

Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White

Chapter 1

- **Opening Prayer**
[use the opening prayer from the Leader Guide, p. 11]
- **Opening Discussion**
 - Define “Liberal” and “Conservative”
- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...
 - Philippians 3:20; Matthew 28:18; Proverbs 14:34; Daniel 2:21; Proverbs 16:12; Judges 8:23; Proverbs 29:2; 1 Peter 2:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:10; John 18:36
- **Video – Session 1: Where Faith and Politics Meet [15:35]**
 - *Politics comes from politika – “affairs of the city”*
 - Do you agree that politics is about power, distribution, and control?
 - 3 Mistakes when bringing faith into politics:
 - Using religion as a cloak to justify evil
 - Have you witnessed preachers and politicians “using God’s name in vain”?
 - Oversimplifying complex issues
 - How are you guilty of expecting simple answers to complex issues like Social Security, environment, immigration, and national security?
 - Divorcing faith and politics
 - Do you think we try to compartmentalize faith in our pursuit of separation of church and state?
 - Is our church embracing both of these messages of the Gospel:
 - Personal relationship with Christ
 - Justice, civil rights
 - Is either given more attention? Is this good?
- **Chapter 1**
 - Hamilton initially describes his faith journey from Pentecostal church to Oral Roberts University to questioning fundamentalist upbringing to John Wesley and Methodism
 - Have you experienced similar changes in liberal/conservative leanings along your faith journey?
 - [5] Do you find yourself “crossing the line” on traditional liberal/conservative issues? Which ones?
 - Why does this polarity exist in the first place? Is it what humans prefer, or are we being led down this path by external influences (crowd mentality)?
 - What do you admire in liberals? Conservatives?
 - [6] Examples: liberal – broad-minded; conservative – holding on to what is good from the past, cautious about embracing change just for change’s sake
 - Other Reflections?

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Italics imply important points or example answers the leader can convey

Chapter 2

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, help us to focus on what is important to you, rather than being distracted by trivialities in your eyes. It is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- What are the 4 or 5 significant issues facing our country right now?
 - Write them down and then share; everyone should keep track of ones you didn't note
 - *Foreign relations, especially with Russia, Syria, Israel, and the Middle East*
 - *Gun control*
 - *Climate change*
 - *LGBTQ rights*
 - *Medical care (availability, affordability, focus on prevention)*
 - *Education (availability, affordability)*
 - *National debt (funding SS, Medicare)*

- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...

- Isaiah 58:1-10

- **Video – Session 1: Where Faith and Politics Meet [continue discussion from last session]**

- "Our democracy rises or falls based upon the willingness of thoughtful people of moral courage and conviction, people of conscience, to participate in the political process – and that is the connection between faith and politics."
 - In what ways do you feel obliged to participate in the political process as a Christian? To wear your faith on your sleeve in political discussions?
 - Why do you think ancient cultures shied away from democracy?

- **Chapter 2**

- [9] What gnats are we straining when it comes to Christianity? What molehills do we make into mountains?
 - Where have you seen us making positive strides to combat this?
- [10] 2007 Vatican statement by Pope Benedict that "It is nevertheless difficult to see how the title of 'Church' could possibly be attributed to [Protestant communities], given that they do not accept the theological notion of the Church in the Catholic sense and that they lack elements considered essential to the Catholic Church."
 - [11] Are there denominations which you brand as not part of the Christian Church?
- [12] Hamilton says that he doesn't believe all Christians should be United Methodists and that Christianity would be poorer if they were.
 - Do you think John Wesley would agree?
 - Do you agree?
- [13] Does our quest for truth, certainty, and purity of doctrine lead us to a "black and white" mentality?
- "In essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity"
 - Do you believe you know the essentials (vs. doubtful matters)?
- [14] Why does Hamilton say that humility is important in faith? *Gateway to understanding, opens the door to progress*
 - He says he believes certain things to be true, but he also believes he may be wrong.

- Is this the approach you take?
- [16] In what ways do we make God too small?
- [17] Story of Hamilton tossing his Beatles' albums, and comparing it to 32,000 [sic – 21,000] people dying that day due to starvation and malnutrition
 - Do you have a personal story of straining gnats? *What people wear at church functions*
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 3

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, help us to discern the truth from the sea of misinformation that hits us from all sides. In Your name we pray. Amen.

- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...

- Leviticus 19:11; Psalm 119:163; Proverbs 12:22; Proverbs 14:5; Proverbs 17:7; John 8:44; Acts 5:3; Colossians 3:9; 1 Timothy 4:2; Proverbs 6:16-19; Psalm 101:7; Matthew 7:15; Proverbs 12:19; Ephesians 4:25; Exodus 20:16; Proverbs 24:28; Proverbs 19:5; Proverbs 20:17; 1 Peter 3:10; Psalm 58:3; Proverbs 21:6; Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; John 8:32; James 3:6-10

- **Opening Discussion**

- What are the motivations behind lying?
- Is there ever an appropriate time to lie?

- **Chapter 3**

- [19] Hamilton talks about emails with false claims about the ACLU.
 - What have you experienced which is similar?
 - In the face of these, would you describe yourself as a naïve acceptor, skeptical ignorer, or an active fact-checker? Were you ever in another category?
- Fake News
 - Do you consider “fake news” to be an epidemic in our country? What has triggered it?
 - Davidson grad Cameron Harris’s fake news story about an electrical worker stumbling across stacked boxes of ballots pre-marked for Hillary Clinton.
 - Parroted Trumps “rigged election” claims
 - Do you think fake news has significantly influenced presidential elections?
 - What news sources did you find trustworthy before the turn of the century?
 - What news sources do you find trustworthy today?
 - Can anything be done to combat this epidemic?
- [20] Hamilton claims we “find a tendency to speak ill of others when they disagree with our way of seeing the world.”
 - Do you agree?
 - He notes safe places to criticize: when with others of the same mindset; email; blogs; notably *not* face-to-face
 - How is our social media culture fanning the flames of anonymous criticism?
- [21] How have you witnessed the tongue as a fire, polluting the whole body, setting the course of life on fire, and set on fire by hell?
- [22] Hamilton suggests that the Bible’s instruction to curb our tongue-lashings extends to politicians, but that we should still practice discernment. What is the difference between “discernment” and “unwholesome” as Paul would say?
- [23] *Hamilton’s practices of restraint:*

- *Remember the call of Christ to avoid judging and calling names*
- *Search your heart to discover the true motivation for speaking ill of someone*
- *Look for good in the other*

- Remember the biblical call to humility (I may not know all the facts or see things as God does) [Matthew 7:5 – “Hypocrite! First take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”]
 - Other reflections?

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Chapter 4

- **Opening Prayer**
[use the opening prayer from the Leader Guide, p. 33]
- **Video – Session 4: Spiritual Maturity and Seeing Gray [16:51]**
 - *Trust & Love: defining characteristics of a spiritually mature life*
 - Hebrews 11:1 – “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
 - Are you ever frustrated by not knowing with certainty?
 - Unity
 - 3000+ Christian denominations
 - John 17:20-23 [Jesus prays that we are one]
 - Where do you see evidence of Christians as one? Where do you see us as divided?
 - Who are the “great” people in history? What makes them great?
 - *Spiritual maturity – not how important you are, how much you serve*
 - Conservatives across denominations share more than conservatives and liberals within a denomination
 - Do you agree?
 - Do you ever feel out of balance or grounded when you consider only your political side?
 - *6 Stages of Faith Development [ref: Fowler – UMC Minister, Professor of Theology at Emory]*
 - *Intuitive-Projective (preschool; fantasy and reality mix together; basic ideas picked up by parents and society)*
 - *Mythic-Literal (school age; logic; accept stories and understand them in literal ways)*
 - *Synthetic-Conventional (teens; all-encompassing belief system to pull different social circles together; don’t see outside their box)*
 - *Individuative-Reflective (young adulthood; tough; see outside the box; critically examine belief system; viewed by Stage 3 as “backsliders”)*
 - *Conjunctive (mid-life; realize limits of logic; see life as a mystery and return to sacred stories without being stuck in a theological box) Hamilton - broader, wider, no longer simplistic, recognizing truth in both sides – accepts paradox; capacity to see the world in mystery; comes with humility and grace [Billy Graham]*
 - What’s your reaction to Billy Graham’s quote?
 - Billy’s daughter: “Experience and the living of a life can soften your perspective.”
 - How does this compare to what you hear from Franklin Graham
 - Universalizing (few; live lives in full service to others without real worries or doubts)
 - Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
 - With which parts are you successful? Not?
- **Chapter 4**
 - Which things have taught you more about God than church or Sunday School? *Hamilton’s example of his girls*
 - [32] Those starting on the left mature by embracing doctrinal formulations and convictions.
 - Did you start out more on the right or the left?
 - Have you found yourself moving to the center? In what ways?
 - Other reflections?

