



Burrowing Deeper:

A Study Guide for Adults & Teens

FROG'S RAINY-DAY STORY and OTHER FABLES

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This free study guide is offered for personal reflection, for facilitating family discussions, and as a teaching resource for small group, classroom, and home school settings. I hope you find it useful for “burrowing deeper” into the personal and cultural applications of these fables.



In joy!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael James Dowling". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Michael James Dowling

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Frog's Rainy-Day Story

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*We're made for a much larger story,
which we miss when we seek our own glory.*

In the beginning of the fable, the letters of the alphabet are clearly unhappy.

- What do *they* think is their problem?
- What do *you* think is their problem?

The letters say they want fame and fortune.

- Why do you think wealth and fame are so important to the letters?
- What can be good about being rich and famous? What can be problematic?

King Solomon of Israel, who was world-renowned for his wealth and wisdom, wrote the following words sometime between 970 and 931 BC:

Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere. (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

- What might the letters in the fable learn from King Solomon's experience?
- What might we learn?

The letters in the fable clearly are feeling restless and discontented.

- Have you ever felt this way?
- What do you think Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD) was getting at when he said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."
- How does it make you feel to know that the God who created all the stars in the sky (Genesis 1:16) loves you and knows every hair on your head (Matthew 10:30)?

In the fable, equality is very important to **a**?

- What point do you think Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., former Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, was making when he said, "I have no respect for the passion of equality, which seems to me merely idealizing envy"?
- Compare and contrast the type of equality Holmes was talking about with the idea expressed in the *Declaration of Independence* that "all men are created equal."

Frog's Rainy-Day Story

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read the following words of the Apostle Paul:

*For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,
so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*

- If you are a Christian, how does it feel to know that because Jesus Christ took your sins upon himself on the cross, God sees you as having the righteousness of Christ?
- What is the difference between doing good deeds to earn God's favor and doing good deeds in response to God's favor?
- What are we saying about our understanding of God's love for us when we attempt to earn God's favor by our good deeds?
- How is our seeking to establish our own righteousness through our deeds actually a denial of Christ's finished work for us on the cross? (Galatians 2:20-2)

In John 13:3-5, we read the following account of Jesus' interaction with his disciples on the night before he was crucified:

Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

- What is unusual about Jesus' behavior?
- What can we learn from Jesus' actions about God's love for us?
- What can we learn from Jesus' example about how we should behave?

What inspiration and guidance can you draw from the following passages of Scripture?

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (The Apostle Paul—Ephesians 2:10)

Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth! Worship the LORD with gladness. Come before him, singing with joy. Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (Psalm 100:1-3)



Duck's Wrong Turn

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*If there's only one way, It's foolish to say
Another way is okay.*

Having the freedom to choose his own way seemed to be very important to Duck.

- Why do you think this was so?
- How important is freedom of choice in our culture?
- Give some examples of how the issue of choice can create tension.

In "Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey (91-744), 505 U.S. 833 (1992)," the Supreme Court of the United States issued a ruling that contained the following statement:

At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.

- What are the spiritual implications of this ruling?
- What are some practical implications?

In John 14:6, Jesus of Nazareth is quoted as saying, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."*

- What do you think Jesus meant by the above statement?
- Why might this statement be offensive to some people and uplifting to others?

Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life." (John 5:39-40)

- What do you think Jesus meant by the phrase "come to me"?
- Why do you think so many people refuse to come to him?

In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, we read the following words of the Apostle Paul:

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.

- When it comes to religion, why do you think so many people follow their own desires?
- What are some possible consequences of wrong choices about spiritual issues?

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

Compare and contrast the following two points of view. Can they both be true?

We all have the same God; we just serve him differently. Rivers, streams, lakes, ponds—all have different names, and they all contain water. So do religions have different names, but they all contain truths—truths explained in different ways and forms and times. It doesn't matter whether you're a Muslim, a Christian, or a Jew. When you believe in God, you should believe all people are part of one family. For if you love God, you can't love only some of his children.

