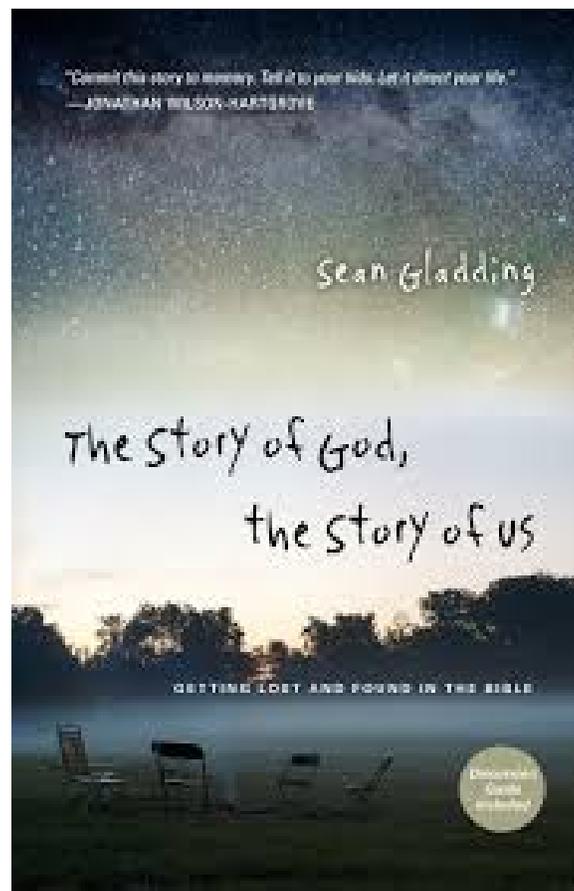


Study Guide for Group Discussion
to Sean Gladding's
The Story of God, The Story of Us

Written by Michele Arndt




IVP Books
An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

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InterVarsity Press

P.O. Box 1400

Downers Grove, IL 60515

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The Story of God, Story of Us – by Sean Gladding
A Study Guide

Welcome to *"The Story of God, The Story of Us"* This study guide has been created to help you connect the narrative from the story, one chapter at a time, to the entire bible cover to cover. It will be best used if the chapter to be discussed is read in conjunction with the scripture passages which correspond. We will work through this study guide together in our discussion time but it will help if you have read over the discussion questions ahead of time and jotted any notes you have. There is also a supplementary chart in the back for you to organize some key themes that will be repeated throughout the story. These themes will help us see how the Old Testament and New Testament point to one another as one perfect whole. I pray this stirs fresh joy and curiosity for you in reading God's Word!

Introduction (before Chapter 1)

What are your feelings/experiences toward reading the bible? How would you complete the following sentences?

"When I think about reading the bible, I _____."

"The first word that comes to mind when I think about the bible is _____."

What IS the bible? When was it written? What are some basic facts you know about the bible?

~ How would you feel if someone picked up a biography about you and read just a few pages and then used it to form the basis of their understanding about you/your life?~

Scripture is the greatest and most complex Love Story humanity has ever known. Have you ever thought of it this way? Why do we read it?

Write your own class goal/desire... (i.e. – "I hope to gain a better understanding of the whole of scripture" or "I desire to better understand God's character as it is seen in the Old Testament")



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Chapter 1 - Creation

Identify the main pieces of the story so far: who are the main characters? What is the setting/timeframe?

What is the 'song' they are singing? When was it written?

The people are confused about where they are/what has happened to them – why?

What does the word “exile” mean? What is the significance of it?

~How do we experience exile today? How does this help us relate to the people in this story?~

Compare/contrast God’s use of the words “forget” and “remember” in the Old Testament– using www.biblegateway.com or some other bible search app, look up these words and note what you find about how they are used in scripture

What phrase is repeated in the telling of the story of creation on p. 22 from Genesis 1? Why is this significant?

If God speaks, what can we conclude given what we see in Genesis 1?

~Do you believe God SPEAKS into your life and causes things to happen?~

Is the biblical account of creation the only creation story found in history?

What do we see about God’s character in how He creates? What do we see about the Trinity?



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How do Genesis 1 and 2 offer different accounts of creation?

What is God's first act towards man immediately after He creates them? What does this tell us?

According to the account of Genesis 2, how are man and woman created different? How are they equal?