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Chapter 5

- **Opening Prayer**

Dear Lord, help us become more aware of the “sweet spots” in our faith that we might strive to live with You in harmony. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- When have you experienced a sweet spot in sports?
- When have you felt you were in a sweet spot in life?

- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...

- Jeremiah 31:31-34
 - In what ways is this covenant being realized now? In what ways is it not?

- **Chapter 5**

- Oral Roberts vs. SMU
 - Where have you experienced similar extremes in legalism and libertinism?
- [36] *Sweet spot of Christianity: grace vs. holiness; faith vs. works; legalism vs. libertinism*
- [38] “...rather than following a set of laws dictating to us what the right thing is, we must be led by the Spirit; and with the joy of the already forgiven, rather than the fear of those hoping to be forgiven, we seek to please the Lord.”
 - Which leads your Christian life more - the Spirit with the joy of already being forgiven or fear of not pleasing God and not being forgiven as a result?
- [38] Romans 6:15 – “What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!”
 - What’s your reaction to this passage?
- [39] Galatians 3:2 – “Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?”
 - Reaction?
- [41] Paul channels Jesus by saying the whole law is summed up by “You shall love you neighbor as yourself.”
 - Is this enough direction to new Christians?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 6

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, help us to be more quick to listen and slow to speak, both with you and with everyone. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

- **Video – YouTube: [Ted Talk by Julian Treasure](#) [7:50]**

- *Silence/Quiet – 3 minutes*
- *The Mixer – How many channels of sound can I hear?*
- *Savoring – Mundane sounds can be interesting (“the hidden choir”)*
- *Listening Positions (perhaps most important)*
 - *Active/passive*
 - *Reductive/expansive*
 - *Critical/empathetic*
- *Receive Appreciate Summarize Ask (RASA)*
- Have you ever had instruction on listening, in school or elsewhere?

- **Opening Discussion**

- Are you a talker or a listener?
- What are the characteristics of a good listener?
From Dietrich Bonhoeffer [and others]...
 - *Patience – avoid “a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say.”*
 - *Act of Love*
 - *Asking perceptive questions*
 - *Ministry*
 - *Prepares us to speak well (“We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God”)*
 - *Reflects relationship with God*

- **Scripture – Have volunteers read...**

- James 1:19; Proverbs 1:33, 2:1-5, 5:1-2, 10:8, *10:19*, 12:15, 17:27, 17:28, 18:2, 18:13, 19:20, 19:27, 20:12, 21:23, 25:12, Matthew 4:4, 7:24, 11:15; Mark 4:24, 9:7; Luke 8:21, 11:28; Romans 10:17
- ***Listen to the other verses. Don't worry about reading your verse until it's your time.***

- **Chapter 6**

- When are you least likely to listen to your friends?
- When are you least likely to listen to God?
- What proportion of your time do you spend listening/reading reinforcing media vs. contrarian media?
- [44] Similar to *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* – resist the urge to respond with solutions, but rather just listen.
 - Have you seen this played out in your experiences?
 - Is it just a male/female thing?
- Which clergy in your life have you witnessed practicing effective listening techniques?
- [45] Hamilton's research into other denominations, and conducting their worship practices each Sunday in his own church.
 - Does this sound appealing to you?

- How well would it be received at our church?
- Would we be at risk of losing members? Is that a bad thing?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 7

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, speak to us this day in a tongue we can understand. Let your Holy Spirit come down upon us and provide the inspiration we so crave from you. In Christ's holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- What experience do you have with Pentecostal Christians?
 - With speaking in tongues?

