

question or set of questions that you find more helpful in generating discussion around the topic at hand. You may also find that asking the questions in a different order works better. If any of these are the case, please use whatever is more comfortable for you, as long as it covers the same material. The questions we have written are simply a guide. We do have one request: if you write new/different questions, please send them to us at [questions@focusonline.org](mailto:questions@focusonline.org). We are always revising our materials, and would love your feedback. Who knows: you may help us make our study better, and as a result, touch a soul for all eternity through your suggestion.

- You may also find that there is too much material to cover during one week. This is where experience is helpful. As time goes by, you will be better able to determine how much material to cover, what to skip, and what to add that isn't in the leader guide. You will also learn which tangents are helpful, and which ones take you off course. Remember, the point of the Bible study is three-fold:
  - 1) To help the participants make a decision to follow (or continue following) Jesus Christ while learning more about their faith.
  - 2) To help the participants develop Christ-centered friendships with the other participants in the study.
  - 3) To enable participants to be more equipped to share their faith with others.

Since these goals are important, you don't want to ignore any of them. That is, you don't want to simply speed through all the material so that you can successfully complete the Bible study in exactly five weeks. At the same time, you don't want to go off on tangents or discuss unrelated material so often that you don't ever progress through the material. We have designed the chapters so that, on average, a typical Bible study can complete the material, while having meaningful conversation on it, in the span of one hour. However, you may find that you need more or less, depending on the composition of your group.



## Chapter 1

### Who Are We and Where Are We Going?

*Say: Let's put first things first: Christianity is above all a relationship. This study aims to help each member of the group accept Jesus Christ's gift of Himself, to enter into a deeper relationship with Him and His Church, and to become disciples in the world.*

#### First Questions

- 1 Explain the following in your own words: Before we jump into the text, it is helpful to contrast a common modern misconception of God with the Biblical view of God. For example, while most of the founders of the United States were Christians, some were "deists." Deists believe in a God who created the universe, but not in a God who is interested or involved in the personal lives of His creation. They believe God is like a watchmaker: just as a watch maker creates a watch and winds it up so that it will run by itself, so too does a "watchmaker" God create the world, wind it up, and let it go without any other involvement. Let's contrast this with the historic Judeo-Christian understanding of God.

#### Welcome

*Foundations for Life* is one of FOCUS' introductory Scripture studies. In these chapters, we're going to seek the answers to some important questions about God, the Bible, and human relationships. Some of the material may sound very familiar, or all of it might be completely new to you. We hope that your sincere participation in this study — regardless of your starting point or background — helps you to examine the truth-claims of Scripture and grow in your ability to share them with others.

The small group setting is a great opportunity for growth. To follow the discussion effectively, you'll need this book, a Bible (your group-leader can recommend a translation if you don't have one), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), and a notebook and pen. As you and your group work through the questions, think of this as a team sport: everyone has a part to play in achieving the goal. Your questions might never have occurred to the others in the group, or theirs to you — so never be afraid to ask questions and discuss your thoughts.

#### First Questions

We all know that some questions have greater consequences than others.

As an exercise, rank the following in order of importance (1 as least important, 4 as most important):

- What should my major be?
- What's my favorite color?
- What should I have for breakfast tomorrow?
- What's the purpose of life?

The way we answer certain questions can change everything. Quite obviously, the answer to "What's my favorite color?" doesn't have as great an impact on the way we think and act as does the answer to "What's the purpose of life?"

These are the fundamental questions we want to begin to answer in this study:

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- Can I know God?

The Bible claims to provide us with the all-important answers. Let's take a look...

3

#### 1 Who is God?

4

## Who Is God?

- 2** Ask: Let's look at the section "Who is God?" Could someone please read 1 John 4:16?

If this is the first time the study has looked up passages in the Bible, it is helpful to explain to the students how to find the various passages (e.g., "The first letter of John is in the New Testament, near the end of the Bible. It is after the book of Hebrews and the epistles of James and Peter.")

