

THE DAY **METALLICA** CAME TO **CHURCH** Study Guide

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CHAPTER 1: THE DAY METALLICA CAME TO CHURCH

1. How might growing up in a Christian church affect your openness to the idea of God speaking through a band like Metallica? If you didn't go to church would you see things differently?
2. How have you been surprised by a seemingly spiritual truth that came from outside the church? Describe that experience. Did that truth encounter draw you closer to God?
3. How do you feel about looking for God in unconventional places? How do you know when it's the right or wrong thing to do?
4. If the truths about justice, denouncing hypocrisy, and forgiveness found in Metallica's lyrics are already in the Bible, why bother recognizing them in the band's songs, especially given the fact that many people would object to the band's overall lifestyle?
5. Can you think of reasons why God would choose to speak to people through means other than the Bible or the church?
6. Theologian John Calvin wrote, "If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God." What motivates us to "despise wherever it shall appear" or "reject" something as being unworthy of bearing God's truth?
7. What process brought the author to the point where he was able to recognize God's voice in Metallica? Do you think the same thing could happen in the realm of online gaming, the import/export business, slasher movies, or tattoo parlors?
8. Why would a church embracing the messages of Metallica's songs draw so much attention?

Exercise: God's Truth through Regina Spektor

Watch Regina Spektor's song "Laughing With" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pxRXP3w-sQ>.

Ask yourself (and talk in your group about) where God's truth is in this song. Does that truth remind you of any Bible passages, theological concepts, or something else you've experienced before? Why might God's Spirit be singing this song through Regina?

See what we did with this song at New Hope Church Calgary at <http://newhopecalgary.blip.tv/file/2862225/>.

Notes:

CHAPTER 2: WAKE-UP CALL

1. How do we create a community that allows for honesty and failure so that people are less likely to hide behind masks?
2. The author states, “God can do whatever he wants with whomever he wants, whenever he wants, whether the person wants it or not.” How does this fit with your understanding of free choice and how God operates in the world?
3. The author writes about how things became much clearer months and even years after being “sideswiped” by God. Why might God intentionally withhold understanding for a time? Do sin and doubt in God’s providence shroud the truth, or do you think there is something else at play?
4. What does the author’s journey in discovering his love for his disabled son say to you?
5. How does our belief in God’s love for us affect our ability to perceive God’s revelation through various media, including rock bands like Metallica?
6. What would it take for you to be able to better see God at work in all things right now? How would you live differently after catching a glimpse of a loving and present God?
7. In what area of life are you able to recognize God moving? In what areas are you unable to see God? Why?

Exercise: God's Word through Your Pain

You've suffered. And perhaps, looking back, you've already begun to see some good, some truth, something beautiful come out of it. Good.

Now recall that painful circumstance again. Write it down as a short story. Don't worry about how well you write, just get it down. Then put it away for a couple of days and then read it again. As you reread it, imagine it being part of the Bible; a story in some early Old Testament book, a story with a bigger message from God embedded in it.

What's that message?

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CHAPTER 3: VAN GOGH'S VISION: TWO BOOKS?

1. Van Gogh's painting *The Church in Auvers* (p. 50) depicts a dark and lifeless church in comparison to the outdoor pathway. How would you paint your church?

2. Consider the painting *Still Life with Open Bible* (p. 56). Zola's book appears well worn and ready to be snatched up. The Bible is given a more prominent size and position but does not seem as used or as accessible as Zola's book. How would you paint the Bible in relation to your favorite novel, film, or TV show?

3. Try to think of an example where the culture has distorted the interpretation of a creational truth. How might the Bible have counterbalanced that misinterpretation?

4. Co-illumination seems to imply that God's truth cannot be fully understood through just the Bible or just creation. Do you agree with this implication? How can the Holy Spirit compensate when one or the other is lacking? When have you learned a biblical truth more profoundly through association with God's creation?

5. How do your experiences resonate with the author's thoughts on travel? Do the anticipation of something new and the feeling of finiteness ring true?

