

A person stands on a dark, grassy hill, their silhouette clearly visible against a bright, glowing sun in a deep blue sky. The sun is positioned at the top center, creating a starburst effect with rays of light. The person's hands are on their hips, and they are looking directly at the sun. The horizon line is visible in the distance, separating the land from a body of water or a distant shore. The overall mood is one of contemplation and freedom.

# FREEDOM FIGHTER

Study Guide

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This study guide was created to help individuals and groups explore in more depth and detail the concepts presented in *Freedom Fighter: How God Wins the Universal War on Terror*. This book, available from Elathia Press, chronicles the stunning attributes of God's character of love, revealing him to be the kind of person who will endure great personal pain and suffering at the hands of his own creatures.

The concepts outlined in *Freedom Fighter* explain how God is totally committed to our freedom: how he created us with it and how he has been fighting to preserve it in the midst of a war that's been raging in his universe. Through this book and study guide, you will meet, perhaps for the very first time, the Great Freedom Fighter whose never-ending love travels far beyond your wildest expectations.

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*The truth will set you free!*

# The universal war on terror

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## *Crisis in God's creation*

1. Reflect on the quote found on page 3: "Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live." **How does fear affect your life?**

2. Read the following Bible verses. **What does each verse say about who our fight/struggle is with?**

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Eph 6:12

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. 1 Pet 5:8

Therefore, rejoice, O heavens! And you who live in the heavens, rejoice! But terror will come on the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great anger, knowing that he has little time. Rev 12:12

3. **How would your expectations about everyday life change if you lived in a literal war zone?**

**Should living in a spiritual war zone also change your expectations? Which ones?**

4. Reflect on the quote found on page 5: "Sin is a rebellious attitude." **How do you normally think of sin? As an attitude or as a behavior?**

1 John 3:4 says, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." Notice this says "everyone who sins breaks the law," **not** "everyone who breaks the law sins." According to John, the sin comes before the law-breaking, because sin is the *attitude* which leads to the law-breaking. **In light of this, would you say Eve sinned because she ate the fruit, or did she eat the fruit because she had sinned?**

**Had she already made a decision in her mind that resulted in a wrong behavior?**

**Is a blind, deaf, mute quadriplegic capable of sinning?**

Which part of sin's equation—the attitude or the behavior—do you think God is most interested in fixing?

5. Reflect on the quote found on page 6: “Adam and Eve’s choice to distrust God *immediately* led to fear.” Who were they afraid of? God? Each other?

Why were Adam and Eve afraid of God? Based on the objective data in the story, did they have any rational reason to fear him?

1 John 4:18 says, “Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.” Does this provide a clue as to why they were afraid?

Adam and Eve had really bought into Satan’s lie, hadn’t they? God never said he was going to punish them if they disobeyed, but that’s what they thought nonetheless. Is there any part of you that fears “God’s punishment”?

Aren’t there many Christian leaders who teach that God will punish us for our sins? According to 1 John 4:18, wouldn’t that be contrary to God’s love, since punishment promotes fear?

Does God have to impose punishment on the wicked for their sin, or does sin carry its own intrinsic punishment?

# Star wars

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## *The beginning of the war*

1. What is the relationship between trust and fear? Are they mutually exclusive? Can you trust someone if you're afraid of them?

2. In the story of Job, God allowed Satan to do whatever he wanted to Job in order to test his loyalty. **Satan didn't *have* to destroy Job, did he? How else could he have tried to lure Job away from God?**

**Why did he choose the path of destruction, and what does this tell us about Satan?**

3. How often do you try to take matters into your own hands instead of relying on God for answers to your predicaments? What's the problem with that?

Isaiah 14:12-14 says, "How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, 'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.'" And Genesis 3:4 says, "'You won't die!' the serpent replied to the woman." **What goal of Lucifer's in heaven did he also use to tempt Eve at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?**

From the beginning, Lucifer desired *autonomy*. That is, he wanted to be equal with God. He wanted to be a god, not a creature. God tried to combat this desire for autonomy in his people by positioning his sanctuary in the midst of the Israelite people. He promised to live with them and asked them to bring their problems (sin) to him instead of trying to deal with it on their own. **What if Eve had gone to ask God about what the serpent had told her at the tree? Or what if Adam had gone to ask God what should be done after Eve ate the fruit? How might human history have been different?**

**In what ways do you strive for autonomy in your life?**

**How is autonomy (the state of existing or acting separately from others) different from having the freedom to choose?**

# Battlefield Earth

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## *The war continues*

1. After they sinned, Adam and Eve hid from God. **What do the following verses indicate about humanity's ongoing fear of him?**

"When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.'" Ex 20:18-19

"Elihu said, 'I wouldn't ask to speak to God. I wouldn't give him a chance to kill me!'" Job 37:20

2. According to the Exodus passage above, *we* are the ones who have asked to have someone in between us and God because we were afraid of him. Some even say that Jesus now fulfills that role as our mediator, "pleading with" God in our behalf.