Mohammed Ali, boxer

Quoted at the memorial service for Ali on June 9, 2016, by Ambassador Shabazz, daughter of Malcolm X

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

The Apostle Paul (Colossians 1:15-17)

Compare and contrast the statement below by Rob Bell, American author, speaker, and former pastor, with the above statement by the Apostle Paul (Colossians 1:15-17):

Jesus is bigger than any one religion. He didn't come to start a new religion, and he continually disrupted whatever conventions or systems or establishments that existed in his day. He will always transcend whatever cages and labels are created to contain and name him, especially the one called "Christianity."

What reassurances can Christians gain from passages of Scripture like the following?

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.

This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. (Ephesians 1:4-5)

...you are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession.

*As a result, you can show others
the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness
into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)*



Pig's Unpopular Play

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*Rules are sometimes hard to obey,
But they help keep us from going astray.*

In the fable, Hen claimed to be open-minded.

- What did she mean by this?
- What are the pros and cons of open-mindedness?

Goat said it was only fair that Cow should feel good about her dress.

- What do you think Goat meant by fair?
- In the barnyard, who determines what is fair?
- How can the concept of "fairness" be used to control others?

In the fable, why do you think some of the animals are so opposed to the script?

- What are some kinds of "scripts" (i.e., rules, laws, standards, and beliefs) that influence our daily lives?
- What scripts do you follow that others may disagree with?
- How would you rank the Bible, the U.S. Constitution, the Koran, federal and state laws, and other scripts in terms of influence and importance?
- What kinds of conflicts can arise when people follow different scripts?

Tolerance is a big issue in the fable.

- How much tolerance is there in the barnyard?
- In what ways did Pig, Cow, and Hen demonstrate intolerance?
- What are some effects of too little tolerance?
- What are some effects of too much tolerance?
- Compare and contrast what happened in the barnyard with the current phenomenon that is referred to as *Cancel Culture*.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, the Apostle Paul says the following about love:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

- How might life in the barnyard have been different if the animals had put more emphasis on love?
- How is tolerating someone different from loving someone?

Pig's Unpopular Play

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

In the fable, Cow said that the barnyard was peaceful until Pig pulled out his script.

- Why was there so little peace in the barnyard? Was the script the problem, or was it something else?
- What are the pros and cons of conflict?

Peace is an important theme in the Bible. Compare and contrast the three types of peace discussed in the following passages of Scripture:

For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

The Apostle Paul (Colossians 1:19-20)

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

Jesus of Nazareth (John 14:27)

Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household!

Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 10:34-36)

In the fable, Cow, Hen, and Goat were offended by Pig.

- What do you think caused this offense?
- How did claiming the right "not to be offended" give these three animals control over Pig's freedom of speech and action?

In the stanza of "The Second Coming" below, what do you think poet W. B. Yates is saying?

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.*

- On a practical level, how are Yates's words borne out in the fable?



Turtle's Favorite Turtle

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*Those who puff themselves up in their own eyes,
Are likely to have an unpleasant surprise.*

In the fable, Turtle is very interested in improving himself.

- What is good about Turtle's approach to self-improvement, and what is not so good?
- Why do you think self-improvement is so important to Turtle?

Turtle asserts that he is "on a roll and in control."

- Why do you think control is important to Turtle?
- How much control did Turtle actually have over his life?
- What is the passage below saying about worry, lack of faith, and the need to control?

*Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And why worry about your clothing?
Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon
in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for
wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you.
Why do you have so little faith?*

Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 6:27-30)

Compare and contrast Turtle's boasting with the boasting described in the three passages of Scripture below:

*This is what the LORD says: "Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power,
or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know
me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and
righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken!"*

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD."

The Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 1:31)

*I will praise the LORD at all times. I will constantly speak his praises.
I will boast only in the LORD; let all who are helpless take heart.
Come, let us tell of the LORD's greatness; let us exalt his name together.*

David, King of Israel (Psalm 34:1-3)

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

In Divine Living: *The Essential Guide to Your True Destiny*, psychic Anthon St. Maarten writes the following:

You are one thing only. You are a Divine Being. And all-powerful Creator. You are a Deity in jeans and a T-shirt, and within you dwells the infinite wisdom of the ages and the sacred creative force of All that is, will be and ever was.