6. Does a counterbalancing view of the Bible diminish the value Christians may place on the Bible? Why or why not?

Exercise: Finding God in a Human Face

Visit the Van Gogh museum website and take a look at his portraits at <http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/vgm/index.jsp?page=1288&lang=en>. Make sure you click on the “show enlargement” link and read the brief summary accompanying each painting. Take note of the kind of people Vincent painted. Spend some time with them. What do you see in their eyes? Then listen to this New Hope Church Calgary message, *What If God Was One of Us?*, looking at how the artist saw and valued human beings <http://www.blip.tv/file/2805574>.

Notes:

CHAPTER 4: SPORTS, SPIRITUALITY, AND THE *SENSUS DIVINITATIS*

1. Recall a time (or times) in your life when you were totally engaged in a sporting or entertainment event. How did it make you feel more alive?
2. If both the true worship of God and the sin of idolatry begin in the same place (the *sensus divinitatis*), how do we make sure we worship in the right direction? How might it be safer to just save all of our devotional energies for purely godly things?
3. How can the concept of the *sensus divinitatis* help us worship God and live life more fully through everyday events and experiences?
4. How would you account for the differences between personal taste and the workings of the *sensus divinitatis*?
5. Do you think foretastes of things to come are as powerful as those things will be in heaven? How do they relate to one another?
6. Many people object to global sporting events like the World Cup because of the large amounts of money spent, the negative impact on local communities, and the idolatry involved. How might the spiritual benefits of finding God in sport outweigh these negative factors? How might they reshape how we do sport?

Exercise: Finding God in Your Favorite Sport

I know it's hard to imagine, but not everyone is into hockey. So do the math with the sport you love most. In your mind, or on paper, rewrite that Stanley Cup editorial from the chapter (pp. 80-84) and insert your player names and your favorite plays. Change the name of the city and stadium. Draw a few new conclusions based on the unique athletic truth that your sport preaches. What is God uniquely saying through NFL football, NBA basketball, or PGA tour golf? Here's New Hope Church Calgary's take on the NCAA's Final Four: <http://www.blip.tv/file/2090205>.

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CHAPTER 5: *CRASH*: WHEN GOD COLLIDES WITH A MESSED-UP WORLD

1. How do stories of brokenness enhance your understanding of salvation?
2. Do you ever miss out on “instances of tacit worship” by not accessing God’s truth in unseemly places? Why? What do you think of the idea that God speaks his truth in enough “safe” places that we don’t need to visit the unseemly places?
3. Considering all of the R-rated material in the Bible, what do you think of the idea that there is nothing so dark that God cannot work through it?
4. Think of a time when you recognized your own brokenness after being faced with the failings of others (like the author did). What happened?
5. In the author’s retelling of the crucifixion story, he speaks of God being at his best. Think of a time in your life when you were at your worst and God was at his best, saving you behind your back.
6. How might all viewers of *Crash*, whether they believe in God or not, receive some degree of divine truth from the film?
7. If God speaks through Hollywood films, what role do God’s followers have in sharing God’s truth in these films?
8. This chapter ends with a call to “let go of our control over how and when God speaks.” What does this mean for you?

CHAPTER 6: *NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN*: EVEN THERE?

1. What lines have you drawn to delineate where God can and cannot move?
2. How would people outside of the Christian faith react if you began to identify God's messages everywhere? (Recall how the Seattle DJs reacted to the author.)
3. As we push the line further out, letting go of control, what must be present in us in order to recognize (or be) God's truth in a dark place?
4. The author uses co-illumination to uncover the truth in *No Country for Old Men* by viewing the film alongside the text of Psalm 73. Would Psalm 73 carry as much meaning today without this contemporary visual depiction of depravity? Think of another film that could do the same thing for Psalm 73.
5. What does the author's recognition of *No Country for Old Men's* co-illumination with the Bible's Psalm 73 say to you about your relationship with the Bible? Would you have made the same connection? Why or why not?
6. Where would God's truth have to appear for you to truly acknowledge his infinite greatness, power, and love?
7. How far might the ideas contained in this chapter go? Could God's story of redemption be present in child abuse, nuclear destruction, pornography, mass-produced suburbs, environmental degradation, and death?