In John 16:26-27, Jesus said, "Then you will ask in my name. I'm not saying I will ask the Father on your behalf, for the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God."  
**What did Jesus say about his willingness to plead with the Father for you?**

**What did he say about the Father's attitude toward you?**

3. **Did the way Jesus came to Earth (as a baby) alleviate fear? How?**

# If you've seen one, you've seen 'em all

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## *God's oneness*

1. What is your “picture” of the Father like? Would you be scared to run into him in heaven if Jesus wasn't with you?

2. After reading John 16:26-27, it's clear that Jesus is not “pleading” with the Father for us. Yet Scripture calls him our “advocate.” **If Jesus isn't pleading with the Father, who is he pleading with?**

Consider these verses that speak of God as a comforter, or advocate:

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—**Jesus Christ**, the Righteous One.” 1 Jn 2:1

“But the Comforter, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things. And he will cause you to recall everything I have told you.” Jn 14:26

“Praise be to the God and **Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...” 2 Cor 1:3-4

The words translated *comforter* and *advocate* in these verses share the same Greek root word. This means that not only is Jesus our advocate, but the Father and the Spirit are *also* our advocates. **Who are the Father, Son, and Spirit pleading with?**

**What are they pleading for?**

**What does the common perception of Jesus as a mediator (pleading with the Father to forgive and accept us) imply about God's oneness?**

3. **Is it significant that the nature of God is relational and communal instead of solitary and isolated?**

**What are the implications of that?**

**If love is defined as being others-centered, can it be said that “God is love” because of his very nature in the Trinity?**



# Life preserver

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## *God's immortality*

1. The opposite of *immortality* is *mortality*, which means “the state of being subject to death.” But death may be a more complex subject than it appears at first glance.

Matthew 10:28 says, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of what can destroy both soul and body in hell.” In this verse, Jesus describes **two** different kinds of death.

The first one kills the \_\_\_\_\_ *but not* the \_\_\_\_\_ .

The second destroys *both* the \_\_\_\_\_ *and* the \_\_\_\_\_ .

2. This was not the only time Jesus spoke of death in different ways. He seemed to be trying to introduce a new way of thinking about death. In John 11:1-15, Jesus had an interesting exchange about death with his disciples:

A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, “Lord, your dear friend is very sick.”

But when Jesus heard about it he said, “Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this.” So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days. Finally, he said to his disciples, “Let's go back to Judea... Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up.”

The disciples said, “Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!” They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died. So he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him.”

**How did Jesus say Lazarus' sickness would end?**

**Why would Jesus first say Lazarus had “fallen asleep” instead of saying that he was “dead”?**

Matthew 9:18-19, 23-24 is the story of another person Jesus raised from the dead: “As Jesus was saying this, the leader of a synagogue came and knelt before him. ‘My daughter has just died,’ he said, ‘but you can bring her back to life again if you just come and lay your hand on her.’”



So Jesus and his disciples got up and went with him... When Jesus arrived at the official's home, he saw the noisy crowd and heard the funeral music. 'Get out!' he told them. 'The girl isn't dead; she's only asleep.' But the crowd laughed at him." **What did the synagogue leader say about his daughter when he met Jesus?**

**But what did Jesus say about the girl when he arrived at the house?**

3. Right before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he had this exchange about life and death with Lazarus' sister, Martha: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me **will live, even though they die**; and whoever lives by believing in me **will never die**. Do you believe this?'" Jn 11:25  
-26

**Are these two statements contradictory, or is Jesus again alluding to two different types of "death"?**

**Which of these deaths described Lazarus?**

**Did he live believing in Jesus, and if so, did he die?**

4. After Jesus spoke of our earthly death as "sleep," the Bible writers embraced that concept and carried it forward. Consider the description of Stephen's execution in Acts 7:59-60. "While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep."

**Doesn't that seem like an odd way to describe what happens to someone who is stoned?**

**In light of what Jesus said about Lazarus, however, does it seem so odd?**

**According to the principle set forth by Jesus in John 11:26, if Stephen "fell asleep" believing in Jesus, did he actually die?**

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who have **fallen asleep**, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus **died** and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have **fallen asleep** in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have **fallen asleep**. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

Notice how Paul himself distinguishes between the “death” of believers and the death of Jesus. He refers to the believers as those who have “fallen asleep,” but he says that “Jesus died.” This isn’t just a matter of poetic translation. Paul actually used two separate Greek words—one meaning “to sleep” (*koimao*) and one meaning “to die” (*apothnesko*).

**Does Paul seem to have embraced the concept of two different kinds of death in this passage?**

**If so, does he also seem to indicate that what Jesus experienced on the cross was not the same type of death we experience when we “fall asleep”?**

**What might be the implications of that?**

5. Compare these two Old Testament passages related to death:

“And the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever. So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.’” Gn 3:22-24

“Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!” Ezek 18:30-32

**In the Genesis passage, why does it say God did not want man to eat from the tree of life any longer?**

**What would be the obvious result of keeping him from the tree?**

**In the Ezekiel passage, what is God asking his people to avoid?**

**Would it make sense for God to ask his people to avoid the very thing he had imposed upon them by keeping humanity from eating from the tree of life?**

**Is it possible that these passages are speaking of two different deaths, just as Jesus outlined in Matthew 10:28?**

**If so, which death do you think is described in the Genesis passage?**

Which do you think is described in the Ezekiel passage?

