satisfaction," as it says in one of the prayers in the Holy Communion liturgy?
7. Verse 10 says, "we have been sanctified" (see study note for "sanctified"). Verse 14 refers to "those who are being sanctified." How is our sanctification already accomplished and yet ongoing?
8. What does our culture think "sin" or "guilt" is?
  - a. What remedies are pursued to deal with sin/guilt/shame?
  - b. Are these temporary or permanent?
  - c. Using this passage, how would you answer the question: "What do Christians believe about guilt and what has God done about it?"
9. Verses 16 and 17 tell us that God will put his law on our hearts and write them on our minds. He also promises to remember our sins no more. How is God inviting you to open your heart and mind to Him? What comfort do you take that, through Christ's atoning sacrifice, your sins will be remembered no more?

## Study 6 - The God Who Fills: [John 14:15-31] "Is It Up To Me Alone?"

1. How does Jesus refer to the Holy Spirit? What does he say the Spirit will do?
2. Where do you see the unity of the Father, Son and Spirit? How are we included in that unity?
3. The disciples are full of sorrow because Jesus has told them he is leaving. How will they not be left as orphans? What assurances of his presence does he give them in these verses?
4. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the "Spirit of Truth" and says he will "teach you all things." Why does Jesus place so much value on this work of the Spirit? (see notes on 14:17)
5. Jesus gives a new commandment, "love one another even as I have loved you." (John 14:15) What does he promise to do if we love him and keep his commands and word? How would you describe this mutuality of love?
6. Later in this conversation Jesus says "He (the Spirit) will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:14) What does glorify mean? How does this transform our minds and hearts?
7. Jesus says that both the Spirit and the disciples will "testify about Me." (John 16:8) How do we see this happening at Pentecost in Acts 2? In the world?
8. The Holy Spirit brings us into close communion with Jesus. How does he also bring us into close communion with the Father? (see Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6)
9. Jesus promised he would not leave us "orphans." Are there ways you live like an orphan? How does faith in these assurances from Jesus make a difference?
10. What part does the Holy Spirit have in our study of the Word?
11. Reflect on the nearness of Jesus to you through the Holy Spirit. How might you describe to someone what it is like to know this nearness of God?

## PART 3: Our God Reigns

### Study 7 - The God Who Builds: [Ephesians 4:1-16] "Why Should I Be Part of a Church?"

1. What is the "calling" to which Christians have been called? Look at chapters 1-3 for clues.
2. What are all the things that Paul includes as part of walking in a manner worthy of this calling?
3. Why does Paul use the image of a "body" to describe the church?
4. Paul describes the virtues or character traits (vv.2-3) that should shape the way we relate to one another in the church before he describes the ministers or ministries (vv.7-16) of the church. Why? What does this tell us about what it means to be a member of the body of Christ?
5. Who is the source of the church's unity? What is God's role? What is our role?
6. What is the picture of maturity that we are given in verse 13?
  - a. How do we grow into this?
  - b. Why does our culture long for unity and diversity yet struggle to achieve it?
  - c. How would you explain to a non-Christian friend or neighbour how God's vision for unity and diversity within the church is good news for them?
7. The church is meant to hold together what our culture so often tears apart: truth and love. In what contexts or relationships in the church is God giving you opportunities to build others up by "speaking the truth in love"?

**Study 8 - The God Who Sends: [Ephesians 3:1-13] "How Should we Live as Disciples?"**

1. To whom has the gospel of Christ been revealed?
  - a. With whom is the gospel of Christ to be shared?
2. Paul names two privileges or "graces" that were given to him by God (vv. 2, 7). What are they? How are they connected?
3. How is his eternal purpose made known?
  - a. To whom?
  - b. Through whom?
4. How is Paul equipped for the ministry of stewarding the gospel?
5. What is Paul's unique role in the mission of the church?
6. What are some of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (v. 8) that you have received? (Glance over chapters 1-2 for review). With whom is God commissioning you to share these riches?
7. How does this expand your thinking about the centrality of the church of the gospel message and mission? Spend time discussing and praying over your own attitudes to the church in the light of this passage.

**Study 9 - The God Who Re-creates: [Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5] "Where Can we Find Hope?"**

1. What does John see? What is there? What does he tell us is not there?
2. Who tells him to "behold"? What is he told to do?
3. What does the declaration "It is done" mean?
4. What do we learn about the reign of God in the new heavens and the new earth? What is the significance of the two images used to describe this new reality?
5. What is the central role of Christ in this vision?
6. In this study we have seen God act and heard him speak throughout the story of Scripture. How do we see everything he's said and done brought to a glorious fulfillment in this vision of the future?
  - a. His creation in Genesis
  - b. His revelation in Deuteronomy
  - c. His covenant promise in Jeremiah
  - d. His incarnation in Luke
  - e. His sacrifice in Hebrews
  - f. His gift of the Spirit in John
  - g. His building up of the church in Ephesians
  - h. His gospel call to the nations in Ephesians
7. How has this vision changed your perspective or lifted your heart? How does having this hope make a difference in how you live?
8. We live in a culture with very little hope. How would you summarize the hope you have as a Christian believer to a friend who is not?