- In your own words, what is St. Maarten saying?
- What do you think Turtle would say about St. Maarten's statement? What do you say?

In his *Atlantic Magazine* article titled "The Meaning of Buddhism," Bhikkhu U Thittila writes the following:

The Buddha again and again reminded his followers that there is no one, either in heaven or on earth, who can help them or free them from the results of their past evil deeds. The Buddhist knows that the powers of his own mind and spirit are enough to guide him in the present and shape his future and bring him eventually to the truth. He knows that he possesses a strength which is ultimately unsurpassable.

- Compare and contrast the above philosophy with the previously cited view of St. Maarten above.
- Compare and contrast the above philosophy with the following three statements by the Apostle Paul:

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.
Romans 5:8

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.
Ephesians 2:8-9

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
Galatians 2:20

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/author/bhikkhu-u-thittila/>



Owl's Problem

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*Try to hold onto happiness, and it will surely slip away;
But delight yourself in the Lord, and true joy will come to stay.*

The Dalai Lama is quoted as saying, "The purpose of our lives is to be happy."

- What kind of happiness do you think he is talking about?
- What are some typical ways in which people strive for happiness?
- How well do these approaches work?
- Why is it difficult to find happiness by making happiness a goal?

John 15:10-11 records the following words of Jesus:

*When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy.
Yes, your joy will overflow!*

- What does the above passage tell you about the source of true joy?
- What would you say is the difference between joy and happiness?
- Why does the joy that comes from God never fade away?

In the two passages of Scripture below, the apostles James and Paul give instructions to Christians about how they should deal with difficulties:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

The Apostle James (James 1:2-4)

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

The Apostle Paul (Romans 5:3-5)

- From the passages above, why are Christians able to rejoice in sufferings?
- What is the difference between praising God in spite of your sufferings and praising God for what He is doing *through* your sufferings?

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

German philosopher Frederick Nietzsche said, "I cannot believe in a God who wants to be praised all the time."

- What does this tell you about Nietzsche?
- What kind of God would be worthy of being praised all the time?
- What other reasons have you heard people give for not believing in the God that Nietzsche said he doesn't believe in?

Compare and contrast the comments by American filmmaker Woody Allen immediately below with the words of the Apostle Paul that follow it.

There are some laughs in life, provided by comedians and provided by fortuitous moments with your family or friends or something. But most of life is tragic. You're born, you don't know why. You're here, you don't know why. You go, you die. Your family dies. Your friends die. People suffer. People live in constant terror. The world is full of poverty and corruption and war and Nazis and tsunamis.

The net result is, you lose—you don't beat the house.

From an interview with Douglas J. Rowe, published by the Associated Press on March 25, 2005

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence. So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.

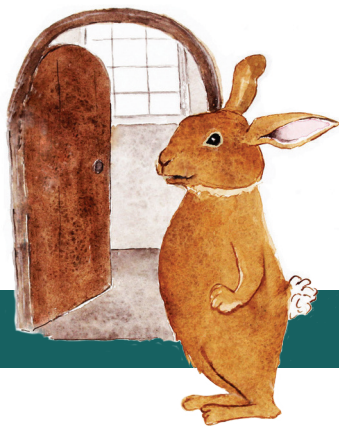
Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully.

Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:12-21



Rabbit's Foxy Guest

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*Those who are wise
Love truth and hate lies.*

In the fable, Rabbit believes that if she is nice to Fox, Fox will be nice to her.

- What is good about this attitude? What can be not so good?
- How did Fox use guilt and pity as manipulative tools to achieve his ends?
- What is the difference between loving someone and being nice to someone?

What problems do you see with each of the following commonly held beliefs?

- "What's true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me."
- "Truth is found inside each of us."
- "There is no such thing as absolute truth."

