

**Some Good News for Change  
By Robin Capcara**

**Study One: What is God Like?**

**Introduction**

These days (and really all throughout history), people have had their own ideas about God. Christians think that the Bible is a good place to find answers to the question, "what is God like?" because it is, among other things, the place God tells us about Himself.

**A. Read Isaiah 45:18 aloud and use the following discussion questions to discover its meaning.**

- 1. Who is speaking?**
- 2. What do we learn about God's character from this verse? (List everything that you see.)**

**B. Read Exodus 34:6**

- 1. Once again, who is speaking?**
- 2. What does He tell us about Himself?**

**C. Read Psalm 97 and list every description of God found there.**

**D. Read Psalm 139:1-6 and 7-12  
What is God like, according to this psalm?**

**Summary**

We have discovered that God is very powerful, righteous, and just. He is King of the whole earth and He's the only God that there is. He knows everything about us and is everywhere that we go (we can't hide from Him!) He is the creator of everything and loves us with compassion and great patience.

## **Reflection question**

**What, if anything, surprised you about the character of God?**

## **Study Two: God's Game Plan for us and for our World**

### **Introduction**

**Who are we? How did we get here? And, perhaps most importantly, why are we here? Tough questions but important ones. Let's see what light the Bible can shed on these critical questions.**

### **A. Read Genesis 1:1-2:3**

- 1. According to this passage, what is creation like? What recurring thoughts or words impressed you?**
- 2. What can we surmise about God from reading this description of His creation?**
- 3. What do you think might be the significance of people being created last? (vv. 1:26-27)**
- 4. What does it mean that we are created "in God's image"?**
- 5. What's significant about God declaring all of creation, including people, "very good"? (v. 1:31)**

### **B. Read Genesis 2:4-17**

- 1. Comparing 1:26-28 and 2:15, what do you learn about the role of people in creation? In other words, what was our job and how were we to relate to God?**
- 2. What were we to avoid doing?**

**3. At this point in the narrative, what is the quality of relationship that exists between the people, their environment and God?**

**4. Use your imagination. How might our world be different today if people had developed it as God intended?**

### **Summary**

**We've learned that simply by speaking God created, out of nothing, a marvelously diverse yet orderly and profoundly good creation. From this we see that God Himself is awesomely powerful, very good and orderly. We learned that people, too, were originally very good and the crowning touch of God's creation. We are created in His image to reflect His character and to rule, develop, and care for the earth as His "assistants". Originally, according to God's game plan, everything was in complete harmony and was just as it should be. Clearly this is not the kind of world that you and I live in today! Next time we'll take a look at "what in the world happened?" Why didn't our world turn out as God intended?**

### **Reflection question:**

**What is your diagnosis of the human condition? What's wrong with our world? How do you fix it?**

## **Study Three: What in the World Happened?**

### **Introduction**

**Our world is a wonderful yet tragically mixed-up place populated by wonderful yet tragically mixed-up people. The Bible speaks of something called sin and tells us that it is what went wrong. In this study we'll examine what sin is and what impact it has had on us and on our world.**

### **A. Re-read Genesis 2:16-17**

**1. What penalty is promised if people disobey God?**

**2. This particular command has been called a test of obedience. (In other words, would people obey God no matter what, or would they choose to "do their own thing"?) Why do you think that utter obedience is so crucial?**

**B. Read Genesis 3:1-19**

- 1. Besides Adam and Eve, who else is involved in this episode?**
- 2. What did the serpent say about God's command? What deceptive notion was behind the serpent's remarks?**
- 3. What do we learn about sin from this event? What is it exactly?**
- 4. The Bible says that Adam was a representative for all of mankind during this test and therefore his act of sinful disobedience "infected" all of us with sin. (See Romans 5:12, 18-19) How do people today, as descendants of Adam, behave in the same way?**

**C. Read Genesis 6:5-6 & 11-12, Mark 7:14-23, and Romans 3:10-12**

**What do each of these passages tell us about people now that we are sinners? (Take one passage at a time and list as many things as you can come up with. Then try to arrive at the main point of each passage.)**