After reading 1 John 4:16,

Ask: We've all heard this before: that "God is love." Let's examine what this means a bit more deeply. What are some characteristics of love?

While there may be many answers, we are primarily going after love as a decision — that is, love is a choice to will the good of the other. Feelings come and go, but love always wills the good of the beloved, whether one feels like it or not.

Ask: Do you see God as having these characteristics? Why or why not?

Allow the conversation to continue for as long as productive. We are simply getting a sense for how people perceive God.

Ask: Could someone please read Jeremiah 29:11?

After reading Jeremiah 29:11,

Ask: How do the passages from Jeremiah and 1 John show us that our God is not a distant, disinterested, detached Creator who abandoned us after He made us?

God is not a cold, impersonal, spiritual force, that is, a "watchmaker" God. In fact, God is a loving father, and He created us in His image and likeness. And, God has a plan for each one of us, a plan of hope!

Ask: How might the modern, "deist" conception of God affect the way we live our lives? That is, in what ways do you think you live as if God is not interested in your life?

**Who is God?**

**2** Read 1 John 4:16 and Jeremiah 29:11

How do you understand the statement "God is love?"

What is the connection between God's love for you and His plan for you?

**4**

The leader may give a personal example in order to jumpstart the conversation (e.g., I only pray to God when I need help passing an exam.)

Ask: In contrast to the "deist" mentality, how might the reality of a God who cares for us personally change the way we live our everyday lives?

- 3** Say: Let's read 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, the word "inspired" literally means "God-breathed." That is, the scriptures are "God's word," which is why we can trust them with helping to achieve God's plan for our lives. As a leader, read Catechism paragraphs 104-107 to better understand the teaching of the Church with regard to the Holy Scriptures.

Ask: According to this passage, what is the role of Scripture in helping to achieve God's plan for your life.

## Who am I?

- 4** Ask: Now that we see what kind of God the scriptures present, where do we fit in? Knowing who we are should help us know where we are going. Can someone please read Genesis 1:26?

After reading the passage,  
Ask: How would you define what it means to be made in God's image and likeness?

There are multiple layers in this question, and in its answer. Let's go after three of them:

**3** Read 2 Timothy 3:15-17

What is the role of Scripture in helping to achieve God's plan for your life?

**Who am I?**

Growing in self-knowledge is a lifelong journey. To begin to understand where we're going (or where we should go) and why, we need to understand ourselves better. And to do that, it is helpful to explore our origins.

**4**

**4** Read Genesis 1:26

In light of our answers to "Who is God?", how does this passage help us answer the question "Who am I?"

These questions — "Who is God?" and "Who am I?" — have haunted the heart of man from time immemorial. The answers are revealed through the two basic themes played out in the Scriptures: God's love and His plan for humanity.

If we are indeed created in God's image and likeness, how do I experience God's love or know His plan for me?

**5**

One — “Image and likeness” means we are created “like” god. That is, like God, we have been created with an intellect (the ability to reason) and a will (the ability to choose, and not just follow our instincts or our passions). It is in this sense that people often think of when they consider this passage. It is more of a philosophical approach.

Two — The second part of this answer can be found in exploring the text of Genesis 1 a bit more. God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” Who is God speaking to here? Who else is with God? This is the first hint at the Blessed Trinity — God (Father/Son/Holy Spirit), a community of persons, speaks. Thus, the use of the plural.

Here you can briefly explain the Trinity: The Father gives Himself completely in love to the Son; the Son gives Himself completely in love back to the Father; the love between them is so real that it is a person — the Holy Spirit. In paragraph 221, the CCC explains that “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.”

Three — A third level of meaning can be determined by examining another passage in Genesis. One of the rules of biblical interpretation says that words should be interpreted based upon repetition. That is, we can better understand what “image and likeness” means by looking at other places where it is used. The very next place where “image and likeness” is used is in Genesis 5:3. Have the group read that passage, and explain that, according to the author of Genesis, “image and likeness” means “sonship.” Seth is made in the “image and likeness” of his father, Adam. In the same way, then, if we are in the “image and likeness” of God, then we must be God’s children.