In *What the Buddha Taught*, Sri Lankan Buddhist monk Walpola Rahula writes the following:

Truth needs no label: it is neither Buddhist, Christian, Hindu nor Muslim. It is not the monopoly of anybody. Sectarian labels are a hindrance to the independent understanding of Truth, and they produce harmful prejudices in men's minds.

- What do you think about Rahula's statement that nobody has a monopoly on Truth?
- What do you think about the rather popular view that all religions are more or less equally true?

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

- Compare and contrast these words of Jesus with the words of Walpola Rahula above.
- How can you know whether Jesus or the Buddha is telling the truth?

As the Apostle Paul emphasizes in the passage below, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a central tenet of the Christian faith:

And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19

- Why is it so important to know whether Jesus' resurrection truly occurred?
- What do you need in order to have confidence in this truth?

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

What do you think about each of the two quotes below?

Nobody in the world possesses absolute truth. This is God's attribute alone. Relative truth is all we know. Therefore, we can only follow the truth as we see it. Such pursuit of truth cannot lead anyone astray.

Mahatma Gandhi, leader of India's independence movement

There is no basis for deciding what counts as knowledge and truth other than what one's peers will let one get away with in the open exchange of claims, counterclaims and reasons.

Richard Rorty, American philosopher

Compare and contrast the two quotes above with the following three statements by Jesus:

You are from below; I am from above. You belong to this world; I do not. That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I AM who I claim to be, you will die in your sins.

John 8:23-24

I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.

John 11:25-26a

You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.

John 20:29

Most Christians would agree that in matters of faith, it's important to put facts before feelings.

- What do you think is meant by this statement?
- When making spiritual decisions, do you generally rely more on beliefs or on experiences?
- What beliefs are most important to you?
- What experiences have been most important to you?



Miss Hen's Boyfriends

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*Our minds invent reasons as places to hide
From ideas that threaten our comfort and pride.*

In the fable, Miss Hen turns down the marriage proposals of all three roosters.

- What do you think about Miss Hen's reasons for rejecting the roosters' proposals?
- How do you like it when people don't give you honest reasons for their actions?
- Why is it sometimes easier to invent excuses than to tell the truth?

The Bible says that it is good for some people to marry, and it is good for some people to remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:25-40). With this and every other decision, the most important thing is to love and obey God.

- How can too strong of a desire for peace and comfort cause us to miss God's best?
- When you have stepped out in faith to tackle challenges and seize opportunities in the past, how have things worked out?
- Do you have any regrets about times when you failed to step out in faith?
- What caused you to pass up these opportunities? Was it pride, fear, the desire for comfort, or something else?

In its position statement on "The Teaching of Evolution," the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) says that since religious beliefs are not scientific, they should not be used in the classroom to explain creation and other natural phenomena.

- How does NSTA's definition of "scientific" impact dialog?
- How are NSTA's actions similar to those of Miss Hen?

In Romans 1:20, we read the following words of the Apostle Paul:

*For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature.
So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

- In your own words, what is the Apostle Paul saying in this passage of Scripture?
- What do you think about Paul's statement that people have no excuse for not believing in God?
- How do you think would happen if Paul spoke at a NSTA convention?

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

Matthew 27:42 describes how people mocked Jesus while he was dying on the cross by saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him."

- Do you think these mockers gave honest reasons for their inability to believe, or did they simply make excuses?
- What kinds of reasons do people give today for not believing in Jesus as the Son of God?
- What is the difference between reasons that are sincerely given in the quest to understand the Christian faith and reasons that are merely justifications for continuing in non-belief?

In John 1:9-12, the Apostle John says the following about the world's rejection of Jesus:

The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

- Why do you think Jesus suffered such rejection?
- How does the above passage of Scripture fit with Jesus' parable of the tenants as recorded in Matthew 21:33-44?

The Apostle Paul offered the following prayer for the believers at Colossae:

So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better. We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

Colossians 1:9-14

- How encouraging is it to know that in a very real sense Paul offered this prayer for every believer, including you?
- How accurately does this prayer express your desires?