**D. Read Romans 8:19-22**

- 1. What has happened to the creation as a result of our sin?**
- 2. What evidence of this do you see in our world today?**

**E. Re-read Genesis 3:15**

- 1. This verse falls in the midst of a series of curses on the serpent, the man and the woman. Is this verse also a curse?**

## 2. If not, how might it be a source of hope?

### Summary

Sin is acting autonomously, "doing our own thing", disbelieving God, and rebelling against Him. Because Adam was our representative, when he rebelled he passed his sin on to each of us. Now every person behaves in accordance with this inherited sin, i.e. we rebel against God and do our own thing too. God is deeply grieved and angered by this. The results of this rebellion are death (both physical and spiritual) and the ruination of normal, good relationships between people and God, their environment and each other. At this point, barring some special intervention from God, the future of mankind and the world is very grim.

In our next two studies on Jesus, we'll examine just such an intervention, one that can and does bring much needed hope to an aching world.

Reflection question: What evidence of sin do you see in your life?

## Study Four: Who is Jesus?

### Introduction

As we noted in our first study, everyone seems to have his or her own ideas about God. The same is certainly true of Jesus. Some see Him as a "man of the people", a gentle political revolutionary, others see Him as a great moral teacher, still others as one of the prophets or a guru/avatar, and some as a well intentioned but misguided Jewish rabbi. Well, who is He really? Let's see what Jesus has to say about Himself.

### A. Read John 10:24-33

1. What are all of the claims that Jesus makes for Himself in this passage?

2. Why did the Jewish leaders try to stone Jesus? Did they have a legitimate case?

## **B. Read John 14:5-11**

- 1. Again, list all of the claims that Jesus makes for Himself in this passage.**
- 2. How does Jesus' claim in v. 6 differ from the notion that there are many paths to God?**

## **C. Read John 10:14-18**

- 1. Some have said that Jesus was unsuccessful in his bid to change the world because He antagonized the government and got Himself killed before He could complete His agenda. How do His words in this passage run counter to that idea?**
- 2. What is Jesus' understanding of His mission?**

## **D. Read Mark 10:45**

- 1. Again, what is Jesus' view of His mission?**
- 2. In light of our previous study, from what is He ransoming us?**
- 3. How could one man, paying with His life, ransom humankind from sin, death and all of their effects?**

## **Summary**

**We've seen that Jesus claimed to be both fully God and fully human, and that He believed Himself to be the only way to God. We've seen that He had a clear understanding of His mission on earth. He willingly laid down His life as a ransoming death for all of God's creation. Remember Genesis 3:15? Here in Jesus' life, death and resurrection we see the fulfillment of that hope-filled promise to Adam and Eve. In our next study, we'll examine more closely what Jesus did and what is yet to come.**

**Reflection question: What is your understanding of Jesus? Who do you believe Him to be?**

## **Study Five: What Did Jesus Do?**

### **Introduction**

Jesus lived but thirty-odd years yet made such a profound impact on our world that people are still talking about it. Let's take a closer look at some of what He did and the importance this has for us today and in the future.

#### **A. Read Matthew 4:17 and 23-25**

- 1. What sorts of things does Jesus do in this passage?**
- 2. What is the significance of these activities?**

#### **B. Read Matthew 26: 57-68 & 27:11-66**

Here we read the account of Jesus' religious trial before the Jewish High Priest and His civil trial before Pontius Pilate, the local Roman governor, as well as the account of His crucifixion.