What 3 gifts does God grant the first humans and how do these gifts relate to one another?

~How does this definition help you think differently about your current vocational pursuits?~

How do we overlook the truth and instead make God out to be restrictive?

"Yet prohibition is only meaningful in the context of freedom: only when we can say 'no' is our 'yes' meaningful." (p. 29) What does this mean?



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Chapter 2 – Catastrophe

What fear of man/suspicion of God did the serpent leverage in producing the fall? (p. 35)

How does the serpent manipulate truth? What drove Eve to sin?

List the results of the fall in the order they happened:

How did the Fall reverse God's 3 original invitations to man?

Who was cursed as a result of the Fall?

How do we see God's grace already in response to the fall?

Is the result of the fall to be understood as a pattern/example for God's purposes in marriage?

How does the Fall distort our identity? (p. 41)

How did God's banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden act as a gracious protection?

How did sin grow/reproduce after the Fall?

Closing quote to reflect on...

"We began the story tonight with the first humans enjoying the goodness and harmony of creation, living in God's world, a world that is very good. We end in a world that is marked by violence – separation, suspicion, distrust, fear, alienation and self-interest....This Catastrophe began when God's creatures decided that the human self should be central in a God-originated, God-centered, God-sustained and God-determined world." (p. 45)

Chapter 3 - Covenant

What is the impact of telling stories? (p. 48-49)

Reflect on this quote: *“But this is their story and has not God told parents to teach their children the Story in all its beauty and ugliness – both the parts we enjoy and the parts we would rather not think about?”* (p. 50)

~How do you relate to the tendency to move towards on the parts of scripture that you like/understand vs. those that are hard/difficult?~

What is the mission God institutes immediately beginning with Abraham? How does it apply to us?

How does the covenant with Abraham show God’s covenant promise?

~How are we like the people at Babel? How are we still “tower building” instead of following God?~

Reflect on this quote: *“Barrenness symbolizes the powerlessness of humanity, yet in our limitedness God acts to give life”* (p. 52) **What does this teach us about where the power of life comes from?**

In the middle of page 53, a woman indignantly bursts out that *“she can’t believe Abraham would do something like that! I thought Abraham was a man of great faith!”*

What does her statement teach us about misperceptions we and others have of what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

Describe the elements of God’s covenant (p. 54). How do these tie to customs of the culture at that time? Why is this significant (p. 56)?



Read the quote at the bottom of p. 55 about how human nature responds when confronted with difficult circumstances.

~How easy is it for you to accept responsibility when you are in this position?~

How does Abraham's near sacrifice of his only son, Isaac parallel God's OWN actions? How do the pieces of this story symbolize Jesus?

Reflecting on Abraham's story, what role does obedience play in laying hold of the promises of God?

"Trust is the antidote to fear" (p. 61) – What does this mean?

Describe the relationship between complacency, testing and receiving God's provision.

Closing Quote to reflect on...

*"Do we grimly strive for control over lives that are effectively uncontrollable,
or do we surrender our lives to the God who promises, trusting God to provide all our needs" (p. 62)*



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Chapter 4 – Community

How are stories meant to be received in order to truly impact our lives? (p. 66)

What happens if we do not LIVE the story? (p. 48-49)

Page 58 describes an unusual effect affliction has on the people of Israel. What was it?

~How is this reflected in our lives today?~

When Moses is confronted with the oppression of his people, what is his response (top of p. 69)?

Who else in our story “took matters into their own hands” early on? Why is this a tempting thing to do?

Who does God tell Moses to say sent him? What is significant about God’s NAME?

~How do you feel about knowing that God is “not a far off God, but one who draws near, hears our cries and cares”?~

According to page 71, why does God harden Pharaoh’s heart?

What does Pharaoh’s response on p. 72 tell us about the connection between knowing God and obedience?

Read the first full sentence at the top of p. 73.

~Why is it helpful to question ourselves when we are in exile?~

Each of the plagues in Egypt were symbolic of something they worshipped. How does the 9th plague, the plague of darkness expose the false god, Ra? What was God trying to show the Egyptians?



Using the description on p. 74 about Passover, reflect on the symbols of the lamb and the blood as a means of sparing death. Add these to your chart.

What does sacrifice require? What does it accomplish?

What do you notice about Pharaoh's request when he initially agreed to let the people go?

