

Searching for God Knows What Study Guide

By Sam Purvis

Chapter 1: Fine Wine

- When you think about living a life full of formulas, guaranteed formulas, formulas that work, Does this life attract you?
- What about a formulaic life is attractive to you? What about a formulaic life turns you off?
- Take a few moments to reflect on your own life. In which areas of your life do you plug in a formula in search of success?
- Think through your book selection. How many books offer you the key to a better spiritual life, to more money, to fulfillment? Think about the biographies you read. Are most of the people successful or failing in their spiritual life? Do you read these books because you enjoy reading other people's stories? Do you read these books because these people possess something you want? Do you read these books and take mental notes of ways you can imitate the men and women who have lived before you and I?
- Reflect on your life before you bought these books. How much better is your spiritual life as a result? How much more money do you have? How much more fulfillment do have thanks to these books? Does your life look like the life of people in the biographies?
- Is it a scary thought to think of going through life without any formula for success, any other person's life to carbon copy? Is it frightening to think of your

- story and your relationship with God being uniquely your own without any formula or guaranteed steps that you can plug in to make everything easier?
- Why do you think walking in a free-flowing, spirit led, life with God is terrifying?
 - Why do you think living a unique story with God and people is beautiful?

Weekly Pathways:

Preface: These assignments are not here for you to mechanically complete as if they were some formula to bring you closer to understanding this book. The purpose of this book is not that you would understand “it.” The purpose of this book runs the same path as the purpose of your life does, that you and I would Know Jesus and abide in truth and love...let the gospel live in us and out of us. These exercises are merely pathways for God to walk you down bringing you into deeper reflection on the things you and I have been talking about. If you are simply going to complete the steps so that you can check them off or tell your study leader that you did them, please don't even do them. Please take your time. If you need two weeks then take two weeks, if you need a month then take a month. This is about you and God not you and your study guide checklist.

- 1) Walk into local bookstore and browse their Self Help section. Take a notepad with you. Write down a few of the titles. What areas do the books offer help in? Thumb through some of the table of contents. Perhaps skim the first and last paragraphs of a few of the chapters. What are the books selling? What are they promising? Are these promises attractive to you? Would the promises push you to follow the steps suggested in these books?

- 2) Go to the Christian Inspiration section. Browse some of the titles. Look through some of the table of contents, perhaps skim a few paragraphs. What are the books promising? What need are they creating in you as you read them? What answers are they giving you for that need? Are the promises and answers of these books attractive to you? Would the books push you to following their suggestions and answers to your supposed need, your problem?

- 3) Read through the Gospel of John. What is Jesus telling you your problem is? What is the answer that Jesus is giving you? Does Christ give you a formula to follow? What is Christ's approach to you and to your relationship with Him?

- 4) Journal your thoughts and reflections on life, relationship with God, and formulas after completing these exercises.

Chapter 2: Imposters

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)

- If Jesus was walking this earth right now, judging from his interaction with people in the Gospels, what would be the five most likely places you would find Him hanging out?

- What does this say about most of our impressions of God in current times?
- What do you find comforting about believing in God?
- What was your impression of God 10 years ago?
- What is your impression of God now? How has it changed?
- A.W. Tozer says that a false impression of God is equivalent to idol worship. Go around the group and discuss this statement.
- Do you ever think that we can have a correct knowledge of God? Why or why not?
- Do you ever feel that if you started asking hard questions about God that you would end up telling God that He doesn't exist?
- Go around the group and talk about how your knowing of God has been further shaped or reshaped after reading John in your last exercise. (If you are not doing a group study then journal your response.)

Weekly Pathways:

- 1) Imagine you are meeting God in a bar tonight to have a beer and talk about life? What would you imagine God saying to you? What would he act like? What would he look like? How would he look at you and the other people in the bar? Write a dialogue between you and Jesus. Share this with your group next week, or whenever you are done (If you are not in a group study then share your conversation with a friend.)

- 2) Head over to First Thursday in the Pearl District, or Last Thursday off of NE Alberta St. to look at art. In what ways does the art speak to you of the character of God? In what ways does the art reveal God? Ask the artists if they had to paint a picture of God how they would paint God? What would be the character qualities represented in their art? Ask some of the photographers if they had to take a picture of something that best represented God to them then what would they photograph? What characteristics of God would be revealed in their photo?
- 3) Go to a church and ask some of the attendees to tell you why they think God is real.
- Journal your reflections afterwards.

Chapter 3: Feet Like Trees

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)
- What makes you who you are?
- Where do you find your meaning?
- Do you ever feel like you have an imposter for a God?
- Do you ever feel like you are an imposter to God?

Weekly Pathways:

- 1) Journal your reflections on these questions after you have discussed them with your group or with a friend.

Chapter 4: Free Verse

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)
- Why do you think much of Christianity has been reduced to lists and statistics?
- John writes, "The Father who sent me, confirmed me. And you missed it. You never heard his voice, you never saw his appearance. There is nothing left in your memory of his Message because you do not take his Messenger seriously. "You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from me the life you say you want".
- Do you think we miss relationship with God when we reduce him to theologies and lists?
- How have you missed God?
- How have you systematized God?