Exercise: Finding God's Goodness in Dark Places

The author quotes Saint Augustine, who once said that there "cannot be a nature in which there is no good." Is he right? Test his idea. Write down a list of the top ten most evil, heinous, anti-God people or things you can think of. Then spend five minutes with each, listing the good traits that still remain in that person or thing. Be honest. Talk about how the truth of this exercise changes your view of evil.

Notes:

CHAPTER 7: PUSHBACK: IS THIS HERETICAL?

1. After reading the first half of the book, what concerns do you have with what the author is presenting?
2. How has God been active in your life outside the formal church setting? How have you taken time to acknowledge God as the source of those things? How would things change if you were more intentional about doing so?
3. What needs to change in what you're passionate about so that you can better acknowledge God's presence in your life?
4. The author distinguishes between theological and psychological objections. Where do you think people's psychological apprehension comes from if it's not based on biblical teaching?
5. How do you react to the statement "Everything God has to say to us is written in the Bible"?
6. How does your understanding of God allow him to speak different things (not necessarily contradictory messages) to different people in different ways? Do some Bible passages resonate with you more than other passages?
7. Do God's messages seem clearer or more muddled when they are received in the context of community? Why?
8. What benefits can you identify with when reading the creational text in community?
9. Do you believe Jesus continues to speak today through whatever means necessary? If so, what might be blinding you to the fact that Jesus is the one communicating?

Exercise: Processing Change

This chapter talks about how people can confuse their psychological unease with their theological unease. It's easy to understand how this can happen because change is difficult. At work or home, structurally or relationally, change is tough to process.

So work on that. Google "dealing with change" and read a few articles.

Then pray this prayer of Thomas Merton:

MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. —from *Thoughts in Solitude*

Notes:

CHAPTER 8: COMMON GRACE AND *THE DARK KNIGHT*

1. How are you sometimes blinded to God's truth in the world because of an unhealthy focus on the negative? Why do you allow this to happen?

2. What things are you perceived as "being against"? How could you change into a person who is "for the good" in those same things?

3. Do you think God would choose to speak through a film like *The Dark Knight* just as he would speak through a faithful follower? What does this say about God?

4. Take a moment to consider all of the good things that have happened today. How might God have been involved in those successes and in staving off evil and catastrophe?

5. Where do you see God's goodness in your community? In what ways is God sustaining that goodness?

6. The author talks about how the *habitus* shapes our choices (pp. 166-67). How does your *habitus* influence you?

Exercise: Balancing the Good/Evil Equation

In the chapter's un-news editorial, you read that the good in this world may be far more prevalent than we think. Compile a 100-point list of what is right in your own city or town. Then write an editorial or make a poster communicating these facts. Let your neighbors know! Post it on a community bulletin board or online. (Be sure to save your list for a few weeks!)

Notes:

CHAPTER 9: “WE GOT TO LET LOVE RULE”

1. What value do you place on things you design or create? Do you sense that God values your creations? What difference would it make if you were to consider your creations co-created?

2. In what ways do you value God's creations?

3. What do you love? Does God love this thing or person in the same way? In what ways can you sense God loving this thing or person through you?

4. Denis Donoghue's love for eloquence leads him to search for it everywhere. Paul Hardy's love of aesthetic and design inspires him to continually create beautiful clothing. What does your love for God's world lead you to do? How does God use you to lovingly remake his world?

5. What is it that makes you love something? Do you pick and choose what or who to love or are you open to loving all of God's creation equally?

6. In your life, what is being created, sustained, restored, or known better through love? In what ways?

Exercise: Going to School on Somebody's Love

Interview someone about something they love in life. Ask him or her to identify what that something is. Then probe some more. Ask, Why do you love that thing or person? How does that person or thing make you feel? Describe in detail what makes you love the person or thing.

Write down everything the person says. Then go over the list and think about how much God loves those same things. Write a paragraph describing and summarizing God's love for that thing.

