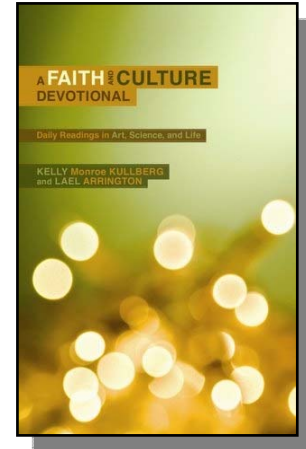


# **A Faith and Culture Tour de Force: How Great Ideas, Events & People Speak to Today's Challenges**

## **Topical Group Discussion Guide for *A Faith and Culture Devotional***

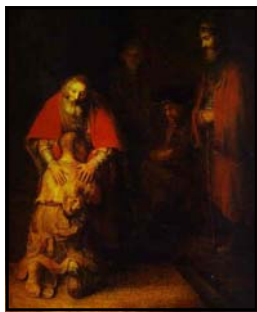
### **A Time to Think/A Time to Wonder: Enjoying the Richness of God and His Work**

*"The glory of God is man fully alive."*—Irenaeus. God invites us to reason rightly, feel deeply and wonder at his works, both in macro—the glory of mountains and waterfalls captured by the Hudson River painters—and micro—the symphony of the minute, incremental order in the Periodic Table of elements. The more we consider the rich nuance and complexity of God at work in the unfolding drama of history, our own souls, and others' (like Blaise Pascal, T.S. Eliot and Julian of Norwich) the more we agree with the Psalmist, "This is the Lord's doing...marvelous in our eyes!" Jesus is the fullest revelation of God's heart and work, pursuing our minds and hearts, transforming our understanding and our imagination so that we might have ever more capacity to experience and enjoy him for eternity.



**Readings:** *The Mind, the Spirit and Power*-John Stott, p. 46; *General Revelation*-Sarah Sumner, p. 57; *The Periodic Table of Elements*-Ben Wiker, p. 173; *The Hudson River School of Painting*-Terry Glaspey, p. 70; *Blaise Pascal*-Kelly and Os Guinness, p. 279; *T.S. Eliot and Julian of Norwich*-Sandra Glahn, p. 285

### **Regrets, PostSecrets and Redemption**



In the challenge of living and loving well we tend to accumulate quite a hidden stash of regrets. Pursuing goodness brings the relief of holiness. And yet, as Tolstoy's life shows us, the burden of relentlessly striving for goodness apart from grace can crush us as surely as the unbridled pursuit of pleasure. In Oscar Wilde's life and on PostSecrets blog we glimpse the deep recesses of regret and how confession opens the door to redemption. Jesus' parable of the prodigal son and Rembrandt's rendering of his return to his Father presses the question: How will we respond to the goodness of the grace of God? Frozen in self-righteousness, or melted by mercy? Will we rejoin the dance of life or simply look on, as all creation sings the praise of his glorious grace?

**Readings:** *Oscar Wilde's Portrait of a Soul*-Kelly, p. 229; *PostSecrets: Extraordinary Confessions of Ordinary People*-Lael, p. 111; *The Virtue of Holiness: A Vivid Thing*-Betsy Childs, p. 221; *Plato*-John Mark Reynolds, p. 62; *Tolstoy*-Philip Yancey, p. 106; *Rembrandt Van Rijn: The Return of the Prodigal Son*-Kelly, p. 108; *Worship: The Red Barn Run*-Kelly, p. 95



**Living the Truth in Love: Building bridges between modern and postmodern sensibilities**

“How can I be confident that what I believe is ultimately real and true?” Those of us with more postmodern sensibilities tend to respond differently than those with more modern sensibilities. The movie *Truman* shows us the relationship between truth and reality and how our illusions and false beliefs are exposed when we hit the wall of reality. So what “counts” for reliable knowledge?

In the public square it’s empirical evidence—what we can test with our senses. The resulting loss of confidence in knowledge about God and what is ultimately good impacts everything from what our Universities teach to the art and architecture we create. We’ll probe the mysteries of God (sovereignty, quantum mechanics) as well as the evidence and reasons to have a proper, rather than a presumptuous, confidence in our knowledge of God and how we might share them with humility. Truth by its nature divides between what is real and what is not. Love sacrifices to bridge the relational divide and bring everyone to the knowledge of God.

**Readings:** *Belief, Knowledge and Truth*, Lael, p. 28; *The Purpose of History* –Lael, p. 276; *God’s Second Word*/Dallas Willard, p. 77; *God’s Middle Knowledge*-William Lane Craig, p. 167; *Quantum Mechanics*-Michael Strauss, p. 227; *The Fact/Value Divide*-Nancy Pearcey, p. 137; *The Modern University*-J.P. Moreland, p. 191; *Post-Modern Architecture*-Gene Veith, p. 232; *The Sociobiology of E.O. Wilson*-Drew Trotter, p. 171; *A Professor Reconstructed*-Mary Poplin p. 244, *The Ultimate Premise*-Phillip Johnson, p. 208; *A Conversation with Muslims*-Erwin McManus, p. 38

**The Sacrament of Struggle**

Perhaps our deepest question for God is, *Are you really good?* Buffeted by loss and pain we may echo the cry of Job: *You seem like my enemy!* We are tempted to flee or settle for living in duty and resignation. God invited Job into something much larger: his sovereign majesty and personal presence. God shows us, as he showed Job and poet Gerard Manly Hopkins, the loving necessity of the fight. And we get a glimpse, in Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*, of the vanity of the easy button.