- **Scripture – Read 1 Corinthians 14**

- *Tongues*
 - *speaking to God*
 - *building oneself up*
 - *seek an interpreter*
 - *sign for unbelievers*
- *Prophesying*
 - *speaking to people*
 - *building others up*
 - *better of the two*
 - *sign for believers*
- *Pray with the spirit *and* the mind*
- [22-25] Why does Paul say tongues are a sign not for believers, but for unbelievers?
- [34-36] How do you deal with these verses? Do they diminish Paul's significance?

- **Chapter 7**

- [48 1st p. & Inset] – Is this no longer present at your church?
 - In what ways are we still “predictable”?
- Hamilton conveys the story of Frances never actually once feeling God's presence.
 - What would you say to Frances?
- [49] What's your reaction to the prerequisite for baptism in the Pentecostal church to be speaking in tongues?
- [50-51] UMC described as having a “quiet reverence” and being “a bit reserved.”
 - In what ways do you find this true/false?
- Pentecostal woman's instruction about not being a pastor because he had a keen intellect.
 - What are the job qualifications to being an effective pastor?
 - How much education is required?
- [54] Wesley's balance between *enthusiasm* (to be filled with God) and *intellect*.
 - Wesleyan quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, experience
 - Do any seem more or less important to you?
- [55] Pentecostal legacy: Holy Spirit – In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 8

- **Opening Prayer**
Lord God, help us to grasp what you would have be at the core of our faith. We long to grow closer to you, and look for your light to help us focus on what strengthens our relationship. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.
- **Opening Discussion**
 - If you were on a deserted island and could have only one Bible translation, what would it be?
- **Video – YouTube:** [Erik Heen 1-conservative-liberal-Bible](#) [7:50] Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia
- **Chapter 8**
 - [62] Fundamentalism vs. Modernism
 - Do you consider each of the 5 “fundamentals” to be essential to the Christian faith?
 - *Inspiration of the Bible (as defined by the doctrine of inerrancy)*
 - *Virgin birth*
 - *Atonement*
 - *Bodily resurrection*
 - *Reality of Jesus’ miracles*
 - Would you agree with the goals of Fundamentalism (evangelism) and Modernism (societal transformation) that Hamilton portrays?
 - [64] What is your reaction to the authorship of certain books being questioned (e.g. Moses)?
 - What is your reaction to the Jesus Seminar in which NT scholars voted on which of the red letters were really said by Jesus?
 - [66] If inerrancy was the only way the Christian faith treated the Bible, would it drive you away from the faith?
 - Would the complete lack of divine inspiration in Christian faith’s treatment drive you away?
 - [69] Viewing the Bible like the Eucharist – written by human hands but used by God to transform us
 - Does this make sense to you?
 - Other reflections?
- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...
 - 2 Peter 1:16-21; 2 Timothy 3:14-17
 - Do you agree with Peter and Paul in these letters? Why or why not?

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Chapters 9 & 10

- **Opening Prayer**

Dear God, we thank you for the gift of your creation, and ask that you help us with a faith that includes both your Word and science. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- How do you reconcile science and the Bible?

- **Scripture – Read Genesis 1:26-31**

- **Chapter 9**

- [74] *Church's mistakes with Galileo:*
 - *Failing to understand the relationship between science and the Bible*
 - *Judging scientific theory based on a literal reading of Scripture*
 - *Believing it was the church's responsibility to approve/disapprove scientific theories*
- God delights in our pursuit of understanding the universe. He doesn't just give us the answers.
 - Can you relate this to the way you raised your children?
 - Why didn't you just feed them the answers?
- [75] "The Bible was written to reveal who God is, and to teach us something about ourselves. It was not written to reveal the fundamental laws of physics, chemistry, or biology."
 - Agree? Does it help to understand why the Bible shouldn't be a science textbook to explain creation?
- [76] *Read the quote.* Science: physical realm; Religion: ultimate questions; Both: reality
 - Does this make sense?
- Could you live in a world where your knowledge was drawn purely from the Bible? From science?