Moth's New Friend

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*God calls to us from the heavens above,
He speaks through every act of love.*

As Moth and Spider gaze up in night sky, they can see at most a few thousand stars. But according to scientists, the universe contains approximately 200, 000,000,000,000,000,000 stars!¹

- How do you think all those stars got there?
- How does the enormous size of the universe affect your view of God?
- How does the enormous size of the universe affect your view of yourself?

Jesus told his disciples that his Father, the Creator of this vast universe, knows the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10:28-30)?

- How does this impact your view of God?
- How does this impact your view of yourself?

Consider the following passage of Scripture about Jesus' role in creation:

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17).

- What is your reaction to the astounding truth that Jesus, who walked the Earth as a man, was the creator of the universe?
- How much does the above Scripture affect your view of Jesus' teachings?
- How much room does the above Scripture leave for the view that Jesus is one prophet among many?

At the beginning of the fable, Moth wants nothing to do with Spider, but by the end of the fable he has changed his attitude.

- What do you think caused this change?
- What happened as a result of this change?

¹Scientists estimate that there are approximately two trillion galaxies in the universe. Extrapolating from the size of our galaxy, which has about 100 billion stars, they estimate that the universe contains approximately two hundred billion trillion stars.

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

Like Moth, we humans have an independent streak. We naturally want to go our own way and do our own thing. Since Adam and Eve, we have wanted to be God and serve ourselves rather than worship God and serve others.

- As you think about the world and our culture, what examples have you observed of this tendency?
- Can you cite some specific times when you experienced this tendency in yourself?
- What do you think causes this tendency?

When speaking to his disciples on the night before he was crucified, Jesus, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

- Explain in your own words what Jesus was saying.
- Why might people with an independent streak find this statement irritating?
- How would dedicated Christians feel about being connected to Jesus in this way?

Although it is good to be alone at times, no one wants to be totally alone all the time. In your own words, what are the following two quotes saying, and what comfort can we derive from them? The first quote was spoken by Jesus, and the second quote is from a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church at Rome:

- *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).*
- *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I [Paul] am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)*

The following verse is from *Aurora Leigh*, Book VII, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit around and pluck blackberries.*

- In your own words, what is the writer saying?
- How do her thoughts relate to the fable?
- How do her thoughts relate to Psalm 8:3-4?



Gander's Day

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

*All that amuses will soon be past;
The wise invest in things that last.*

In the fable, Gander describes himself as “one of the king’s most loyal subjects.”

- How accurately does Gander see himself?
- Why do you think Gander blames the king for locking him out of the castle?

Gander said when he began his day, “Life goes better when you plan.”

- What is good about a commitment to planning, and what can be problematic?
- How do you develop your plans? How much is God involved?
- Life is full of “carnivals” that can distract us. Are there things that you regularly do that may be “good” but not the “best”?

In Luke 14:16-18a, Jesus begins a parable with the following words:

A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, “Come, the banquet is ready.” But they all began making excuses.

- How are the invited guests in this parable similar to Gander in the fable?

In the Bible, Jesus extends many gracious invitations. Here are a few examples:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again.

Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6:35

Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

Revelation 3:20

I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.

Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.

John 11:25-26a

- Why do think so few people respond favorably to Jesus’ invitations, in spite of the promised rewards?

Thought-Provoking Questions for Adults and Teens

We all make mistakes in life, just as Gander made mistakes in the fable. Mistakes have consequences, and sometimes God may discipline us for our good because He loves us. What do the following passages of Scripture say about God's faithfulness:

*The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.*
Lamentations 3:22-23

*For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." So we can say with confidence,
"The LORD is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?"*
Hebrews 13:5-6

*And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life,
neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the
powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—
indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God
that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
The Apostle Paul (Romans 8:38-39)

How does the following poem relate to the fable:

The Things of This World

By Kay Ryan

*Whenever the eye lingers
it finds a hunger.
The things of the world
want us for dinner.
Inside each pebble or leaf
or puddle is a hook.
The appetites of the world
compete to catch a look.
What does this mean
and how does it work?
Why aren't rocks complete?
Why isn't green adequate to green?
We aren't gods whose gaze could save,
but that's how the things
of the world behave.*