- 1. Describe what Jesus endured during this experience?**
- 2. How could Jesus, who Himself claimed to be God, ever be "forsaken" by God (v.46)? What can this mean?**

#### **C. Read Matthew 28:1-10**

- 1. Was Jesus able to fulfill His promise that He'd rise again?**
- 2. What does Jesus' resurrection show us about Him? About death?**

#### **D. Read Acts 1:1-11 & I Corinthians 15:3-8 (see also II Peter 1:16-18)**

- 1. Was the resurrection of Jesus a public or private event? Is it significant that there were so many eyewitnesses?**
- 2. Where does Jesus eventually go? What is the significance of His ascension back to heaven?**
- 3. With what promise do the "two men in white clothing" leave us? (Acts 1:10-11)**

#### **E. Read Revelation 21:1-8**

**This is a highly pictorial description of what it will be like when Jesus returns.**

- 1. How is our post-second coming world described?**
- 2. Notice that a "new earth" is described and not simply heaven, as one might expect. Review Romans 8:19-21 to discover why that might be.**
- 3. Where will God be? (v.3)**
- 4. Who gets to "inherit" the new earth? What do you think it means to "overcome"? (Hint: I John 5:5)**
- 5. Which people do not inherit the new earth? What is their fate?**

#### **Summary**

**We've found that Jesus, unlike His predecessor Adam, lived a perfectly obedient life, even to the point of death. He preached, taught, healed and cast out demons--- all of which were a part of His obedience, showed His authority as the Son of God and brought real help, healing and enlightenment to hurting people. His death on the cross paid for and canceled the penalty for all of our sins. Essentially Jesus, who had never done anything wrong, took the penalty we deserved. (Remember Genesis 2:17?)**

Jesus evidences His power over death by "taking up" His life again at the resurrection (John 10:18). His ascension shows His kingly reign over the earth until He comes again. His Second Coming will include a judgement of all people and a complete restoration of God's good creation as it was intended to be from the beginning.

Reflection question: What impressed you most about the life and ministry of Jesus? Why?

## **Study Six: Responding to Jesus**

### **Introduction**

We've certainly discovered a lot in our last five studies! We've seen that God is a powerful, good King who made both our world and us originally good. We've learned that because of our rebellion against God, our world and we have been under the curse of sin and death. We have discovered that God, in His great love for His rebellious creation, sent His only Son to die an undeserved death on our behalf. Not only that, but Jesus also rose from the dead and is alive today looking for a response from us. Just what sort of response is He looking for?

**A.** Many people think that if you simply believe in God, however you conceive of Him/Her that that is sufficient. Perhaps this is acceptable to God; let's see...

**Read James 2:19**

1. Though highly sarcastic this verse makes a strong point; what is it?

2. So, is belief in God enough?

**B.** Many people believe that being a reasonably "good person" is sufficient to be accepted by God. Perhaps this is acceptable to Jesus; let's see...

1. Read Matthew 5:48

- a. According to Jesus, what is God's expectation for us?
- b. Have you ever known anyone who's met that standard? Or do you meet it?
- c. If no one can meet this standard, why do you suppose Jesus insists on it?

## 2. Read Romans 3:10-12 and 23

Are there any "good people"?

C. Well, what does it take to be in a restored relationship with God?

Read Acts 3:19

1. What are we challenged to do?
2. What will result if we rise to the challenge?

D. How can these two things, repenting and turning to God, wipe out our sin and make us acceptable in God's sight when "believing in God" and "being a good person" aren't enough? If the answer is not yet clear, let's keep looking...

## 1. Read John 3:16 and 36

- a. What is the result of believing in Jesus?
- b. What is the result of not believing in Him?

## 2. Read Romans 10:9-10

- a. What is promised?
- b. How do we receive what is promised?

**c. What does it mean to call Jesus "Lord"?**

**Summary**

**We can't ever be good enough to earn a place with God (His standard is perfect goodness!!) Even acknowledging that there is a God is not enough. But happily, because Jesus' death on the cross wipes out our sin, we can be accepted. We must believe in Him, receive Him (actively invite Him to be the Lord of our lives), and repent of all sins, past and present. If we respond, then life, restoration and wholeness can be ours!**

**It is equally true, however, that failure to respond in this way to Jesus means that we continue under the curse of death and separation from God. (1 John 5:12)**

**Reflection question: We must each decide how we will respond to Jesus. How will you?**