**Readings:** *A Christian Theory of Everything*-Sam Storms, p. 23; *Theodicy*-Lee Strobel/Peter Kreeft, p. 156; *Malaria*-Michael Behe, p. 159; *Darkness*-Hugh Ross, p. 139; *Gerard Manly Hopkins: The Sacrament of Struggle*-Sue Stewart, p. 161; *Dr. Faustus: The Vanity of the Easy Button*-Lael, p. 86

**Bold, Fresh Vision for Cynical Times**

To read the headlines or ponder so many fractured relationships and dreams we may well wonder: should we hold on to our expectations and dreams or let them go? Is there any real hope for breakthrough or overcoming in *this* life, or do we only get fleeting glimpses? Historically the cultural pendulum has swung



from the optimism of empire building, romanticism and Norman Rockwell to the pessimism of the fall of Rome, realism and Pablo Picasso. Was Jesus, who knew what was in a man better than anyone, a cynic? To better understand the cynic in ourselves and others we'll probe the hidden assumptions of cynicism and how the Word calls us to a "Romantic Realism" that respects the reality of a minor theme of fallenness, suffering and loss, but offers a major theme—a "robust gospel" so strong that "cracked image-bearers can be restored to personal union with God, freed from shame, placed in communion with others, and offered to the world."

**Romantic Realism-Lael Arrington, p. 176; Rome: From Glory to Apathy-Francis Schaeffer, p. 116; Burning Man-Lael Arrington, p. 182; Seeing Through Cynicism-Dick Keyes, p. 119; Major and Minor Themes-John Eldredge, p. 151; Norman Rockwell-Kelly Kullberg, p. 179; Picasso-Kelly/Lael, p. 52; Composing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century-Keith Getty, p. 253; The Small and the Big Gospel-Scot McKnight, p. 273**



### Nurturing Relationships in an Attention Deficit Culture

Surely our greatest treasure is the *presence* of one we love. Yet the tendency to isolation and independence lurks everywhere—in our social networks, families and churches. God shows us, in the way he gives his presence to us, how we can nurture community, practice empathy and make spaces in our fast-paced entertainment culture to give our attentive, tender

presence to others. In the way Van Gogh paints people's eyes he invites us to see the eternal value and potential of others. Trust and self-giving flourish when we nurture oneness with husband or wife and worship with God. We'll explore how that intimacy can be protected so that it can flourish.

**Readings: Rousseau-Nancy Pearcey, p. 225; Life as Entertainment-Lael, p. 54; The Pursuit of Happiness-Catherine Hart Weber, p. 235; Hearing God-Dallas Willard, p. 185; Vincent Van Gogh-Catherine Claire Larson, p. 125; Attention Deficit Culture-Fred Harberg, p. 127; Real Art: The Hope Beyond Ground Zero-Chuck Colson, Makoto Fujimura, p. 287 (and [www.culturedevo.com](http://www.culturedevo.com) blog March 7, 2009); Sex, Intimacy and Worship-Bruce Herman, P. 73**

### God's Purposes, Our Part in the Larger Story

Is our daily experience one of moving further past our prime and promise...or closer to it? We'll probe God's purposes in Scripture and *Paradise Lost*, where Milton parts the curtain on the councils of God and Satan in eternity past to cast a poetic vision of the battle for our hearts. We'll further trace God's purposes in the unfolding drama of creation/fall/ redemption, and finally glimpse the future and hope of the New Earth Jesus is preparing for us. The more we understand God's redemptive plans, the more we come to know his heart. As we trust him and discover his design for us we can live out our unique purposes with vision and passion.



**Readings:** *Paradise Lost*-Gene Veith, p. 34; *Augustine and the City of God*-William Edgar, p. 123; *The Copernican Principle*-Guillermo Gonzalez, p. 103; *Abraham, Father of Three Faiths*-Kelly, p. 25; *Ancient Empires*-Kelly, p. 59; *The Resurrection*-Gary Habermas, p. 113; *The Graying of America: Aging, Dying and Hope*-Kelly/Lael, p. 255; *Heaven*-Randy Alcorn, p. 257;



### **Creating a Culture of Faith and Life**

In these times of economic and emotional scarcity we can do far more than survive. With prayer and a redeemed imagination we can create a culture of faith and life. Use our talents to give generously to others. “The Christian,” Francis Schaeffer reminds us, “is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars!” Culture can be transformed when Christians band together to imagine how to bring God’s kingdom into their sphere of influence. Puritans imagined an entirely new community in a new world. Handel’s inspiration for “The Messiah” freed many from debtors’ prison William Wilberforce in the British Parliament and busy wife and mother Harriet Beecher Stowe with her story-telling gift imagined ways to combat the evils of slavery. The more we cultivate wonder and worship and present our imaginations and gifts to God, the more he inspires us to create a culture of life that transforms both our daily lives and the larger culture around us.

**Readings:** *Art a Response to God's Beauty*-Michael Card/Francis Schaeffer, p. 36; *Handel's Messiah*-Patrick Kavanaugh, p. 199; *New England: A City upon a Hill*-Lael, p. 169; *The Great Awakenings and An Emerging America*-Kelly, p. 241; *Uncle Tom's Cabin*-Joy Jordan Lake, p. 267; *Today's Slavery*-Jodye Hassett Sanchez, p. 271; *U2*-Mark Joseph, p. 165; *The Future and The Wonder of Being*-Charles Malik, p. 289

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Introduction and welcome to the study at Lael and Kelly's Facebook page, A Faith and Culture Devotional.

A Faith and Culture Devotional reviews by Chuck Colson, Internet Monk and others as well as fresh updates also available at [www.culturedevo.com](http://www.culturedevo.com)

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