*Ask: If God is love and we are created in His image and likeness, what does this mean for us?*

Not only are we meant to share in God’s eternal exchange of love, we are also made to give and receive love. We are made to live as His children. The truth that God created us to live as His children is the major theme of this entire Bible study.

**5** *Ask: How do you experience God’s love or know His plan for your life?*

This question asks for some serious introspection, so don’t be surprised if you’re met with silence. In fact, sitting in silence for 20-30 seconds is perfectly acceptable—let the participants feel the weight of the question, and attempt an answer if they are so inclined. You may add to the end of the question, “Or do you at all (experience God’s love or know His plan for your life)?” Here we hope to get the group to begin thinking about Our Lord’s specific plan for each of them, and to realize, as we begin the next section, that they’ve inherited a very real brokenness.

### The Fall

**6** *Ask: Let’s look at the story of the Fall. Would someone please read Genesis 3:1-15?*

After reading the passage,  
*Ask: How does the serpent tempt Adam and Eve?*

The serpent lies to Adam and Eve and tells them that if they eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (the one God commanded them to not eat of), then that their “eyes would be opened, and you will be like God.” The devil tempts Adam and Eve to distrust the laws that God had given them, and to desire to become like God. They were tempted, in essence, to want to be God. The irony is that there were already made in the perfect image and likeness of God.

*Tell:* The “Oil vs. Honey” story.

There once was a man pulled over on the side of the road with the hood of his car raised. Another man pulled over to offer some assistance. “Do you need any help?” he asked. The man with the car trouble said, “Well, I was just trying to decide whether I should put this jar of oil or this jar of honey into my engine.”

**5** If we are indeed created in God’s image and likeness, how do I experience God’s love or know His plan for me?

#### The Fall

When God created Adam and Eve, our first parents, they were in right relationship with Him and with each other. This state of “rightness” is called “original holiness and justice” (CCC 404). God made us inherently good, and Adam and Eve’s original state of holiness was meant for all of His children since we all are part of one family. But just like an instruction manual is for the good of a car, God also gave a command to Adam and Eve for their own good—so that they could be truly happy and free. It was not an arbitrary law to restrict them, or a rule to make their lives boring; it was a blueprint for their happiness if they chose to obey. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve did not follow God’s command.

5

**6** **Read Genesis 3:1-15**  
How does the serpent tempt Adam and Eve?

6

“Certainly you want to put oil in your car, don’t you?” The man answered, “A lot of people have told me that.” “Well, sir, you don’t have to listen to me. Just read the owner’s manual. It will tell you to put oil in your car!” The man responded angrily by saying, “But this is my car and I don’t want other people telling me what do to with it. I’m the boss, and I can do whatever I want with my own car!” So, exerting his independence, he proceeded to put the honey into his car’s engine. (Story by Dr. Charles Rice, University of Notre Dame Law professor.)

After telling the “Oil vs. Honey” story,

*Ask: Why didn’t the man want to follow the owner’s manual?*

The man is right. He is his own boss. He has the “freedom” to do whatever he wants with his own car. This man is also now a pedestrian. Just like the owner’s manual is there to help the owner get the most out of his car, so God’s commandments are there to help us get the most out of our lives: they are the blueprint for our happiness. We have to know how we work. Who knows this best, but the One who made us — just like the maker of the car knew what would make it function the best.

**7** *Ask: What are the consequences of Adam and Eve’s disobedience?*

Students will likely point to the narrative: Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden, death entered the world, etc. The Church understands the Fall as a breakdown of the original harmony of creation.

**7** What are the consequences of Adam and Eve’s disobedience?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 397, says the following:

*Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in His goodness.*

**6**

When God created Adam and Eve, our first parents, they were in right relationship with Him and with each other. This is called “original holiness and justice.” God made us inherently good, and this original state of holiness was meant for all of His children since we all are part of one family.