Notes:

CHAPTER 10: A CHILDLIKE IMAGINATION

1. When was the last time you experienced something that absolutely stunned you to the point where you were speechless, lost in wonder? Describe your experience.

2. What things do you “know” about God that prevent you from knowing more about God?

3. The author expressed that he feels most childlike when looking through his camera. What activity causes you to feel young again? Why do you think you are more open to God at that time?

4. If imagination “clothes invisible spiritual realities with material forms,” as George MacDonald suggested (p. 193), what imaginative activities do you engage in that help you understand spiritual truth?

5. What is the number-one reason for your imagination growing old: sin, structure, stress, expectations, responsibility, money, “sufficient” knowledge, independence, distrust, boredom, materialism, other? Why is that?

6. Think of your favorite love songs. Try to imagine God singing those to you, or you singing them to God.

7. An actor participates with a scriptwriter to bring a character to life. How do you play out the part God has written for you?

8. How is the story of God still new to you?

Exercise: Growing Young Again

Take a young child to the zoo, science center, or park and let her lead the way for the entire afternoon or day. It'll be tough to do, but follow her in whatever direction she leads. As you follow, try to get inside that child's head a bit. Take a photo every time you remember something from your childhood. When you get home, review the images. Then go to www.thewildernessdowntown.com, plug in your childhood address, and watch the video.

Notes:

CHAPTER 11: PARABLE EARS AND ICON EYES

1. Do you feel you possess what Jesus calls a “ready heart,” the gift of insight into God’s kingdom? If so, how did it come to you?
2. Why do you think Jesus chose to speak parables about ordinary, everyday things instead of fascinating, exotic things?
3. Which of Christ’s parables is your favorite? What about it surprises, shocks, or confounds you? Why do you think this parable resonates more than others do?
4. If someone were to tour the walls of your mind, what images and parables would be hanging there?
5. In what directions have Jesus’ Bible parables or creational parables nudged you?
6. What conditions must be in place for you to see or hear of God’s kingdom through creation?
7. How close is Jesus to you? Are your ears open to his gentle whisper?
8. If Jesus really is an iconic window to the Father, how does this change how you see God?
9. What kind of picture of God would people see through you? Would they see God clearly?

Exercise: Write a Life Parable

Recall the most recent time a “God thing” played out in your life (you know, a life circumstance that resulted in you recognizing God’s active presence). Try to imagine God authoring that story: creating the characters, working out the plot, coming up with the setting.

Now write that story down in the form of a parable (no longer than 400 words; check out Wikipedia for a definition if you need to or read a few well-known parables first—the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) or The Good Samaritan (Luke 10)).

Notes:

CHAPTER 12: HEAVEN ON EARTH

1. Describe the most perfect place you've ever been. What qualities made it just right?
2. Where do you see "new earth" glory, peace, or perfection in your town or city? Have you ever considered it a foretaste of heaven?
3. Why do you think God chooses to restore this old creation rather than simply creating a new one to replace it?
4. What appeals to you more—a garden or a city? Why? How does a picture of heaven as a perfect balance of garden and city excite you and open your imagination to new possibilities?
5. Can you recognize where God is transforming you into the person you were made to be (so that God can be revealed more fully to and through you)?
6. Both the ecosystem described by Eric Sanderson and the image of the New Jerusalem where everyone worships God contain elements of brotherhood and peace. In what ways can your community of faith live out these same principles here and now?
7. How have your thoughts and feelings toward creation changed after reading this book? Toward the Bible? Toward God?
8. The book ends with a description of what a person who lives into the idea of God speaking everywhere might look like. What would it take for you to be this person?

Exercise: Remake Your City

Reread that 100-point list you wrote for chapter 8 about all that's right in your city or town. Take the top five things from your list and plot them on a map. Now chart the course for a walk, drive, or bike ride. Then take the tour and thank God for what's right at each stop. Try to imagine what the thing you're looking at would look like if it were perfect, and maybe write down one thing you could do to help it get there (think about how you could follow through on one of those things).

Notes: