



BACKSTORY BIBLE STUDY

INTIMACY



Today, the word intimacy has taken on sexual connotations. But it is much more than that. It includes all the different dimensions of our lives -- yes, the physical, but also the social, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects as well. Intimacy really means **total life sharing**. And haven't we all had the desire at one time or another for closeness, for oneness, for sharing our life with someone totally?

Disclaimer: This study assumes a belief in God or a higher power. To be involved in this study you don't necessarily have to believe in the Christian God or even think He's personal or involved...that's a big part of what we'll be examining over the next few weeks. I just figured that if there are any atheists participating in this study, before we got started it would be fair to inform them of that particular presupposition.

Describe the best date you've ever been on. What feelings were present? What made it the best?

Point 1 - Intimacy

From the beginning, relationships have been woven into the fabric of life. We were fashioned as works of art reflecting the image of our Creator: we think, we choose, we create, and we were designed to love – to experience intimacy with God and each other...

Read Genesis 2:18-25

During the formation of the world God designed mankind to enjoy His creation with others. He had just finished calling all He made "good" (and man "very good"), yet He said it was NOT good that man should be alone (vs. 18).

Why do you think God valued man experiencing His love and creation in the company of others? Wouldn't it be better if it was just God and man? Wouldn't that be perfect intimacy?

Ultimately looking for answers like it brings Him more glory / no one person could ever completely and wholly reflect the "image of our Creator" / it showed off His character / it's a picture of His triune nature. Really any answer is OK at this point.

One author's perspective which I like...
"One can acquire everything in isolation, except character." – Marie-Henri Beyle

Why is the thought of being alone so unappealing? Could you describe a time when you felt alone?

Let this go on as long as it needs to.
Transition with something like, "Loneliness is not God's design. We were created to experience true, God glorifying intimacy."

I once heard a minister at a wedding describe the account of Adam naming the animals (vs. 19-23) in this way. There Adam was all excited that God was going to fashion a helper "fit for him". He didn't know what that meant, but everything God created was good so he had some high expectations! So he was watching all the animals go by and giving them names, "Aardvark, Arachnid, Armadillo" and on and on, but none of them were right for him. None of them were worthy of an



intimate relationship. Finally, he's coming down to the end, "Yak.....Zebra...<snoring>" The poor guy was disappointed and wiped out so God hooks him up by putting him into a deep sleep. God then takes one of Adam's ribs, fashions a helper "fit for him" and He probably brought her to Adam like this, "Pssst...hey Adam. Wake up. Look what I made for you!" Adam turns around and...., "Whoa MAN!" read vs. 23 again, emphasizing NOW.

**Why do you think Adam says "now" or "at last"?
What does that tell you about how God had designed him?**

He was created for intimacy; God honoring, glorifying intimacy with God Himself and with others. Adam had a felt need to be intimate with something.

What is so appealing about paradise? About being "naked (or exposed) and unashamed"? About being loved unconditionally?

Oughtness

Instilled in us is a longing for the ideal world and perfect intimacy for which we were created. We sense that the evils of war and rape and death are alien to our existence. As Martin Luther King Jr. observed, we are confronted by an "eternal oughtness:" that the world is not as it ought to be, that unconditional love and perfect peace are forever elusive.

As you observe the world, what screams to you, "This is not how things ought to be?"

Why ought not life be that way? If Hitler, a rapist or a member of the KKK are only doing what seems right to them, who are we to tell them that's not how things ought to be?

On our own we don't have that right. We are sinners just like they are. But God, who is perfectly good (James 1:17) and the author of life (Acts 3:15) in whose image we were created (Genesis 1:27) has the right to determine how things ought to be. We, as His followers, are charged to be His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) representing Him to the world. Granted in a lot of cases throughout history Christians haven't done a fantastic job representing Him well. I think a large reason for that is that we often focus on preaching against sin (i.e. don't do drugs or get drunk, don't have sex before marriage, don't be gay, don't lie, you name it) rather than preach the gospel and let Christ change people. What did Paul (and others) do to shape the culture through the 1st century church? Rather

than react to the secular culture around him and try to argue people out of sin, because of Paul's intimate relationship with (and passion for) Christ he shrewdly and simply preached the gospel (I Corinthians 2:1-2, Acts 26:22-23) and the gospel haters didn't know what to do with him or how to stop him. His intimate relationship with Christ led to eager anticipation of being with Christ in eternity (Philippians 1:19-24) which provided the drive to share Christ with others even in the face of murder attempts, shipwrecks, illegal public beatings and imprisonments, etc. (2 Corinthians 11:21 - 12:10, Philippians 3:8). We who know Christ have the same future hope of perfect and eternal intimacy with our Creator that Paul did. We get a glimpse of what it will be like in Revelation 21:2-7. (Read it.)