~Are there times in your life when you have failed to obey God/have rejected Him but still expect Him to bless you?~

Closing Quotes to Reflect on...

"The problem is not that our people are in exile in Babylon; the problem is that all of creation is in exile – east of Eden, far removed from the goodness of the garden. Babylon is just the latest expression of what lies at the heart of the problem: humanity's fear, our need to make a name for ourselves, the violence we do to each other and to all creation in order to secure a future for ourselves, instead of trusting the God of creation to provide.

We need a new exodus from sin!" (p. 77)

"This is our story. God's intention remains to liberate us from 'Egypt' from the things that keep us in bondage. God continually wishes to lead us out of those things that lead us even further into exile. Our God is a God of liberation, a God who passes over us, sparing us from death, through the shed blood of a spotless lamb! (p. 79)



Chapter 5 – Community Part II

~How does our brokenness drive us either away from or toward worship and scripture? Do you think we fall short, at times, of knowing scripture by settling for “worship experiences”?~

Moses does not enter the Promised Land. Why?

In spite of this, how does Moses sign off his leading of the people? What does he tell them?

How does the Israelites actions in response to God’s command not to hoard the manna reflect an underlying tendency of human nature?

What was the result of their disobedience?

What was God trying to accomplish in delivering the Israelites from Egypt?

Describe the components of the culturally familiar treaty God uses to establish his covenant with the people of Israel.



Complete the table below to compare this cultural treaty to God’s treaty with Moses:

	CULTURAL ROLE	SEEN IN ISRAEL’S STORY
VASSAL		
SUZERAIN		
LANGUAGE		
COVENANT		
STONE TABLETS		

What then, is the purpose of the 10 commandments (“Torah”)?

What are some of the *benefits* of the 10 Commandments?

What was so unique about the tabernacle and God’s instructions to build one?

How long did it take for the Israelites to break their part of the agreement? Describe what they did.

What aspect of humanity is seen in Aaron’s role with the golden calf? How was he deceived?

By contrast, how did Moses respond to knowing the people had already disobeyed?



~How do you respond to the sin of those around you? Do you accuse or do you intercede(pray)?~

Why did Moses break the stone tablets?

On what is Moses banking the hope of the Israelites to move on from here? Connect Psalm 27:4 to your response.

How does God reflect grace in his response to the people?

Was there still a consequence for their disobedience? What was it?

How did the Israelites desires deceive them? What is meant by “euphoric recall”? Read Numbers 11 and 14 and describe the effects of “euphoric recall”.

Compare the ministry of Moses in the Old Testament to the ministry of Jesus in the NT using this chart.

ACTIONS	MOSES	JESUS
Intercession		
Demand for signs		
Prophetic Message		
The result of intercession		



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Closing Quotes to Reflect on...

“Keeping Torah is not to earn God’s favor; it is our response to the favor God has already shown us. We are to be holy, as the LORD our God is holy.

As they kept the commandments, their identity would be shaped, as the way they lived their life together would reveal the character of God to all those around them!” (p. 98)

“Moses told the people, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you and you shall listen to him when he appears!”

The little boy thinks for a moment and then his eyes grow large, “Are you the prophet like Moses?”

... “Oh no. We are STILL WAITING FOR THE ONE MOSES SAID WOULD COME...” (p. 99)



Chapter 6 – Conquest

Who is being described at the top of p. 103 and what is significant about this judge compared to all the other judges?

We already know Moses did not enter the Promised Land. Of the millions of Israelites God delivered from slavery in Egypt, who were the only two to enter the Promised Land?

According to Moses' words, why did this generation enter the Promised Land?

How does Rahab's response give us insight about God's power among unbelievers?

What is similar about the way in which God leads the Israelites OUT of Egypt and the way He leads them INTO the Promised Land?

Why did God cease to provide manna in the Promised Land?

How does God's position/response to evil compare to ours? What does it reveal about what we truly believe about God's ability to handle evil?

How does this reality explain the greater problem of 'evil' in our world and what God is doing about it?

How does the history of Israel display God's zeal for our spiritual purity and our tendency to gradually become desensitized by the culture around us?

Why does God have the right to destroy people?



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How is “rest” a gift from God (3 ways) and what does it symbolize?

How is the cycle of “forgetting” demonstrated during the period of the Judges?

Who then, is to blame for what became of Israel? God or the Israelites?

*~How does our culture shape us?
Who is responsible for the outcomes of our choices?~*

What are we to notice/learn about Deborah and Sisera’s leadership as females? As males?

Closing Quote to reflect on...

“In those days, there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was *right in their own eyes...*” - Judges 21:25



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Chapter 7 – Crown

What is one of the primary purposes of reading the bible?

What did the old man want the people to remember before entering this part of their story? Why?

What is one of the primary purposes of reading the bible?

What new character repeats the theme of barrenness in the story? (add these to your chart)
What does she do with the child God finally gives her?

What ironic contrast do we see in the lives of Eli's sons? What parenting lesson should we draw?

Summarize Samuel's life and how God used him. How did Samuel worship in response?

What drove the people's desire for a king? How did this desire expose their blindness?

How did the Israelites sin with this request?

~How do we reject God's leadership in our lives?~



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Who was Israel's first king and what were the defining marks/events of his leadership?

Describe the effects on the community of Israel as they experienced human kings.

Compare/Contrast the marks of Saul's leadership vs. those of David's using the chart below

<i>SAUL</i>	<i>DAVID</i>

Describe the difference between the temple and the tabernacle.

~How does David's idea to build God a temple represent our desire to do great things for God?~

How does Solomon's reign over Israel illumine our eyes to what is commonly revered in leadership?
How was Solomon's kingship displeasing to God?



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Chapter 8- Conceit

How does God intend "exile" to change us?

Describe God's outlook on painful experiences in our lives. Does he expect us to just be "ok"?

What faulty belief did the Israelites have regarding God's presence in the temple?

What message was the prophet Ezekiel sent to give to the Israelites?

Despite all of his riches and fame, what did Solomon conclude as his life drew to a close?

What important lesson can we learn from Rehoboam's life? What did his actions bring about?

What cycle is playing out intensely during this period of Israel's history?

What human tendency does Hoshea's life demonstrate?

How do Hezekiah, Josiah and Huldah break this cycle?

*~What danger do we face when we become conceited like Israel?
What is God's response?~*

How is the lowest point in Israel's history described? (p. 145)



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What promises do Ezekiel 36 and Isaiah 54 remind us of?

According to Isaiah 58, Micah 6:8 and Jeremiah 29, what does God expect from us in exchange for His promises?

What are prophets sent to do in general? What is their purpose? How is their message best heard?

What is meant by the following statements?

“What we need is another Elijah!”

“Perhaps we are waiting for a new exodus” (p. 149)

Closing Quotes to Reflect on...

“God’s purpose is not to bring you and me out of exile; it is to deliver the entire world from exile – for we are ALL living east of Eden!” (p. 148)

“This new exodus will not be limited to God’s people Israel; the new exodus will be for ALL people...and the new exodus will not only be for all peoples; it will also be deliverance from all the things that keep people in bondage.

It will be deliverance for ALL of creation, as it groans under the weight of what humanity has done!” (p. 149)

“This new exodus will require another prophet like Moses – just as Moses himself saw....” (p. 150)

~INTERLUDE~



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Chapter 9- CHRIST

What is the significance of Roman rule and how the religious leaders responded to Jesus appearance?

What is the significance of Jesus' lineage compared to cultural customs? (p. 145)

Reference the following passages and describe what specific prophecies were fulfilled about Jesus.

Passage	Prophecy	How Jesus fulfilled it
Zechariah 9:9		
Isaiah 9:6-7		
Isaiah 11:1-5		
Micah 5:2-5		

What is the "shekinah"glory?

How does Herod's plan to slaughter all boys under two resemble a similar act in Israel's history?

This chapter highlights that God draws unlikely characters into His story. How do we see this in scripture?

~What bearing does that have for us personally?~



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What was John the Baptist's message?

Notice the details included in the story of Jesus baptism? What similarities does it have to how Genesis begins with the story of Creation?

**Compare/Contrast the temptations of Jesus to those Israel faced in the desert.
How does Jesus combat these temptations?**

Temptation	Jesus/Israel	Scriptural combat
1st		
2 nd		
3rd		

How do the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples relate to one another? What do they represent?

Describe the key pieces of how Jesus ministry began. What was it built on?

What was Jesus referring to when he talked about destroying the temple and raising it again in 3 days? What did this mean?