However, sin ruptures the original harmony with God such that man is now at odd with himself, others, nature, and God. We are now a broken family, in a broken world, and death has become a reality for all people. Since Adam and Eve’s disobedience, original sin has deprived all of humanity of unity with God. We too are born with original sin, and every man and woman inherits this fallen

state, called “concupiscence,” which inclines us toward evil. As a result of Adam and Eve’s sin, we all now have: a darkened intellect, a weakened will, and disordered passions (For more information, see CCC 37, 400-401).

**8** *Ask: What is the cause of Adam and Eve’s disobedience?*

Read CCC 397. The pride of Adam and Eve led them to distrust God’s plan for their lives, and they immediately became skeptical of their Father and viewed His laws as tyrannical, unfair, and arbitrary. But, just like an instruction manual is for the good of a car, God also gave a command to Adam and Eve for their own good — so that they might be truly happy and free. It was not an arbitrary law to restrict them, or a rule to make their lives boring, but a blueprint for their happiness, if they chose to obey.

**8** What is the cause of Adam and Eve’s disobedience?

Genesis Chapter 3 provides us with a narrative account for the entrance of pain and suffering into the human drama. Because of the Fall, the world is not as it should be, and neither are we. We see this made abundantly clear on every news channel, every day: murder, rape, theft, disease, and crises of all kinds abound. However, the Good News is that while death and destruction color much of the human story, they do not have the final word.

**6**

*Ask: How does original sin affect you today? Do you mistrust God, specifically His laws or His plan for your life?*

**9** *Ask: Could someone please re-read Genesis 3:14-15?*

Even in the midst of describing the consequences of sin, God still makes a promise of salvation. This passage is known as the “Proto-Evangelium,” or “First Gospel.” It is here that God first promises to save humanity from the works of the devil. By promising that the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, God promises that sin and the devil will ultimately be defeated. The rest of this study will explore that promise in more detail.

The question is, how ought we to respond to the brokenness in ourselves and in the world? The answer to this question shapes the meaning and purpose of our lives.

**9** **Re-read Genesis 3:14-15**

Look up the word “enmity” in a dictionary. With the definition in mind, what does it mean to put enmity between the woman’s offspring and the devil?

Can you think of a practical example of how this “enmity” reveals itself in our lives today?

**7**

**10** Review the Action Point:

Ask if students have been able to read a chapter of John each day. If not, invite them to do so this upcoming week.

**10****Action Point**

Begin reading the Gospel of John, one chapter per day. Each chapter should take no more than five minutes to read.

**7**

## Chapter 2

### He Will Not Abandon Us

**The Father's Mercy**

**1** Introduce this chapter by using this introduction found in the Student Guide.

*Ask: Could someone please read Luke 15:11-32?*

*Ask: Why do you think the son leaves home in the first place?*

*Ask: Why did he decide to return?*

He remembered the love of his father. He recognized his own sins and that he was in a bad situation.

*Ask: How does the Father receive his son who left and returned home with nothing but shame? Why does he receive him in this way?*

The Father is watching for the son, waiting for his return. And, he not only goes out to meet his son upon his arrival, but the father runs to meet his son and welcome him home! The Father is thrilled to have his son back home.

**1**

In the last chapter we saw how the initial harmony of creation was broken by our failure to trust in God's plan. The rejection of God's will is what the Scriptures call "sin" (see James 4:17 for a straightforward definition). We also briefly discussed the first human sin, the origin of the brokenness we experience in the world and ourselves (thus, the term "original sin").

One of Jesus' most popular parables gives us deeper insight into the effects of sin on our relationships.

**The Father's Mercy****Read Luke 15:11-32**

You might see some of yourself in the rebellious son who removed himself from the father's house. On the other hand, you may identify more with the older son who remained home. Whether you've openly rejected God's love and feel far from Him or you've always followed "the rules," this parable is intended to introduce us to the heart of God.

What does the father want for each of his sons?

**9**