There are going to be myriads of people in heaven (Revelation 7:9-10) and yet the passage we just read depicts intimacy with God. How?

Bride adorned for her husband, Wiping away tears, Leading the thirsty to an endless supply of living water, Personal recognition of overcomers receiving their inheritance, "I will be his God and he will be my son".

Questions to reflect on as we go about our week

As you reflect on the subject of intimacy, on a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your desire to know and be known by God?

Do you see yourself moving closer to, or further away from God?

Backstory Bible Studies written by:
Matt Baehr & Jesse Furey



BACKSTORY BIBLE STUDY

BETRAYAL



But intimacy was lost. Humanity turned from the source of life and chose to live without God. Now pain, selfishness, and a corrupted sin nature stain all our relationships. We experience the world as broken, life as lacking, and things not as they ought to be...

Say you're a scientist and your area of research is the creation of life in a lab. You have dedicated your entire professional career and put your reputation on the line for this research and then...one day...you do it. You create life. It has never been done before. You made history! So you nurture the life you created and meticulously create an environment for it to be able to thrive and sustain life. Then one day, inexplicably, your creation turns hostile. It rejects and begins to destroy the environment you created for it, not to mention your career, your life's work, your reputation...

**How would you feel as this was happening?
What would you do?**

**What are some common stories of betrayal?
When you think of betrayal, what comes to mind?**

Probably someone will mention the idea of cheating in a romantic relationship. If not, you can bring it up and it will resonate with them as a legit example.

Background on Hosea: *Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He prophesied in the 8th century BC just before the northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BC. Israel was coming off a golden age of peace and prosperity not seen since the days of Solomon. Unfortunately, this prosperity led to moral decay and Israel betrayed God to worship idols aka tangible things.*

Why, if God was blessing them so much, would they turn to idol worship?

They were searching for tangible things they could grasp mentally or physically to praise and worship because it requires less faith and allows more control on their behalf.

**What kinds of things does our nation worship?
How has that affected our thinking?**

Secularhumanism.org says Secular Humanism can be defined as - "the intellectual and cultural movement ... characterized by an emphasis on human interests rather than ... religion."

I'd say that's a pretty fair definition of what our country values including wealth, power, success, doing what makes you feel good, etc.

I think it is pretty common for those of us who grew up in the church to wonder why the nation of Israel so often turned from God to idol worship. They were supposed to be worshipping the One true, living and active God who had done all sorts of miraculous things for them (the plagues which delivered them from slavery in Egypt, the parting of the red sea, guiding and feeding them in the desert, knocking down the walls of Jericho, etc.). Why would they feel the need to worship inanimate objects they formed with their own hands (Isaiah 40:18-20, 44:19)?



The Israelites, like the Canaanites, were an agricultural society. The Canaanite gods were tied to the seasons of the year. Baal (the pagan god mentioned most in the Old Testament) was the god who represented the rainy season, which was (before the invention of running water) a crucial time of year for agricultural societies. If there was a lot of rain, they had an abundant crop. If there was not a lot of rain, they struggled to make it through the year. The Canaanites believed Baal would get trapped by Mot (pronounced Moat), the god of the underworld, during the dry seasons. Just to warn you, this is about to get pretty X-rated. Eventually Anath (pronounced A Knot), Baal's Xena-warrior-princess-like girlfriend, would get horny and lonely, go into the underworld, defeat Mot, rescue Baal and they would have lots of sex. The Canaanites believed rain was Baal's spilled semen falling down from the sky, and the more sex he and Anath had the more fruitful the rainy season would be. Classy I know.

Here's the thing though. The way the Canaanites "worshipped" was to have sex with temple prostitutes. They thought that the more they had sex, the more Baal and Anath would be "in the mood" leading to a more abundant rainy season. The Israelites got sucked into this practice not only because uncommitted sex was worship but mainly because it gave them a sense of control over their livelihood. It was just like Adam and Eve. Instead of trusting God and leaning on Him and His blessings, they took matters into their own hands and sought out ways to control their own blessing, provision, and happiness. They were hoping to acquire the glory, joy and intimacy their souls were created to desire through practices they thought they could govern. They betrayed the Author of love and creation and spiritually prostituted themselves.

This doesn't just apply to sex. In their hearts they wanted tangible things or practices they could have some semblance of control over to give them life and happiness. What sort of things or practices do we turn to in order to meet those same needs in our hearts?

If this account is true, it should seem intuitive. We should sense that God is there but distant from us; that the world is not as it ought to be; that evil pollutes our thoughts and actions; and that the pursuit of redemption is universal.

We find out at the beginning of Hosea that Gomer, his wife and mother to his 3 children, leaves him to become

a prostitute (most likely a temple prostitute of Baal). This gives us a small picture of how God views our betrayal of Him.

What's the difference between being betrayed and simply getting hurt by someone?

Looking for the idea of choice being involved. Someone knowingly and willingly hurting someone else.

Put yourself in Hosea's shoes for a minute. According to the law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 he had the right to divorce her and never have anything to do with her again. And yet, to show His unrelenting love toward His people, though they had given Him no reason to love or redeem them, God prompts Hosea to once again love and redeem his battered, unfaithful wife.

Read Hosea 2:14 – 3:5

The LORD poetically enables us to catch a glimpse of His character in His usage of Hosea's children's names which were given to describe Israel's plight.

His first son is named Jezreel. The valley of Jezreel is where a God-fearing man named Naboth's vineyard was. Evil King Ahab, who promoted Baalism as the national religion of Israel, wanted the vineyard and had Naboth murdered when he wouldn't allow Ahab to seize it from him (1 Kings 21). What the LORD is saying in Hosea 2:22-23 is that He is not willing to allow destructive idol worship to characterize His people and He will plant Himself in the land.

Hosea's second child is a girl named No Mercy (heb. Loruhamah). Despite their guiltiness, the LORD says He will have mercy on No Mercy. (Hosea 2:23)

Hosea's third child is a boy named Not My People (heb. Lo-ammi). The LORD says to Israel, "You are my people" even though they've given Him no reason to do so and have rejected Him for tangible idols.

Conclusion:

In Mary Shelley's classic novel *Frankenstein* the lead character, Victor Frankenstein, becomes obsessed with the creation of life. After years of research he gains the knowledge he was seeking and takes months to fashion a creature out of old body parts. One night, in the secrecy of his apartment, Victor brings the creature to life. Consequently he becomes horrified, sickened and remorseful over the monstrosity he created and



abandons it. Loneliness and vengefulness overtake the creature due to the betrayal he has experienced and he in turn betrays his creator by murdering those who mean most to Victor. The story spirals downward, seeped in betrayal, until both Victor and the creature he created die in agony. It is a depressing and hopeless depiction of life, yet not too foreign from our experience with betrayal. The pain we feel when betrayed often leads us to seek revenge or self-approved justice.

God is not like us.

When His creation betrays him by thinking we know how to take care of and govern ourselves better than He does, rather than abandoning us like Victor Frankenstein, He becomes one of us monstrosities (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When He knows Judas is going to betray him, rather than exacting his revenge on him, Jesus says, "What you are going to do, do quickly." (John 13:27) and later allows Judas to identify Him to a brute squad with a kiss of friendship (Mark 14:43-45).

After Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends, betrays Him and denies three times that he ever even knew Jesus (Mark 14:27-31), rather than becoming bitter and denying Peter as His follower, Jesus restores him and charges him with the care of other believers (John 21:15-19).

After being mocked, spit upon, beaten, unjustly condemned to death, forced to carry a cross up a hill, nailed to that cross, and put on public display to die, rather than justly killing all those who were wronging Him with more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:52-54) He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

While you and I have lived our lives in active and passive rebellion against God, rather than universally condemning us to eternal death in Hell, He provides a way to redeem us. Like Hosea paying the price to buy his wife back from her battered life of prostitution (Hosea 3:2-3), Christ loved us enough to pay our price and die for our sins (Romans 6:23, 5:8) and conquered death by rising again (1 Corinthians 15:3-6) so that we who trust in Him might live in perfect intimacy with Him forever.

The idea of betrayal involves a breach in trust. God fully knew we would betray Him, yet still sacrificed Himself to purchase our redemption. Now we can

put our full trust in Christ! Is there anyone more trustworthy?

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BACKSTORY BIBLE STUDY

ANTICIPATION



anticipate

verb [with obj.]

1 regard as probable; expect or predict: she anticipated scorn on her return to the theater | [with clause] : it was anticipated that the rains would slow the military campaign.

- guess or be aware of (what will happen) and take action in order to be prepared: they failed to anticipate a full scale invasion.
- look forward to: Stephen was eagerly anticipating the break from the routine of business.

2 act as a forerunner or precursor of: he anticipated Bates's theories on mimicry and protective coloration.

- come or take place before (an event or process expected or scheduled for a later time).
- react or respond to (someone) too quickly, without giving them a chance to do or say something.
- pay (a debt) before it is due.

I Everyone is anticipating something. We all have something we are looking forward to. Anticipation is a universal experience and it's often the hoping for tomorrow that gets us through today. **What are you anticipating? What are you looking forward to?...holding out for?**

The answer to these questions tell a lot about you: your values, hopes, dreams, and fears. The weekend,

going home to be with your family, graduation, a date, your (eventual...you hope) wedding, future family, or the perfect job. Or maybe you're Gleeking out over the next episode of Glee. Fortunately, we aren't here to judge...

In the movie *The Christmas Story*, Ralph was anticipating a Red Rider bb gun. If you've ever seen the movie (and with dozens of opportunities ever Christmas season who hasn't?) you remember how much he longed for that bb gun. It's all he could talk about. He dreamt about it. He wrote a school paper about it. He talked it up with his parents every chance he could get. Hearing "you'll shoot your eye out" didn't hinder his anticipation in the least. And then Christmas morning comes around. Ralph rushes downstairs and opens gift after gift only to find his hopes dashed and a hand made pink bunny outfit instead of his hoped-for bb gun. We've all experienced that, haven't we? You put all your hope in something and you end up standing in a ridiculous pink bunny suit (figuratively, we hope). **What is one example in your life of anticipating something only to get something different? How did you feel? What about a time where you got what you anticipated and it didn't meet your expectations?**

Dashed hopes. Ridiculous consequences. This is the backstory of humanity throughout the bible. In chapter three of Genesis we saw our first father and mother's epic betrayal; the failed attempt to become gods and the breaking of trust with God. The ruining of intimacy. Thankfully, God promised someone to look forward to. He promises in Genesis 3:15 that one day a son will be born who will crush Satan and deliver his people from sin and death. And man has been anticipating him ever since.

God promises, man betrays. That sums up much of



the Old Testament. Over and over God promises a deliverer and over and over humanity attempts to provide their own delivery. They attempt to build a tower to heaven, turn to their children, worship other gods, and ask for a king just to name a few. But they always end up in a pink bunny suit...still anticipating their Messiah (Messiah=anointed one of God).

Into our ridiculous mess, God speaks through his prophets throughout the Old Testament. Prophets were men who spoke the words of God. Often they were simply “forth-tellers,” telling forth what God wanted his people to hear. But they were also “fore-tellers,” telling people what God will do in the future.

There was a pretty high standard for prophets: get it right or die. These prophets were nothing like Nostradamus...their predictions were very specific. Micah 5:2 says “You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from eternity past,” which basically means “the savior who has existed for all eternity will come out of a tiny town in the middle of nowhere.”

This is pretty specific. And if you know the story of Jesus, you know he was born in Bethlehem. Jesus doesn't just meet this one prophecy. In a conservative count he meets over 90 specific messianic prophecies. In his book “Science Speaks,” Peter Stoner uses the science of probability to examine the likelihood of any man meeting 8 prophecies.

The 8 prophecies:

1. Born in Bethlehem
2. Preceded by a messenger
3. Entered Jerusalem on a donkey
4. Betrayed by a friend
5. Sold out for 30 pieces of silver
6. The \$ to be thrown in the house of God and used to buy the potter's field
7. Silent before accusers
8. Crucified with thieves

He found that there was a 1 in 10 to the 17th power chance of someone fulfilling just those 8 prophecies. That's 17 zeroes after the 10! To give you a picture, it would be like spreading silver dollars 2 feet high over the entire state of Texas, marking a random coin, stirring them up (with a huge wooden spoon...just go with it), blindfolding a person and giving him one shot to pick the right coin. That's more unlikely than The

Jersey Shore winning an Emmy.

One of those messianic prophecies is found in Isaiah 62:10-12:

Go through, go through the gates; prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway; clear it of stones;
lift up a signal over the peoples.

Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth:

Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.”

And they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD:

and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.

Zion (the city of Jerusalem and the place of promised salvation) is in shambles. The highways are overgrown and littered with stones, stones that trip up the weary travelers. People are scattered all over the earth. Humanity groans as it waits for the coming savior. Into this darkness God speaks through Isaiah. Salvation is coming. The wait is almost over. He will rename His people. They will no longer be called Desolate and Forsaken. They will be called Sought Out, Redeemed, Holy.

Go Through, Go Through the Gate

In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus says:

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

In order to pass through from death to life, from betrayal to relationship, you must pass through Jesus. Jesus is the gate. He says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Have you passed through Jesus unto eternal life? Describe that experience. Has your walk with God fallen short of, met, or exceeded your expectations? Why?

Romans 14:20 says:

“Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.”



Paul (the author of Romans) is addressing eating food that had been dedicated to pagan altars. He says that food is food and to go ahead and eat...but don't destroy the work of God while you're at it. What is at heart here is living above reproach. Many Christians choose to live less than holy lives (under the excuse of "grace"...read Romans 6 for a rebuttal of this) and by doing so are dragging stones back onto the highway. Remember, Jesus said the way to salvation is hard, but we make it harder when we live like the world. Probably it's not food offered to idols, but: sex, gossip, laziness, drunkenness, piracy (music, not high seas), etc.

Being above reproach means that we build bridges to the Gospel instead of barriers. We build up the highway instead of dragging stones back onto it.

What barriers have you dragged onto the highway with your lifestyle? (Be honest, we all do this!) What do you need to do in order to build up the highway for your friends, classmates, neighbors, family to hear the Gospel with open hearts?

2 Corinthians 5:20-12 says:

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

People are natural evangelists. Even the most awkward of us love telling people about things we love. Bands, shows, movies, restaurants, teams. If you are a Christian, you are an ambassador. It's not a question of if you are, but what kind of ambassador are you.

What do you talk about the most? What message do you think people associate with you? How are you doing at lifting up the signal (proclaiming the Gospel)?

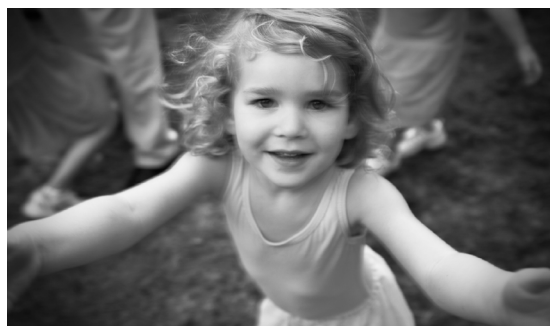
Everybody is anticipating something. You have the message of hope, the only message that won't leave people standing at the bottom of the stairs in a pink bunny costume.

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BACKSTORY BIBLE STUDY

PURSUIT



pursue

verb

1 I pursued him through the garden: follow, run after, chase; hunt, stalk, track, trail, shadow, hound, course; informal tail. ANTONYMS avoid.

2 pursue the goal of political union: strive for, work toward, seek, search for, aim at/for, aspire to. ANTONYMS eschew.

3 he had been pursuing her for weeks: chase, run after, go after; informal make up to; dated woo, court, romance.

4 she pursued a political career: engage in, be occupied in, practice, follow, prosecute, conduct, ply, take up, undertake, carry on. ANTONYMS shun.

5 we will not pursue the matter: investigate, research, inquire into, look into, examine, scrutinize, analyze, delve into, probe.

We pursue what we desire most

Every good story involves pursuit. Romeo pursues Juliet. The Capulets pursue Romeo. Juliet (apparently) dies, Romeo pursues her into death. Juliet wakes up and sees Romeo (actually) dead and Juliet pursues him into death. Not a pretty picture, but one that resonates...largely due to our shared experience of pursuit. And our innate understanding that pursuit requires sacrifice.

We all pursue something. There is a reason you pull yourself out of bed to go to class. You are pursuing a good grade. Or a good degree. Or a good job. Or your parents' acceptance. Or status in the world. Or comfort. Or, most likely, all of the above. And what we pursue is what we desire most. This is why we are willing to sacrifice just about anything to get it.

What (or who) are you pursuing? What are you hoping to gain from your pursuit? What kind of sacrifices have you made along the way? What kind of sacrifices do you anticipate making?

The story of the Gospel is no different. There is pursuit and there is sacrifice. Only you are the prize that God is in pursuit of. The story of Jonah is a pre-story of the Gospel.

Read Jonah 1:1-3:

Many of us are like Jonah: we're religious, we've seen God at work, and we keep all the rules. And like Jonah, many of us run from God's presence, plan, and purpose in and for our lives.

Why do you think Jonah ran away from God's presence? Can you think of a time you ran from God? What were you afraid of?

Read verses 4-6:

In the midst of danger and fear the mariners cried out to their false gods. Nowadays you'd be hard pressed to find an idol worshiping mariner...but if we look closely we find ourselves represented by these men. In "Counterfeit Gods," Tim Keller defines idols (false gods) like this: "it is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and

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imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give...an idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, 'If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure.' We all can identify with placing more importance on something or someone than on God.

What do you turn to most often in the midst of fear and danger? What about in the midst of peace and happiness? Aside from God, what do you most often look to for meaning and value?

Read verses 6-17

God pursues what He desires most. He pursues the religious legalists (Jonah) and He pursues the lawless idolaters (mariners). We often think the story of Jonah is about a great big fish when it's really about a great big God who is willing to use great big means to save great big sinners.

How has God pursued you? What means did He use to save you? As a response to His pursuit, what do you need to stop pursuing? How could it look for you to pursue God with your life this week?...this semester?...this year?

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BACKSTORY BIBLE STUDY

SACRIFICE



What's the most ridiculous picture, image or statue of Jesus you've ever seen?

Why do you think people try to create images (either positive or negative) of Jesus so often? More so than any other public figure throughout history!