- **Book – Chapter 10**

- Were you taught evolution as a science/fact or as a theory in school?
 - Has that affected your faith?
- 4 reasons why people don't accept evolution:
 - *Contradicts literal reading of the creation story*
 - *Diminishes the role of God in creation*
 - *Proposes a closer association with other life forms*
 - Do you agree that these three can be reconciled with Christianity?
 - *Claims it is an unsupervised and impersonal process*
 - [81] Read the quote – Do you agree that this can't be reconciled with Christianity?
- [82] *Additional philosophical claims, introduced by scientists (Richard Dawkins – ethologist, evolutionary biologist, "meme", The God Delusion) – "purposeless" "indifference"*
- 3 Christian responses to evolution:
 - *Creation Science*
 - *Treats Genesis as "historical record."*
 - Is that the way you view the Bible?
 - *Faculty include 8 PhDs in various scientific fields*
 - *Intelligent Design*

- *Accept the earth is > 10K years old*
- *Accept some of the principles of evolutionary theory*
- *Complexity in life cannot be explained by evolution*
- *The complexity suggests an intelligent plan by a creator*
- *Theistic Evolution*
 - *Evolution explains the process by which God brought about life on the earth*
 - *Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants, a few fundamentalists*
- What are your perspectives on the above 3?
- What do you think about Hamilton's perspective on:
 - God intervened in evolution at specific points (e.g., hominids → humans with a higher consciousness & soul)
 - How the very first life forms came to exist
 - Ultimate origins "before the Big Bang"
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 11

- **Opening Prayer**
Lord Jesus, come to us. We know we are an imperfect group of followers, and we ask that you refocus us on what matters to you. In Your name we pray. Amen.
- **Opening Discussion**
 - What characteristics would you use to describe Jesus?
- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...
 - Luke 4:18; Matthew 11:28-30
- **Chapter 11**
 - *Different ways the church describes Jesus (social gospel vs. personal relationship gospel)*
 - *Revolutionary / Judging by what we do / Servanthood / Love your enemies / social justice*
 - *Personal Lord and Savior / Save the lost / Die for our sins / Born again*
 - Which of the two ways exhibits God's grace, God's love? Which promotes evangelism?
 - [91] Jesus doesn't directly address social reform (women's rights, slavery, government oppression). His primary opponents were religious leaders of the time.
 - He plants the seeds and lets us infer the need for social change
 - Why do you think he didn't more directly champion these causes?
 - [92] Jesus doesn't directly address the need for a personal relationship with him.
 - He does speak about him being the vine and us being the branches
 - How important is a personal relationship with Jesus to you?
 - [93] "I fear that if Jesus came to our towns today, he would not sit for long in our churches."
 - Do you agree? Are we Pharisees on Sunday?
 - Where would we find Jesus sitting today?
 - [95] Jesus refused to conform to any specific religious mold.
 - Do you agree?
 - Do you think he expects us to follow suit?
 - How do you do so when attending the same services each week?
 - Other Reflections?

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Chapters 12 & 13

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, help us to broaden our perspective to the salvation of your whole creation, including those who don't label themselves as Christian. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- If you were to pick a faith which was furthest from Christianity, what would it be?

- **Video – YouTube:** [About "When Christians Get It Wrong"](#) [9:46]

- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...

- Genesis 9:13; Jonah 4:11; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 60:3; Revelation 21:24; John 14:6; John 3:5; John 3:18

- **Chapter 12**

- Christian exclusivism vs. universalism
- [bottom 97] Read “There are hundreds of millions...did not call upon him for salvation.”
- [bottom 98] Read “On the converse...freedom to choose or reject him.”
- We already see this in shades of gray
 - Who are others that might be at Hitler's level of evil? [ref: listovative.com] Stalin, Vlad Tepes (Dracula in mid-1400s), Osama Bin Laden, Ivan the Terrible, Saddam Hussein, Pol Pot, Mao Zedong, Hirohito, Genghis Khan, Kim Il Sung, Ayatollah Khomeini
 - Is there any way you see any of these as embraced/forgiven by God?
- [100] OT is a story of Hebrews as well as other people through whom God works
 - Could God be so focused on the Hebrews as to exclude a relationship with other nations? *Story of Ninevah*
- [106] “God can apply the saving work of Jesus to anyone God chooses to apply it to.”
- [107] *Jesus speaks in prophetic hyperbole*
- [108] What do you see the true purpose of missionary work to be?
 - *Evangelism shouldn't equal blackmail*
 - *Inclusivism*
- [111] Read Billy Graham quote “Those are decisions...”

- **Chapter 13**

- *3 Dimensions of Hell which are disturbing:*
 - *Good people sent there*
 - *Torture and punishment for its inhabitants*
 - *Eternal punishment*
- Jesus speaks of the “Last Judgment.”
 - Do you agree with Hamilton that the above are hyperbole?
- [115] Jesus specifies those who are going to hell: “fool”, lust, hypocritical religious leaders, bad stewards, unhelpful religious leaders
 - Who might avoid all of these characteristics?
 - Would other religions?
- What do you think hell is like, if there is such a thing?
- [118] Hamilton – “a place filled with the self-absorbed, absent of nearly all goodness, darkened as we would expect by the desire to be as far away from God's reign as possible.”

- Do you see hell as a sort of place to work out God's redemption? How is this different from Catholicism's purgatory?
- [119] Read final paragraph and final sentence
- Other Reflections?

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Chapter 14

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord, frequently we don't understand when bad things happen to good people. We know you love us and wish the best for us always. Help us to remember that as we cope with tragic events around us. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- Where did you get your visions/understanding of hell?

- **Video – YouTube: [What is Hell?](#) [4:41]**

- Reactions?

- **Scripture – Have volunteers read...**

- Matthew 3:12, 5:22, 5:30, 10:28, 13:41-42, 13:50, 18:8, 18:9, 23:33, 24:51, 25:41, 25:46
- Why do you think Matthew wrote so much about Jesus talking about hell?
 - *Eschatological*
 - *More Jesus speeches*
 - *Written for the Hebrews*

- **Chapter 14**

- Deism (initial, but no longer directly involved) vs. Theological Determinism (everything planned)
 - Do you or others you know fall into either of these camps?
- [122] "Everything happens for a reason" / "It must be God's will"
 - How do you respond to these sayings?
- [123] What does Hamilton say is the problem with Deism? *Goes against a Bible in which God continues to appear and knows us by name*
- What does Hamilton say is the problem with Theological Determinism? *Uses life examples like 8-year-old girl who was raped by two adults. Could there be any greater good that justified this action? Also story of Gary and Danny – roofers hitting power line, and Gary saving 3 others.*
- Do you think God ever punishes someone for sin with death?
- Do you think God ever calls someone to be with him because he loves them so much?
- Do you agree with Hamilton's mother-in-law that "sometimes things like this just happen"?
- [127] God didn't make the tragedy [Gary and Danny] happen, but forces good to result from it.
 - Can you think of events where this is true? *Jesus being crucified*
 - Has God caused anything good to come from hurricane destruction?
 - Did God cause anything good to come from 9/11?
- [128] God *can* intervene, but normally chooses to guide us indirectly, and clean up after us.
 - Do you agree?
- [129] *God's perspective is more vast/eternal than our microscopic perspective. God also understands the promise of resurrection.*
- [131] *Father of killed 3-year-old son – "...faith doesn't fix problems, but it helps you to cope and survive, and eventually grow through the inevitable tragedies that everyone will have to face."*
Mother – "I no longer have a naïve, childlike faith where God protects you from all harm... It's a deeper faith that has been tested... God doesn't promise me a pain-free life, but he does promise to always be there to love me, comfort me, and guide me."
- Other Reflections?

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Chapter 15

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we admit that sometimes we have our doubts. Bolster our faith and help us work through these times. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- What are some examples of bad things happening to good people that you don't understand?

- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...

- Psalm 10:1-2; 13:1-3; Psalm 10:14-18; Romans 8:28

- **Video** – YouTube: [Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen? \[7:32\]](#)

1. God deems retention of our freedom as greater good than momentary suspension of freedom for safety/security
 2. God can bring about greater good
- Reactions?