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~Read the very last verse of the gospel of John (21:25). How do you feel when you consider that our bibles contain only portions of what Jesus said and did? How might we invite others to be open to reading about Jesus?~

Who did Jesus seem to get along with? Who did he seem to have the most confrontation with? Look up Mark 2:17 in the Message [www. biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

~In light of the question above, consider your own position with Jesus. Are you an “insider” or an “outsider”? What is Jesus asking of you? When you look at other people, do you tend to put them in categories?~

The gospel calls us to follow Jesus for our salvation. What does it mean to follow Jesus? Review pp 170-171 if you need help.

Who were most of Jesus’ supporters? Why would this have been difficult for the disciples?

According to Jesus, what is the Law?

Closing Quotes to Reflect on...

“...This ‘new wine’ burst the ‘wineskin’ of Torah; Torah was given to liberate people from slavery and sin, and the Pharisees’ additional requirements led them back into a new form of bondage. It is important to remember that Jesus said that he did not come to do away with Torah, the law of the covenant; he came to fulfill it!” (p. 169)

“Those with eyes to see recognized these signs of the kingdom of God, which was breaking into the brokenness of the world. And the heart of his message was the exodus all over again: freedom from bondage, whether the bondage of disease, the bondage of marginalization and exclusion, or the bondage of sin” (p. 173)

“The healing Jesus brings is more than physical. It is also restoration to COMMUNITY...which is central to healing. It is the practice of my people to isolate those who suffer with diseases such as leprosy. We also avoid contact with ‘notorious sinners’ believing they will pollute our purity, for they are ‘unclean’. To be touched by an unclean person is to become unclean yourself. Yet nearly every time Jesus healed someone, he TOUCHED them! Jesus, if you will, ‘reversed the flow’.

Instead of the persona’s touch making Jesus unclean, Jesus’ touch made the person clean! (p. 174)

~Spend some time reflecting on these quotes for yourself personally. Have you decided to follow Jesus? Has Jesus touched you? Are there any areas in your life where you are still in bondage to something? Are you depending on the law or the love of Jesus for your salvation?~



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Chapter 10- CROSS

What brings/draws people to the story?

The man in this chapter notices that “Christians” are very different than what he thought. What does he notice about them?

Note the questions this man asks of the Christians he has met:

- *Why are you doing this?*
- *Why do you choose this life?*
- *Can you not at least worship your Christ and the Emperor?*
- *Why do they take such a risk?*
- *What compels her to host the assembly in her home or to teach newcomers things that could be viewed as treasonous?*
- *What compels her to watch her business suffer for these choices?*

How would you answer these questions for yourself? Do others see evidence of a peculiar life in you? How would you respond to someone who asks why you can't worship Jesus and other gods at the same time?

The man in this chapter eventually asks the ultimate question: “Is this love worth dying for?”
What is Jesus' answer?

~What is YOUR answer? Is the love of Jesus worth dying for?~

How were the prophets treated in the OT? How does this inform how Jesus was treated?

What is the message/meaning of the parable of the vineyard?

~Explain the simple statement “Beware of the religion scholars”. What did this mean then? What does it mean now? How do you see religion scholars functioning today?~



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What is the pattern Jesus gives us of a good King?

What can we learn from Jesus about the best way to face temptation?

The process of Jesus trial involved MANY discrepancies for both the Roman government and the religious system. Why? What was the ultimate charge brought against Jesus?

What can we learn about how Jesus faced into the accusations that were brought against him?

How did Jesus answer to Pilate about his identity fulfill scripture?

Consider Pilate's crisis of belief and his final words when writing the inscription to be placed on the cross over Jesus. What does this tell you? Have you ever experienced a crisis of belief? Is your belief about Jesus clear to you? To others?

Closing Quotes to Reflect on...

"This is what you believe? That this 'new covenant' can deliver people from the power of sin and death?"

'Yes, she replies...but this new exodus is not just for my people, Israel...as you can see... through Israel, God's firstborn, God's intention was to show the other nations what God is like, inviting them into covenant relationship, redeeming all of humanity. Jesus led all of creation out of the Egypt of violence, sin and death – the new exodus" (p. 186-187)

"The woman says, 'What if Jesus' death is not the end of this story?"