The common theme in our lives we're discussing today is Sacrifice. When does sacrifice seem pointless or illogical? When it doesn't produce anything, when something was sacrificed in vain or someone sacrifices for the wrong cause (i.e. suicide bombing)

We sacrifice for things that are important to us. If what's important to you is losing weight, you sacrifice food and comfort. If what's important to you is athletic achievements, you sacrifice your own body to reach your goals. If it's your country, it could be your life. If it's cars, it's money. If it's education, it's time and money. If it's money, you sacrifice time, more money, relationships, and in some cases your moral character to get it. Oftentimes people sacrifice personal interactions with real people for the safety, ease, and lack of risk that comes with developing relationships through social networking and blogging. Or vice versa, they become willing to sacrifice the persona

they put on display or risk the reputation they've built to get out there and meet people. Sites like match.com and eharmony.com base their success on people being willing to sacrifice their pride in their search for intimacy. In fact I think it's pretty safe to say that in order to get anything worthwhile or valuable in life, something else needs to be sacrificed. This even rings true in nature...

*Another seed did bite the dust
To feed the ground and nourish us
And that is how the cycle goes
So much life and death happening beneath our toes.
From "With You" by The Beekeepers*

Do you think that the statement "In order to get anything worthwhile or valuable in life, something else needs to be sacrificed" is true? Why or why not?

What are some sacrifices you've made in life to get something worthwhile? Why was it worth it to you?

What is the one thing we all sacrifice for? What in life requires the most sacrifice? What drives us to be willing to make sacrifices?

*The answer is love. Love is the driving force. We love things, people, or ourselves so we're willing to sacrifice. Where our love is, there our sacrifice will be also. *Use some examples people shared to drive this home. e.g. "You said you've sacrificed eating meat. That is most likely because you love animals, or the health benefits enough to make the sacrifice worthwhile to you."**

In chapter 17 of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry has his first face to face encounter with Voldemort who is the embodiment of evil (Satan if



you will). Voldemort had possessed a professor at Harry's school named Quirrell. During the climax of their encounter Voldemort was inciting Quirrell to kill Harry, yet every time he put his hands on Harry they were agonizingly and instantly burned to blistering. Harry picked up on this and, despite the pain he too felt while touching Voldemort's cohort, stood up to the embodiment of evil and staved off his adversary. As Harry was recovering he asked his mentor Dumbledore, "Why couldn't Quirrell touch me?" Dumbledore's response was profound:

"Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign...to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever... Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good." (p. 299)

Harry's mother sacrificed her life for her son because of her love for him, and it changed him forever.

That is a fictional story, yet the reason why so many people connect with it is because it surfaces desires we all have in our hearts: desires for love, bravery and sacrifice. I think the reality that sacrifice is needed to gain anything worthwhile...all of these sacrifices, whether big or small, are meant to point us to the ultimate sacrifice.

Life's greatest mystery was revealed in love's greatest act. Jesus, the author of life, died for us, taking upon Himself our guilt and atoning for our sin.

Donald Grey Barnhouse was pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and he was driving his family in a car to the funeral of his first wife, who died from cancer.

So his kids were in the car, and a big truck passed by them on the other side of the road. And Barnhouse said to his kids, "Did you see that truck? Did you see the shadow of that truck? Would you rather be hit by the truck, or by the shadow of the truck?" His daughter said, "The shadow." And Barnhouse said, "Kids, the truck of death hit Jesus, so that mommy only has to go through the shadow of death."

Optional: If there's time have different people in the

group read these passages

1 Peter 3:18

Ephesians 5:1-2

Hebrews 7:26-27

Hebrews 9:24-26

Hebrews 10:11-14

2 Corinthians 5:21

Romans 5:10-11

Romans 6:10

We mentioned during the betrayal study that the thing that distinguishes betrayal from simply getting hurt by someone is the matter of choice. When someone betrays they are willingly choosing to hurt someone else. The same principle is true when it comes to sacrifice. The thing that distinguishes sacrifice from passivity or random happenstance is choice. When someone sacrifices they are willingly choosing to lay aside or give up things, experience pain, risk death, rejection, etc. to gain something else exceedingly more worthwhile.

CROSSWORDS.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement. –ROMANS 3:23-25

SINNED: moral failing in thought and action. In what we do, and what we fail to do.

JUSTIFIED: a judiciary term where the guilty party is declared, not only innocent, but morally blameless.

GRACE: a free, unmerited gift, neither earned nor deserved.

REDEMPTION: the price paid to purchase someone out of slavery.

SACRIFICE: religious usage: a substitute takes upon themselves the suffering and judgment of another.

Jesus' death is the ultimate demonstration of God's love. He took upon himself the pain, guilt, death, and condemnation of our sin and betrayal in order to restore a relationship that we have rejected. How can we be sure? God raised Jesus from the dead. He is alive today and offers life to all who would receive it...

Given these definitions, how does Jesus' life, death, and resurrection provide the solution to



our sin and separation from God?

See if they can articulate the answer themselves. Use this if you need to tie it together.

Where we sinned by morally failing in thought and action, Christ never did. In His life, thoughts and actions he perfectly satisfied God's standard of morality, practice and obedience. Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of (or payment for) sin is death. Death can be defined as separation from God. In his death, Christ willingly chose to sacrifice himself for us in order to redeem us from our slavery to sin. He paid our price and in so doing, we who accept the grace freely offered us become justified or declared morally blameless. Christ's sinlessness is applied to us making us worthy to stand before a holy God. And we have assurance of eternal life because Christ didn't stay dead. He defeated death and sin and came back to life. Our faith is based on the fact of the resurrection. The rock our faith stands on is the resurrection! It is a historical event. After rising from the dead he appeared to over 500 people over the course of 40 days before ascending into heaven (I Corinthians 15:3-22). Over 500 eye-witnesses would make an undeniable case in any court of law. The fact is that God sacrificed Himself to provide the solution for our sin and separation from Him.

Conclusion:

Why is Christ better than Harry Potter or Potter's mom? There are myriads of answers to this question. Here's one.

Christ is real. He's alive, living, and active...maybe even right now in your heart! You may already know him personally or maybe you sense that he's pursuing you. How is this possible? Because he rose from the dead. That's what sets him apart. Christianity is not true because it makes you feel a certain way. Christianity is true because Jesus Christ rose from the dead! Potter's mom may have sacrificed her life for her son because she loved him deeply, but that's where it ended. She had no power over death. Once it consumed her that was it (not to mention she's fictional). The same thing can be said for every other religious figure that actually lived. They may have had a dynamic impact on society and religious or ethical thought...but they're dead. Their influence may still be lasting through today...but they're dead. Everyone dies. Even Christ, yet Christ defeated death and sin by rising from the dead, never to die again. He is the only one to ever do that! Potter's mom loved her son so she was willing to die for him. Christ loved us, even though we have given him absolutely NO

reason to, and chose to take our punishment on himself by sacrificing his life. But he went farther than Potter's mother and other religious figures. He defeated death and lives forever offering to redeem us from our sin and inviting us to live with him. The only thing other religions can offer you is rules. Christ through his life, death and resurrection offers forgiveness, justification and life! Sign me up!

Now when you see the image of the cross, what does it mean to you?

Backstory Bible Studies written by:
Matt Baehr & Jesse Furey



BACKSTORY BIBLE STUDY

INVITATION



invite

verb [in'vīt] [with obj.]

make a polite, formal, or friendly request to (someone) to go somewhere or to do something: we were invited to a dinner at the embassy | [with obj. and infinitive] : she invited Patrick to sit down.

- make a formal or polite request for (something, esp. an application for a job or opinions on a particular topic) from someone.
- (of an action or situation) tend to elicit (a particular reaction or response) or to tempt (someone) to do something: his use of the word did little but invite criticism.

In C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*, one of the characters invites the others to follow:

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this...Come further up, come further in!"

C.S. Lewis taps into a longing in all of our hearts: to be invited into something bigger, better, more real and beautiful than what we currently experience. Something that we didn't even know we wanted until

it was offered.

Jesus does it even better: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28 ESV) "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38 ESV)

What are some of the best invitations you've ever received? What made you so excited to be invited?

Read John 6:35-40:

"Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Jesus goes on to compare himself to the manna (bread) that God delivered from heaven to feed Israel during their exodus from slavery in Egypt (if you've seen "The Prince of Egypt" you know what I'm talking about). But, he says, there is a major difference: if you partake of Jesus you will never hunger again! He is the bread from heaven that satisfies for eternity. He knew that it takes a greater satisfaction to drive out the weak things we seek satisfaction from.

He hits some pretty heavy theological points here:



some will see him and not believe, God the Father is actively and effectively drawing people to Him through Jesus, Jesus will never let go of his sheep, and everyone who sees and believes in Jesus will be resurrected and live forever.

How do you feel knowing that Jesus will not let any believer go? Do you act like your salvation is sure in Him? Why or why not? What would change in your relationship with Him if you really believed that He will never let you go?

In his *Confessions*, Augustine said something that applies very well to our bible-belt culture:

“For it is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded ridge...and another to tread the road that leads to it.”

How sure are you that you’ve responded to Jesus’ invitation to come to him with saving faith and aren’t just looking at the land of peace from a wooded ridge?

In Mark 1:15 Jesus explains how to be sure: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Repentance and faith are two sides to the same coin...the coin of our salvation.

Repentance is a sorrow over your sin and a turning to God in obedience through Jesus.

Faith is trusting in the person of Jesus for salvation and eternal life.

There is only one way of salvation described in scripture: by grace (the free gift of the Gospel) alone, through faith (trust in Jesus) alone, in Christ alone. And faith is always accompanied by repentance.

Is repentance evident in your life?...do you hate sin and love God? Is there anything you need to repent of now? What do you think the difference between repentance and perfection is?

At the end of the day, Jesus is inviting all of us to find him more satisfying, more pleasing, more enjoyable than anything else. He may also be inviting you to live a more radical life for him...to give something up that you hold tighter than you hold him...to go somewhere crazy with the Gospel...or to share the Gospel in your own dorm or classes. Only you know what He is inviting you into...

What is Jesus inviting you into that you need to respond to? What will you do?

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BACKSTORY BIBLE STUDY

REUNION



There are two types of reunions.

1. *There are reunions you are obligated to. Usually you're indifferent or you'd rather not go. Sometimes you hate going. Your cheeks get pinched and senior citizens kiss you. But you go anyway because the food is usually good and for some reason it's important to see people you're related to or went to school with. It's important to them at least.*

What was the most awkward or memorable family reunion / holiday get together experience you've ever had?

2. *There are reunions you long for. You count down the days. The thought of it makes you joyful and sad all at the same time...joyful because you have it to look forward to, sad because it hasn't happened yet. You're brimming with anticipation and impatience.*

What are some examples of reunions you or someone else would long for?

They will have their own answers. Here are some examples to get the conversation going if need be: When a loved one comes back safe from war, when lovers in a long distance relationship finally see each other, seeing a loved one in the afterlife...

Do you remember how we defined Intimacy way back at the beginning of this study? Here it is: Intimacy includes all the different dimensions of our lives -- yes, the physical, but also the social, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects as well. Intimacy really means total life sharing. And haven't we all had the desire at one time or another for closeness, for oneness, for sharing our life with someone totally?

The answer to that question is of course, "Yes!" We all desire closeness, oneness, and sharing our lives with someone completely trustworthy. The thing is, mankind had that. We had the perfect version of it, and we lost it. Well, Adam lost it, and consequently so have we.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "We are made in God's image."? What do you think it means? It comes from Genesis 1:26-27. It's how we were originally created.

Do you feel like you reflect God's image very well?

*In his book "You Can Change", Tim Chester describes our image bearing plight and Jesus' response to it, but before we read his quote let's ground ourselves in Scripture. *Have someone read Romans 5:12-21 and someone else read I Corinthians 15:12-21, 45-49* Perfectly clear right? This may help...*

"Jesus came to remake us in God's image. He's the second Adam. Everyone takes their imprint from their father, Adam. We're made in Adam's image. That should have meant we're made in God's image, but in fact it means we're made in the broken image. We all have a built-in bias against God. But Jesus is the second Adam, and all who are united to Jesus by faith are being made new



in Christ's image, the image of God as it should have been. Jesus took our brokenness, our hatred, and our curse on himself on the cross. He took the penalty of our sin and in its place gave us a new life and new love...God is in the business of change. He's interested in making us like Jesus. He's restoring His image in us so that again we can know Him, rule with Him, and reflect His glory." (pg. 17)

And that's the intimacy we long to get back...to be reunited with! Our reunion with Christ is what mankind is longing for deep within, whether we realize it's Christ we're longing for or not. Those of us who know Christ personally know what it means to be joyful and sad all at the same time as we look forward to our reunion with Him; exceedingly joyful because we have it to look forward to, yet anticipatorily sad because it hasn't happened yet.

The climax of the story is still to come, when Jesus returns to judge all with perfect fairness. The unbelieving and disobedient will not enter the life to come. But the forgiven will experience life in all its fullness, enjoying intimacy with God and each other forever.

Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them...He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever. –Revelation 21:3,4

A lot of Christians make heaven the goal when sharing their faith. Like, "Trust Christ and you'll go to heaven instead of eternally burn in hell fire!" or "Put your faith in Jesus and you'll escape judgment!" or regretfully "Don't you want to walk the streets of gold to your mansion in heaven?" While all that is mostly true, it is missing a pretty significant part. I have a close friend who says, "If heaven were made of toothpicks I'd want to be there...because CHRIST is there!" He's the goal. He's our hope. Hell is separation from Him, the Father, the Spirit, goodness, love, joy, peace, intimacy, hope, anything worthwhile...all of it wrapped up in God! The separation, not the flames, is the worst part of hell. The perfect intimacy, not the riches, is one of the best parts of heaven. Who even KNOWS what the best part of heaven will be?!?! Everything will be best! We obtain it through faith in Christ, and longingly anticipate our reunion with Him!

How do we shake off this Adam image and

begin to have God's (the second Adam's) image restored in us? They should be able to explain the basic message of the gospel back to you by this point.

So what do you think? Honestly. Is it true? Do you need Jesus?

Gauge the group and take them through the whole rest of the book if possible. Follow up with them. Answer questions. Pray. Pray. Pray

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