- **Chapter 15**

- With what aspects of your faith do you experience doubt upon occasion?
- Was there a period in your life when you experienced the most doubt?
- [134] Do you “fear doubt”?
- How do you deal with your doubt?
- *Hamilton poses 3 responses:*
 - *Reject everything and turn away from God altogether*
 - *Suppress questions and retreat to an “intractable” (hard to control) faith of inerrancy*
 - *Face doubt head-on; may be truth/untruth in what we were taught*
- [135] In what ways do you struggle with your children's questioning of faith?
 - *Proverbs 22:6 “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.”*
- [136] Quote from Os Guinness (2nd paragraph in quotes)
 - Does this work for you?
- Think of people from the Bible who doubted. *Thomas, Gideon, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Disciples*
- [137] Have you ever found yourself paralyzed by doubt?
- Other Reflections?

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Chapter 20

- **Opening Prayer**

Dear Lord, we wish we lived in a world without war, and ask that you help us to understand your desire for how to deal with conflict. In Christ's holy name. Amen.

- **Opening Discussion**

- What is your memory of the Vietnam or Iraq War?

- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...

- Matthew 26:52; Ecclesiastes 3:8; Matthew 5:9; Matthew 10:34; Matthew 24:6-7; Psalm 144:1; Romans 13:4; Matthew 5:44; Hebrews 12:14; Luke 6:27-29; Deuteronomy 20:1; Matthew 10:28; Exodus 15:3; Romans 14:19; 1 Samuel 15:3; Exodus 20:13; Romans 12:18; Leviticus 19:18; Isaiah 2:4; Numbers 10:9; Matthew 5:21-22; Numbers 31:2; Matthew 5:7; John 14:27

- **Chapter 20**

- Can war be justified? If so, what are your characteristics of justifiable war?
- Does the type of weaponry come into play? (nuclear, ground, drones, air) Why?
 - Were Hiroshima and Nagasaki justified?
- How does your faith enter into answering these question?
- *UMC Social Principles on Military Service: We deplore war and urge the peaceful settlement of all disputes among nations. From the beginning, the Christian conscience has struggled with the harsh realities of violence and war, for these evils clearly frustrate God's loving purposes for humankind. We yearn for the day when there will be no more war and people will live together in peace and justice. Some of us believe that war, and other acts of violence, are never acceptable to Christians. We also acknowledge that many Christians believe that, when peaceful alternatives have failed, the force of arms may regretfully be preferable to unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide. We honor the witness of pacifists who will not allow us to become complacent about war and violence. We also respect those who support the use of force, but only in extreme situations and only when the need is clear beyond reasonable doubt, and through appropriate international organizations. We urge the establishment of the rule of law in international affairs as a means of elimination of war, violence, and coercion in these affairs.*

We reject national policies of enforced military service as incompatible with the gospel. We acknowledge the agonizing tension created by the demand for military service by national governments. We urge all young adults to seek the counsel of the Church as they reach a conscientious decision concerning the nature of their responsibility as citizens. Pastors are called upon to be available for counseling with all young adults who face conscription or who are considering voluntary enlistment in the armed forces, including those who conscientiously refuse to cooperate with a system of conscription.

We support and extend the ministry of the Church to those persons who conscientiously oppose all war, or any particular war, and who therefore refuse to serve in the armed forces or to cooperate with systems of military conscription. We also support and extend the Church's ministry to all persons. This includes those who conscientiously choose to serve in the armed forces or to accept alternative service. When persons choose to serve in the armed forces, we support their right to adequate care for injuries suffered, and advocate for sufficient resources to meet their physical and mental health needs, both during and after their service. We are aware that we can become guilty both by military action and by conscientious objection, and that we all are dependent on God's forgiveness.

- *UMC Social Principles on War and Peace: We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy. We oppose unilateral first/preemptive strike actions and strategies on the part of any government. As disciples of Christ, we are called to love our enemies, seek justice, and serve as reconcilers of conflict. We insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to work together to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them. We advocate the extension and strengthening of international treaties and institutions that provide a framework within the rule of law for responding to aggression, terrorism, and genocide. We believe that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities; that the militarization of society must be challenged and stopped; that the manufacture, sale, and deployment of armaments must be reduced and controlled; and that the production, possession, or use of nuclear weapons be condemned. Consequently, we endorse general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.*
- *Just War theory (tradition traced as far back as ancient Egypt)*
 - *Just cause*
 - *Lawful authority*
 - *Just intent*
 - *Last resort*
 - *Reasonable hope of success*
 - *Discrimination (of non-combatants)*
 - *Proportionality*
- What are some historical examples of justifiable war? Do they meet the above criteria?
- What are some examples of unjustifiable war?
- Do we tend to rationalize war in retrospect, as opposed to justify in advance?
- Should a Christian be able to opt out of fighting in a war based on their beliefs (e.g., the Amish)?
- Other Reflections?