A laugh escapes the merchant. "Then that would make him truly remarkable!" (p. 191)

The Story of God has told us over and over again that we cannot save ourselves. We never get it right. We always end up making a mess of things. The catastrophe of the garden of Eden, which ruined all humanity, has led to one consistent fact: no matter what God does to meet us where we are, we turn our backs and go our own way." (p. 193)

Chapter 11- CHURCH

Has your faith ever cost you something? Have you ever been kept from believing because of something you might lose?

What does Jesus say about this in the following passages?

Luke 14:26

Luke 9:23

Why is the resurrection difficult to believe? Can you relate to the merchant's struggle?

In your opinion, how is Christianity both "strangely compelling" and "deeply troubling"? To which aspect do you more relate?

What is an "ekklesia"? What is its purpose? How does the Greek word help us understand this? (hint: go back to the bottom of page 156 if you need help)

What was the cultural view the merchant shared about the body? How is Jesus' body different?

Review pps 202-203. What is the significance of the resurrection?

What is meant by "God exists as a community of relationships"?

How far back does God's plan reach of redemption through Jesus ?



Review pps 202-203. What is the significance of the resurrection?

How many days did Jesus roam the earth after he rose from the grave? Why does this matter?

What is the mission Jesus has given us?

To what Old Testament stories do the events of Pentecost directly connect? What is the connection?

How does the story of Peter and John in Acts 4 with the lame man help us better understand people's true needs?

*~How might this inform/change the way you handle needy people around you?
How does it help you see physical needs, but look more deeply?~*

*~Do you believe that we, like Peter and John, have the same power and
authority in Jesus to bring healing to others? Why or why not?~*

*~The Pharisees were religious elites who hated Jesus but had very high
standards for the religious performance/"spiritual cleanliness" of others. How
did the disciples fall into this same mindset? How do WE?~*



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On pg. 212, we hear a story from Acts 6 where there was a dispute over waiting tables in the community vs. preaching. What does this story teach us about how God sees our VALUE in the church?

How are relationships in the church meant to be uncommon from the philosophies of the world?

In chapter 6, we considered God's view of women in the church. In Acts and the early history of the church, we are given more examples of women in the church, like Lydia. What do these women teach us about God's view of gender in the church

~How do you relate to the merchant in wrestling with the Story? Is there a specific invitation to faith that God is holding out to you? What is it? Spend some time in prayer asking God to give you the grace to say 'yes' to His invitation.~

Closing Quotes to Reflect on...

"The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God among us, no longer 'restrained' by a building. The living church has now replaced the tabernacle and the Temple of old. You all – the body of Christ – are the Temple of the Holy Spirit" – p. 205

'God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from – if you want God and are ready to do as God says, the door is open!' (p.210, quoted directly from Acts 10:34)

"God treated the outsiders exactly as God treated us, beginning at the very center of who they were and working from the center outward, cleaning up their lives as they trusted and gave their allegiance to God...

don't we believe that we are saved because the Lord Jesus amazingly and out of sheer generosity moved to save us ...?"

(p. 211, quoted directly from Acts 15:6-11)

Chapter 12- CONSUMMATION

What is God's desire for us once we grasp The Story? How does the merchant's experience reflect this?

Is faith a one-time event that happens at a specific point in time or more of a process? Explain.

~What is YOUR experience? Do you see evidence of TRUE belief in your life?~

What is the purpose of baptism?

What is the role of persecution for following Jesus? What gives us hope as we face persecution?

Overview of 7 cities in Revelation, structure of the letters, p. 225 – discuss the differences between Christianity and other cults/sects?

The merchant describes that all humanity, pagan and Christians will be judged (p. 226). For what will we be judged?

What is the purpose of the book of Revelation? What does it call us to?

How does the merchant's responses to Hera's questions give us a model for handling questions others might have about Jesus/the Bible/Christianity?



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~To whom will YOU give your believing allegiance? Which “story” or “empire” will you choose to live by?~

CLOSING BENEDICTION

“My prayer is that you will choose the Story of God, and that you will come to experience the fullness of life in the new creation – the forgiveness of sins, a return from the alienation of exile, and the vocation of partnering in the mission of God to heal and restore shalom to all that is broken in God’s beautiful world.

THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS BE WITH ALL. AMEN.” (p. 235)



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Table of Themes Throughout the Story:

**WATER/
FLOOD**

BLOOD

LAMB

SON

**BLESSING/
COVENANT**

BARRENNESS

EXODUS

MARRIAGE