6. Genesis 2:16-17 says, “But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.” **Which death do you think God was warning Adam about in this passage?**

# Reality show

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## *God's honesty*

1. "A lie has speed, but truth has endurance." Reflect on this quotation. **What does it mean?**

**Could this be why the universe-wide war, which began so easily and spread so quickly, has continued for so long?**

**What does this suggest about why sin will never arise again in the future?**

2. Reflect on this quote from page 33: "God allowed [Satan] access to the garden, but not unlimited access. He couldn't follow Adam and Eve around, pestering them with endless temptation. God confined him to the tree and warned Adam and Eve not to go near it." **How does this demonstrate God's fairness, even to his enemies?**

**Do you wish he had restricted Satan's freedom a little bit more?**

**Do you wish God had banned Satan from Earth? Or maybe banned him from having rebellious thoughts in the first place?**

**What would be the implications of that?**

3. Reflect on this quote from page 35: "Satan claimed that God was afraid of losing his control over the universe. To avoid that, Satan said, God would stoop to any means necessary to secure his position." **Do you sometimes believe that God doesn't do what's best for you or that he doesn't have your best interests at heart?**

**Do you sometimes believe that you know better than God how to deal with problems in your life?**

4. **What did the cross reveal about God's character?**

Luke 23:34 says, “Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.’ And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.” **What did Jesus do to those who were torturing him?**

Luke 23:42-43 says, “Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.’ And Jesus replied, ‘I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.’” **What did Jesus promise to the thief?**

**What did he require from the thief in exchange for this consideration?**

Matthew 27:46 says, “At about three o’clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, *‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’* which means ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’” **What does this indicate about God’s involvement in the death of the wicked?**

**In other words, what was the Father doing to Christ on the cross?**

**Did the cross (and the events leading up to it) reveal that there is anything you can do to God to make him retaliate against you?**

5. Consider the following verses about the events leading up to the cross:

He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Mt 26:38

He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. Lk 22:44.

**What do you think was happening to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane?**

**Why was he already at the point of death before anyone had even laid a hand on him?**

**Which of the two deaths Jesus described in Matthew 10:28 do you think he was starting to experience in the Garden?**

# Higher power

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## *God's omnipotence*

1. “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” Reflect on this quotation. **Do you agree? If so, might some of Jesus’ fiercest temptations been outside of his wilderness encounter with Satan?**

**Do you think Jesus might have been tempted to use his power for something outside of God’s plan and purpose for his life?**

2. Consider these verses from Psalm 33 quoted in this chapter: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”

Everything God created in this world was spoken, or commanded, into existence—with the exception of human beings. When God created Adam and Eve, he didn’t use a command. Instead, he used his hands. **What might this suggest about God’s unwillingness to “command” us?**

**Though he can make nature bow to his will, what is his desire for his intelligent creatures?**

3. Revelation 3:20 says, ““Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” **What does this verse suggest about God’s respect for your freedom?**

**Is it more natural for you to picture God as domineering or submissive?**

4. Reflect on this famous quote: “Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” **Do you think this applies to God? Why or why not?**

**When it comes to your relationship with God, does he *have* absolute power?**

**In order to grant you the freedom to accept or reject him, did he have to relinquish his omnipotence?**

# Heads or tails

## *God's humility*

1. "True humility is contentment." Reflect on this quotation. **Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

2. In the passage from Philippians on page 51, verse 6 is often translated, "Who, *though he was God*, didn't consider equality with God something to be taken advantage of..." However, the Greek word translated *though* would more accurately be translated *precisely because*.

It is not *in spite of being God* that Jesus humbled himself, but *because he is God* that he humbled himself. **How does this affect your understanding of God's humility?**

**Do you think God is humble all the time or only in the person of Jesus as an incarnate human being?**

3. **If being a servant is in God's nature, in what ways did Jesus serve others? How did he serve his disciples? The Pharisees? The people who were treated as outcasts in his society? His enemies?**

4. In Ephesians 5:21-6:9, Paul gives instructions to three sets of people: "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ... For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord... For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church... Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do... Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ... Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don't threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites."

Here, Paul addresses husbands and \_\_\_\_\_, parents and \_\_\_\_\_, masters and \_\_\_\_\_.

**In each case, Paul first addresses which party in the relationship—the party that would be considered *more* or *less* powerful?**

**Why do you think Paul chose to do that?**



In each case, if the “less powerful” party followed Paul’s instructions, what would be the result in the relationship?

What effect would this have on both parties?

5. When you act toward another person with humility and submission, are you exercising power or displaying weakness?

6. In what ways (if any) does God submit himself to us?

In what ways (if any) does God not submit himself to us?

# O holy knight

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## *God's holiness*

1. God is in a set-apart category all his own. **We will never be *the* Creator, as he is, but in what ways *can* we be holy?**

**In what ways can we be set apart? Set apart from what?**

Paul talked about being set apart in Romans 12:2. “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” **What was Paul suggesting we be “set apart” from in this verse? How is this accomplished?**

**How did Jesus embody this?**

2. C.S. Lewis once said, “Those who are members of [the body of Christ] become as diverse as the hand and the ear. That is why worldlings are so monotonously alike compared with the almost fantastic variety of the saints. Obedience is the road to freedom, humility the road to pleasure, unity the road to personality.” **How does being “a part of” the body of Christ help “set us apart” from each other in terms of individuality?**

**How can unity be expressed in such diverse personality?**

3. **Does God himself express unity in diversity? How?**

# The Deity is in the details

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## *God's orderliness*

1. Reflect on this quote from page 59: “Contrary to the belief that ‘taking’ is bad, every participant in the cycle has to take something. The key, though, is that the taking is for the purpose of giving.” **Often, we focus more attention on “giving” than “taking,” but is it possible that to be at either extreme isn’t healthy?**

2. Do you know any “takers”—people who will take whatever they can get without ever giving in return? What are they like?

What problems can arise because of their constant taking?

On the other hand, do you know any “givers”—people who give and give and give without ever taking in return? What are they like?

What problems (if any) can arise because of their constant giving?

Is it easy to have a relationship with a person operating at either extreme? Why or why not?

3. Reflect on this quote from page 60: “We can’t refuse to take because we think taking is selfish.” **Is taking without giving in return a selfish act?**

**Is giving without taking in return a selfish act? Why or why not?**

4. Consider the following Bible passages. **What does each of these passages say about giving *and* taking?**

While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the Lord said to him, “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the Lord every seventh year. For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the Lord’s Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year. And don’t store away the crops

that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of complete rest. But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own during its Sabbath... If you want to live securely in the land, follow my decrees and obey my regulations. Then the land will yield large crops, and you will eat your fill and live securely in it. But you might ask, 'What will we eat during the seventh year, since we are not allowed to plant or harvest crops that year?' Be assured that I will send my blessing for you in the sixth year, so the land will produce a crop large enough for three years. When you plant your fields in the eighth year, you will still be eating from the large crop of the sixth year. In fact, you will still be eating from that large crop when the new crop is harvested in the ninth year." Lev 25:1-6, 18-22

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!" Mal 3:10

"Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back." Lk 6:38

# What's love got to do with it?

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## *God's love*

1. Reflect on this quote from page 65: "Trying to decide whether we 'merit' [God's] love completely misses the point." **Do you agree?**

**Do your children "merit" your love? Why or why not? Do you find that to be a strange or silly question?**

**How would it make you feel if your child came to you and said, "I know I'm worthless, but I'm so grateful you love me anyway. I know I don't deserve it."**

2. Jesus once said, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Mt 7:11) **Why do we think God's love for us is unlike the love we have for our own children?**

3. Reflect on this C.S. Lewis quote from *The Problem of Pain*: "There is kindness in Love: but Love and kindness are not coterminous... Kindness, merely as such, cares not whether its object becomes good or bad, provided only that it escapes suffering... It is for people whom we care nothing about that we demand happiness on any terms: with our friends, our lovers, our children, we are exacting and would rather see them suffer much than be happy in contemptible and estranging modes. If God is love, he is, by definition, something more than mere kindness. And it appears, from all the records, that though he has often rebuked us and condemned us, he has never regarded us with contempt."

**What does this suggest about the relationship between love and suffering?**

**If God allows us to suffer, does it mean he doesn't love us?**

**Could the removal of suffering, in some cases, actually be an unloving act?**

4. How does the Bible describe God's love? Consider these two passages:

"Better think this one through from the beginning. **God is kind, but he's not soft.** In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand **and leads us into a radical life-change.**" Rom 2:4

“He said, ‘I am the Lord, the Lord. I am a God who is tender and kind. I am gracious. I am slow to get angry. I am faithful and full of love. I continue to show my love to thousands of people. I forgive those who do evil. I forgive those who refuse to obey. And I forgive those who sin. But I do not let guilty people go without visiting the consequences of their sin upon them, their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.’ Ex 34:6-7

**Why does God’s love involve discipline (sometimes called “punishment”)?**

**Is the purpose of this discipline for change or retribution or something else? Can discipline feel like suffering?**

**Is there a point at which discipline is no longer necessary or effective? What then?**

# Man's best friend

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## *God's friendship*

1. In John 15:15, Jesus said he preferred to call us friends and not slaves. But in Romans 6:16-18, Paul wrote, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, **you are slaves of the one you obey**—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. **You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.**”

**In light of what Jesus said, what do you think this passage from Paul means?**

**What does it mean to be a “slave” to righteousness?**

**Is being a “friend” of Jesus and a “slave” to righteousness the same thing? Why or why not?**

2. Reflect on this quote from page 73: “Engaging in friendship with us is more important to God than displaying his superiority.” **Do you agree with this statement?**

**If so, why do you think God values our friendship so highly?**

**In your mind, is God’s superiority diminished by his willingness to be friends with us?**

3. Think back to the story of Jonah. The Ninevites worshiped the fish god, Dagon. It’s interesting to note, then, that Jonah arrived in Nineveh having just come up out of a *fish*, and it would seem that God used the Ninevites’ erroneous belief to help them “hear” his message. **Why would God allow the Ninevites to think that Jonah was from another god at first?**

**What does that say about relationship being God’s highest priority?**

Jonah wasn’t happy that God forgave the Ninevites, and he lashed out at God for being so forgiving. **Are you as honest with God as Jonah was?**



Do you share our deepest anger and frustration with God—even anger you may feel about what *he* is like? Or do you feel like you need to “sanitize” your thoughts and feelings before you share them with him?

4. Reflect on this quote from page 76: “This is salvation. It isn’t a legal transaction. It’s a friendship.” **How would restoring our relationship with God fix what went wrong in the beginning?**

# Giving it all he's got

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## *God's giving*

1. Reflect on this quote from page 79: "For a God who notices when a sparrow falls to the ground, no need of ours is too small to escape his attention." **Do you trust God to meet all your needs?**

**Do you know what your true needs are?**

**What do you do when you think God is not giving you what you need?**

2. Reflect on this quote from page 80: "By designing the sacrificial system, God was saying to the Israelites, 'I'm not mad at you. Please bring your problems to me. I want to take care of them.' By doing this, the Israelites were able to internalize God's forgiveness and acceptance." Ever since sin entered our world, we've had a big problem. **Is our problem with God?**

**Has our problem ever been with God?**

Think back to the story of the Prodigal Son. **Did the prodigal's problem lie with his father?**

**What was his problem?**

**3. If our problem is not with God, what is our problem?**

Consider the following Bible verses:

Don't be afraid of those who can kill your body, but not your soul. Fear what can destroy both soul and body in hell. Mt 10:28

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 6:23

**What do these verses say about what our problem is? Where does God fit into that?**

4. Reflect on this quote from page 82: “[God] wants to give us more than we can imagine! This doesn’t mean God will give us everything we ask for.” **Why would God want you to ask him for things he will not give you?**

5. In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus said, “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” **How is God’s perfection described in this passage?**

**Why does God give to people who either reject him or refuse to acknowledge him as Lord?**

**Does God always return good for evil? Does he ever do evil?**

# Show business

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## *God's truth-in-advertising*

1. Satan charged that God is vengeful, which means “seeking to harm someone in return for a perceived injury.” **Is that true? If God seeks to harm the wicked because of what they have done to him, could he be the same God Jesus was talking about in Matthew 5:43-48?**

**Does God have to add anything to the consequences of sin to “get back” at the wicked, or are the consequences of sin terrible enough?**

**If sin is truly deadly, does God have to destroy it?**

2. Satan charged that God is selfish, which means being “concerned chiefly with one’s own personal profit or pleasure.” **Is that true? If God were selfish, would he have given us the freedom to choose?**

**How can our freedom encroach on his personal profit or pleasure?**

3. For centuries, it looked like it was actually God who caused death because he banned humanity from the tree of life. But John 11:11 says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up.’” **How did Jesus refer to the “death” God imposed on humanity?**

4. The cross was designed to keep a person right at the point of death for many days until they got so tired they could no longer push themselves up with their legs in order to breathe. Then they would suffocate. This was the significance of breaking the legs of the thieves crucified next to Jesus—so they would die more quickly. But, “when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.” (John 19:33) Jesus didn’t die from being crucified. He had already come to the point of death in the Garden of Gethsemane. **How do you think Jesus’ death was different from the “sleep” we normally call death?**

**Does anything Jesus said before the cross or during his time on the cross give any clues to what his death was all about?**

5. In Colossians 1:19-20, Paul said Christ's death even reconciled heavenly things to God: "For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross." **What heavenly things would need to be reconciled and why?**

**How did Jesus' death accomplish that?**

# God must be odd, 'cuz he never “gets even”

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## *God's forgiveness*

1. “Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit.” Reflect on this quote. **In your mind, how does this relate to God?**

**Could you describe him as “endless forgiveness”?**

2. Reflect on this quote from page 95: “When we embrace sin, we are overcome with guilt and shame, and we immediately become afraid of God.” But 1 John 4:18 says, “Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.” **How does God's perfect love cast out our fear?**

**Did Jesus demonstrate perfect love in his life and, especially, in the events leading up to his death?**

**Did he ever indicate that you should be afraid of God?**

3. One of the greatest stories of forgiveness is in the exchange Jesus had with Peter after his resurrection. Remember, the last time the two of them had locked eyes was after Peter betrayed Jesus three times. Read the following *Genesis Road* blog on John 21 to get a glimpse behind the scenes:

Author Colin Quек once said that “love is just a word until someone comes along and gives it meaning.” Haven't you found that to be the case? We use the word *love* in a surprising number of ways in our culture. We say we love our children, but we also say we love pizza. The “love” in both of those statements means something different! Love is just a word until someone comes along and gives it meaning.

That's also what's going on in this chapter of John. You see, in the English language, the exchange that Jesus had with Peter about “love” looks pretty boring and repetitive. Jesus sounds a little bit like a broken record, asking Peter over and over if he loves Him. But it all looks a little different as soon as someone comes along and gives the word *love* a meaning.

There are two Greek words for “love” at play in this dialogue. The first is *phileo*—a word that indicates a mutual exchange of affection which is based on the characters of the two people involved in the relationship. The second word is *agape*—a word most often used in the New Testament to express God's love for man. This type of love is *not* based on the character of the person who is being loved, but on the person doing the loving.

Agape love chooses to love *in spite of* the other person involved, not *because of* them. That's why John 3:16 says "For God so *agaped* the world that He gave . . ." God's giving is based on *who He is*, not *who we are*.

So now, if we read Jesus' dialogue with Peter using the Greek words for "love," all of a sudden, we see a little drama taking place. This is the first time since His death and resurrection that Jesus has addressed Peter personally, and the *first thing* He says to him is, "Peter, do you *agape* me?" (vs 15) In other words, Jesus is saying, "Peter do you love me more than anything else in this world, in this life? Would you totally sacrifice yourself for me? Would you lay down your life for me?"

Now, consider the position Peter is in. He's been through a lot in the space of a few weeks. From the very beginning, Peter was a bold, brash, cocky disciple who frequently let his mouth run ahead of his better judgment. And it was that self-confidence and boldness that had led him to declare that he was ready to die with Jesus. "Even though all may fall away because of You, *I will never fall away*," he said (Matt 26:33). And it wasn't long before he found out just how wrong he was.

And now, he's face to face with the friend he ended up *denying* instead of *dying with*. So, when Jesus asks him point-blank if he loves Him more than anything else in the world . . . Peter is not about to boldly declare anything any longer. He knows better. And that's why Peter responds by saying, "Yes, Lord, you know that I *phileo* you."

Men, imagine getting down on one knee and proposing to the girl of your dreams. And she says, "Awww, you're so sweet. It's so nice to be your friend." Jesus asks Peter if he's ready to "go all the way," and Peter says, "Well, Lord, you know I like you an awful lot."

So, Jesus asks Peter again: "Peter, do you *agape* me?" (vs 16) And Peter says, "Yes, Lord, you know that I *phileo* you." Peter knows that *agape* love is all about the character of the one who is *doing the loving*, and he just can't bring himself to say something he's not sure of. Say what you want about Peter, but you have to admire his honesty here.

And then, Jesus does something wonderful. The third time he asks Peter the question, He says, "Peter, do you *phileo* me?" (vs 17) That's why it says that Peter was grieved that the Lord asked him the third time. He wasn't sad about being asked a third time. He was sad about *what Jesus asked* the third time. He was sorry that Jesus lowered the standard, that He "gave in" and came to him.

But what a *wonderful* statement about the love of God! God is not limited by *our* limitations! He doesn't wait for us to attain some level of loyalty or love for Him in order to build a relationship with us. On the contrary, He is always pursuing us, always coming after us, even when it means He must "come down to our level," so to speak. If Peter is unable to meet Him on the level of *agape*, Jesus is ready to start with *phileo*.

**How did Jesus' exchange with Peter assure Peter that he was forgiven?**

**If Jesus so easily forgave Peter for betraying him in his time of need, is there anything you can do that God won't forgive you for?**

**How does the realization that God will stoop to meet you wherever you are make you think differently about yourself?**

**How does it make you think differently about others?**



# Look who's stalking

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## *God's initiation*

### 1. In what ways has God pursued you in your life?

2. Read the following story from Luke 19: Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

**Do you think Jesus was actively pursuing Zacchaeus, or was inviting himself over for dinner just an impulse when he saw Zacchaeus in the tree?**

3. Exodus 7:1-5 says, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Pay close attention to this. I will make you seem like God to Pharaoh, and your brother, Aaron, will be your prophet. Tell Aaron everything I command you, and Aaron must command Pharaoh to let the people of Israel leave his country. But I will make Pharaoh's heart stubborn so I can multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. Even then Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you. So I will bring down my fist on Egypt. Then I will rescue my forces—my people, the Israelites—from the land of Egypt with great acts of judgment. When I raise my powerful hand and bring out the Israelites, the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.'" **Although we often think of the plagues on Egypt as God's punishment, what motive did God reveal in this passage?**

**Did the plagues accomplish this goal? How?**

4. Matthew 5:23-24 says, “So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.” **In this example given by Jesus, who has committed the offense and who is initiating the reconciliation?**

**How is this similar to your relationship with God?**

**What does this suggest about why God continues to initiate a relationship with you?**

5. Reflect on the quote from Psalm 139 found on page 103: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

**How should this reality affect your daily life?**

**How can it affect loneliness or the times you think you are acting in secret?**

**Are you ever really alone?**

# Heaven can wait

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## *God's patience*

1. “Patience is not passive, but active; it is concentrated strength.” Reflect on this quote. **Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

**Is it harder to exercise patience instead of reacting impulsively?**

2. Reflect on this quote from page 107: “Instead of expecting us to conform ourselves to him, [God] customizes his approach to us based on our responses.” Think about how Jesus approached the Pharisees, the woman caught in adultery, and Pontius Pilate. **Why do you think he interacted with each one as he did?**

**Were his motives for each interaction the same or different?**

**Were his hopes for the outcome of each interaction the same or different?**

3. Reflect on this quote from page 108: “As we continue in our relationship with God, we can also expect to undergo a process of emerging maturity in our faith.”

Abraham (whose story spans many chapters in Genesis) is a great example of this relational process. **In what ways did Abraham change as a result of his ongoing relationship with God?**

The disciples also experienced a close personal relationship with God in the person of Jesus. **In what ways did they change as a result of that relationship?**

**What was the difference in the case of Judas?**

**Why do you think Jesus continued his personal relationship with Judas, knowing what he would do?**

**Who “left” the relationship—Jesus or Judas? If we are determined to “stay” with Jesus, will he ever leave *us*?**

4. What changes can you identify in your faith life when you look back over the last 5 years? 10 years? 25 years?

5. What particular areas in your life have required God's patience?

Has his patience ever run out?

# On guard

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## *God's protectiveness*

1. Reflect on this quote from page 113: “God didn’t give us the law so we’d have a list of rules to keep. He gave us the law so we could practice love.” It has been said that feelings follow behavior. **What implications might that have for how you view the law?**

Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.” **Given at the end of Moses’ summary of the law, what does this indicate about God’s ultimate desire for you?**

**Is it possible to “keep the law” without loving God? Is it possible to love God without “keeping the law”?**

2. Reflect on this quote from page 114: “God protected us from the foolish idea of autonomy by subjecting us to the first death.” **Is “going to sleep” in the first death a blessing or a curse?**

**How might you view it as a curse? How might you view it as a blessing? Which do you think God intended it to be?**

Genesis 3:22 says, “Then the Lord God said, “Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!” **What would it be like to live forever in this sinful world?**

**How long would you want to live among other sinners?**

**Is there any benefit in having to face the reality that you can’t sustain your own life?**

**What, if any, blessings come from realizing that you have little control over how and when you “go to sleep” in the first death?**

3. Reflect on this quote from page 117: “It is so easy to forget that everything we have—every breath we take—is a gift from [God].” The Sabbath is an affront to our take-charge, look-out-for-number-one culture. It’s a reminder that Someone Else is looking out for us, and—whether we acknowledge it or not—we are dependent on him.

Exodus 16:11-30 tells how the Israelites were dependent on God while they were wandering in the wilderness:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “I have heard the Israelites’ complaints. Now tell them, ‘In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will have all the bread you want. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”

That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew. When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground. The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. “What is it?” they asked each other. They had no idea what it was.

And Moses told them, “It is the food the Lord has given you to eat. These are the Lord’s instructions: Each household should gather as much as it needs. Pick up two quarts for each person in your tent.”

So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little. But when they measured it out, everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed.

Then Moses told them, “Do not keep any of it until morning.” But some of them didn’t listen and kept some of it until morning. But by then it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell. Moses was very angry with them.

After this the people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual—four quarts for each person instead of two. Then all the leaders of the community came and asked Moses for an explanation. He told them, “This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day set apart for the Lord. So bake or boil as much as you want today, and set aside what is left for tomorrow.”

So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor. Moses said, “Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the Lord. There will be no food on the ground today. You may gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath. There will be no food on the ground that day.”

Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food. The Lord asked Moses, “How long will these people refuse to obey my commands and instructions? They must realize that the Sabbath is the Lord’s gift to you. That is why he gives you a two-day supply on the sixth day, so there will be enough for two days. On the Sabbath day you must each stay in your place. Do not go out to pick up food on the seventh day.” So the people did not gather any food on the seventh day.

**How did his provisions teach them to rely daily on him?**

**How did they exercise trust in God differently on Sabbath as opposed to the other six days?**

4. Reflect on this quote from page 120: “Allowing the consequences of sin to be openly demonstrated is how God protects us from ultimate self-destruction. When we feel the suffering that comes as a result of sin, and when we see the effects of sin in the world, we are able to seek clearly that God tells the truth about the nature of sin.” **If it were possible, would you remove all the suffering in the world? For yourself? For your children? For everyone?**

As you think about the answers to those questions, consider this story about pain, adapted from the original which appeared in *Reader's Digest* some time ago:

Many years ago, there was a little boy in India who was born with a condition that caused his nerve endings to be disconnected from his brain. In simple terms, the boy could not experience physical pain. That sounds marvelous, doesn't it? To never have one ounce of physical pain? To never endure a backache or a headache or that intense pain that comes when you stub your toe in just the right way. Certainly, we'd love to rid ourselves (and our kids) of those painful nuisances.

But the absence of physical pain in the boy's life didn't work out so nicely for him. At just about a year old, when he was beginning to walk, he discovered the clay oven in the kitchen and, before his mother knew what was happening, he had put his hands into the fire, and they were severely burned. They were only just able to be saved with skin grafts.

Any normal child would probably never have touched the oven in the first place—feeling its heat long before getting so close, but if they had, they would have jerked away immediately because they would have experienced pain. But the little boy never felt a thing.

A couple of years later, after playing outside one day, the little boy came in and collapsed in the doorway of the hut. And when his mother picked him up, she noticed that his foot was badly cut and he was losing a lot of blood quickly. Once again, his life was able to be saved by a transfusion, but, you see, because of his condition, the boy's body could not say to his brain, “You've been hurt! Get help! You need attention quickly.”

So how about wanting to remove pain from your child's life? Now we're thinking twice. In the normal course of our lives, we need physical pain. It's dangerous not to have it! It alerts us to the fact that something is wrong.

And in the case of the little boy in India, not being able to feel pain actually crippled him—and ended up killing him. When he was just eight years old, his mother went to check on him one morning and found him dead in his bed. An autopsy revealed that he had died of a ruptured appendix. Had his body worked properly, he would have been in extreme pain, and that would have likely led to a life-saving procedure.

**After reading this story, are you glad your children can feel pain? Would you want to remove their ability to do so?**

**In the spiritual realm, could this also be the reason God allows suffering?**

**If being able to feel pain right now keeps you from an untimely (first) death, what might keep you from the death that is the ultimate consequence of sin?**



# Frequently asked questions

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## *God's self-assurance*

### 1. Do you think Jesus was secure in who he was and what his mission was?

In John 10:17-18, Jesus said, "The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded." **What effect did this assurance have on Jesus when he battled with the agony of his emotions in the Garden of Gethsemane?**

**How did Jesus triumph when his feelings of anguish were so intense?**

2. God spoke very confidently about his friend Job: "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.'" Job 1:8 **Was God correct in his assessment of Job?**

**What does this tell you about God's ability to read your heart?**

**Does this encourage or discourage you?**

3. Romans 8:28 says "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Through Paul, God declared that he is able to work all (yes, that's *all*) things together for our *good*. **In a world with so much tragedy, suffering, and awfulness, how much self-assurance does it require to declare that *everything* can be worked together for good instead of evil?**

**Do you believe God can fulfill this promise? Why or why not?**

# Unconditional surrender

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## *God's wrath*

1. “Who would believe divine wrath involves surrender?” Reflect on this question. **Have you ever before heard God's wrath associated with surrender?**

**How is God's wrath usually described?**

2. Reflect on this quote from page 129: “In the process of striving for total independence, sin leaves God's intelligent creatures incapable of making free choices—it totally enslaves its followers to selfishness and death.” **How does this differ from the common idea that sin means freely doing whatever we want?**

Romans 6:15-18 says, “So, since we're out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want? Since we're free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind? Hardly. You know well enough from your own experience that there are **some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom**. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it's your **last free act**. But offer yourselves to the ways of God and **the freedom never quits**. All your lives you've let sin tell you what to do. But thank God you've started listening to a new master, one whose commands set you free to live openly in *his* freedom!”

**What would this suggest about Satan's ability to choose a different path?**

**Could he repent if he wanted to?**

**If he was capable of repenting, do you think God would welcome him back into heaven?**

3. Reflect on this quote from page 130: “We have to *really work* at being lost. We have to constantly turn God away—again and again and again.” **How did Pharaoh turn God away time and time again?**

**How about the Pharisees and religious leaders in Jesus' day?**

“Then Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron. “This time I have sinned,” he confessed.  
“The Lord is the righteous one, and my people and I are wrong.” Ex 9:27

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” Jn 3:1-2.

**What do these verses suggest about the rejection of God by Pharaoh and the Pharisees? Were they deceived?**

4. Reflect on this quote from page 132: “Though it’s agony for him to let go, [God] treats even his wicked children with dignity and respect. He won’t ignore their freedom in order to shield himself from suffering.”

To bury a child is the worst suffering a parent can imagine. But in this life, at least we have the hope of a resurrection, and we can know that even if we bury all our children, we’ll see them again. **Is God a parent who loves his children?**

**Does he love his wicked children any less than his righteous children?**

**If God must relinquish his children to the death caused by sin, does he have hope of ever seeing them again?**

**What does it say about God’s commitment to our freedom that he would endure the agony of a parent who loses a child forever in order to respect the choices we make?**

## Keeping our options open

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### *God's commitment to freedom*

1. "The love of liberty is the love of others." Reflect on this quotation. **Do you agree? Why or why not?**
2. Study the diagram on page 134. **Would you place the terms in a different order? Are there any terms you would add or delete?**
3. Reflect on this quote from page 136: "Without love, there would be no life." **Do you agree with this statement?**

**Is this true even for God? If he didn't exist in an others-centered community of three persons, would life still be possible? If so, how might it be different?**

4. Reflect on this quote from page 137: "Ultimately, the God who is all-powerful grants *us* the power to make the most important choice in life: will we live or will we die?"

Because of Jesus' death, we know that God doesn't execute those who reject him. We know that he treats all his children—righteous *and* wicked—with love, respect, and dignity. **How does knowing this truth about him keep the universe secure?**

**If God destroyed those who didn't love him, how would this severely curtail our freedom?**

# Happily ever after

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## *The end of the war*

1. Reflect on this quote from page 139: “Though the war is not yet over, it has already been won. God has won it by being himself.”

Revelation 12:10-11 says, “Then I heard a great voice in Heaven cry: ‘Now the salvation and the power and kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ have come! For the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down from this place, where he stood before our God accusing them day and night. Now they have conquered him **through the blood of the Lamb, and through the Word** to which they bore witness.’”

**How does the revelation of the truth about God win the war?**

**In light of what God has done in the course of this war, would you say he is more interested in (a) making sure everyone is “saved” or (b) making sure everyone is free to choose whether or not to be “saved”?**

**What’s the difference between those two?**

2. Reflect on this quote from page 139: “Now and for all eternity, we have *nothing to fear* from him who is love and life and freedom!”

Consider the following verses:

Some time later, the Lord spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, “Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great.” Gn 15:1

“It is all right,” the Lord replied. “Do not be afraid. You will not die.”  
Jdg 6:23

“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God!” Lk 1:30

“But the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.” Lk 2:10

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.” Jn 14:27

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, “Don’t be afraid! I am the First and the Last.” Rev 1:17

**What central message of the Bible is contained in these verses?**

**Do you believe this message?**