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Chapter 21

- **Opening Prayer**

[use the opening prayer from the Leader Guide, p. 27]

- **Opening Discussion**

- Which presidents wore their Christianity on their sleeve?
 - *Carter*
 - *James Garfield (only clergyman – Disciples of Christ) [assassinated after 6 months by a religious zealot]*
 - *William McKinley (also shot)*
 - *Woodrow Wilson*
 - *John Quincy Adams*
- Who do you consider the presidents who modeled Jesus' teaching?

- **Video – Session 3: How Should We Live? The Ethics of Jesus [19:21]**

- How have the "Culture Wars" appeared at your church?
- Do you think the 60s are at the root of the bipartisanship we see today?
- If you agree with the pendulum swings, where do you think we are today between left and right?
- Do you think you look for the "Via Media" or are you one of the outer balls?
- *4 Ways to deal with the culture war:*
 - *Reject the culture*
 - *Accommodate the culture*
 - *War against the culture*
 - *Courageous witness through sacrificial love*
- Jesus had already spoken against adultery, yet he doesn't condemn the woman → grace
 - Where is the church practicing this sort of "radical love" today?

- **Chapter 21**

- Pew Research
 - Half say it's important for the president to share religious beliefs
 - 40%/27% say there's too little/much religion discussion by political leaders
 - 1 president from nation's largest denomination
- What role does your faith play when you "pull the lever" on Election Day?
 - What was your reaction to Mitt Romney's Mormonism
- What are the critical qualifications to be president?
 - *Hamilton's analogy of choosing a brain surgeon*
- *Important questions Hamilton poses:*
 - *Is the person earnestly a Christian, or just professing for political expedience?*
 - *What kind of Christianity does the candidate embrace?*
 - *Is being a devout Christian enough to make one a great president?*
 - *Can one be an excellent president and not be a devout Christian?*
- Could you elect an atheist?
- Other Reflections?

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Chapter 22

- **Opening Prayer**
[use the opening prayer from the Leader Guide, p. 41]
- **Opening Discussion**
 - What makes you proud about our country?
 - What makes you embarrassed about our country?
- **Video** – YouTube: [The Newsroom - America is not the greatest country in the world anymore](#) [4:48]
 - Have you ever felt this way?
 - Do you have a rebuttal?
- **Scripture** – Read Matthew 25:31-46 (emphasis on verse 32 – “nations”)
- **Chapter 22**
 - Do you view our country as gluttonous and wasteful?
 - Has this changed over the course of your lifetime?
 - Do you view our country as generous and selfless?
 - Has this changed over the course of your lifetime?
 - If Christianity serves as a sort of conscience for our nation, what sins should we be surfacing?
 - In what ways has America grown to be “tasteless salt” or a light under a bushel?
 - [bottom of p. 224] War on terror exacerbating terrorists – Do you agree or disagree?
 - [225] Are we in need of a vision?
 - To what visions have we aspired in the past? *man on moon; chicken in every pot; new deal*
 - To what vision should we aspire now? *“Blessed to be a blessing” “The light of the world”*
 - Other Reflections?
- **Scripture** – Have volunteers read...
 - Jeremiah 9:24; Micah 6:8; Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)
- **Video – Session 6: What Would Jesus Say to America? [18:34]**
 - *Mishpat (“justice”)*
 - *Tsedeka (“righteousness”)*
 - *Hesed (“steadfast love, lovingkindness, mercy”)*
 - *No child should go sick; no one should starve*
 - What is the American dream for you?
 - Are we spending too much on our military and too little on diplomacy?
 - How have we gotten into this situation?
 - “For God, everything is spiritual”
 - Does this make sense?
 - Is the prospect of all sides rallying around a common pursuit of justice, righteousness, and kindness within our reach?
 - Is this what our Founding Fathers did?
 - Other reflections?

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