Weekly Pathways:

- 1) Go to the library and skim through a chapter of a book about the setting and rising of the sun. Sometime during the week climb to the top of a mountain and watch

the sunset, or get up early and catch the sunrise. What captures your soul, experiencing the beauty of the rising and setting sun or reading a few statistics about the rising and setting of the sun?

Chapter 5: Naked

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)
- Don says that Moses tells us that the things we do whether good or bad are coming out of a need to be told who we are. Think about the things that you have done over the last week, have you been looking for something to put on because you have been exposed? What have you used to cover your nakedness?
- What do you want to know about who you are?
- Go around the group and talk about the way that God has named you through Jesus?
- If you are a Christ follower, tell each other stories of how God has called each of you by name?

Weekly Pathways:

- 1) Get out of the city and go hiking. Take a journal and your Bible. Stop and write down what you would feel like if you were walking around with no clothes. Be honest. What would your reaction be if you ran into someone else? What would

you say? Open up your Bible and read Genesis 1-3. Write down what you think Adam and Eve must have felt like before the fall. Write out what you think Adam and Eve felt after the fall.

Chapter 6: Children of Chernobyl

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)
- Talk about Hiroshima and talk about the woman who lost her husband because America bombed Iraq. Talk about the man jumping off the 17th floor of the twin towers. Talk about war and our verbal wars with each other that take place every day. What does this say about our condition after the fall? What does this say about us as people?
- How does Genesis 3 speak into Vietnam and World War II?
- If you are a Christ follower, where is the space that scripture carves out for you to stand in the midst of war between our souls and evil spirits, between God and Satan?
- Talk about where we should be standing in our countries self-proclaimed war against Iraq. Talk how you and your group specifically are supposed to engage the homeless population of Portland. Talk about the space that scripture has carved for you stand in regarding sexual slavery in Portland and a million other evidences of our condition as fallen creatures.

- Talk about hope. Where is hope in Iraq? Where is the Gospel in the injustice in Portland? Tell stories about where you have seen the seeds of the kingdom growing despite suffering.

Chapter 7: Adam, Eve and the Alien

- Where do you look for meaning in this life?
- How do you compare yourself to other people?
- Where do you look for happiness?
- How do you treat other people depending on how they look, how they smell, how smart they are, how gifted they are, etc?
- After reading this chapter how do you feel?
- After reading this chapter how do you want to think about life and other people?
- After reading this chapter how do you want to live your life with those who have been marginalized by your community and society as a whole?

Chapter 8: Life boat theory

- Where do you see the lifeboat theory playing itself out in your life?
- If you found yourself surrounding yourself with people who think like you, look like you, like you, what would this tell you about yourself?
- Discuss the unhealthiness of living out of a need to be named by others and constantly trying to control the different names that they give us.
- If we instinctively live our lives bowing to the opinions of others what hope is there for us? How can we get away from this default mechanism?

Weekly Pathways:

- 1) Pick up People Magazine or another pop life publication and read an interview with a musician or an actor, how do you see the life boat theory playing out in this interview. Write out where this persons needs and wants are similar to yours, write out where they are different. Where do they look to be named? Where do you look to be named?

Chapter 9: Jesus

This stage of the book is a huge turning point. The writer's conference at the beginning, cheesy as it was, had a few points of parallelism with the gospel and with this book. The women leading the conference were advocating creating a crisis point, a need, and then finding the answer, the fix, for the problem. There is a crisis point in the gospel, but that crisis has not been created by a money-hungry author. If it were, I think you and I would have a legitimate reason to want to kill the author and blacklist his book. The crisis of the gospel is present whether we like it or not. The last eight chapters have been slowly bringing us to the crisis point. We have seen through dark glasses our desperate state of affairs. We were crafted for something and that something has come up missing.

The Gospel also has a point where we finally, in desperate joy, are given an answer to our crisis. This too, is not created by any human but is a work of Divine Grace. Jesus, at the point of our darkest hour shines brighter than the despair of our broken state.

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)
- John writes about an interchange between Himself, Jesus, Peter, and Judas.

“After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.”

If you wrote a book about Jesus like so many do today would you feel you could refer to yourself as “the one that Jesus loved”. Why or why not? When you think of yourself do you think of yourself as the one whom Jesus loves or do you think of yourself as a teacher, an author, a waiter, a town drunk, a whore?

Weekly Pathways

- 1) Take five minutes to reflect on these statements found on p. 128. “if somebody loves us we will do all kinds of things in their name, for them because of them. They will make us who we are.” Do you find this experientially true? Why do

you think this is? If Jesus truly was characterized most strongly by love, what does this mean for you? What would life be like if you and I truly believed this, allowed ourselves to be loved? Journal your reflections.

- 2) Sit down and write at least one hundred words in the form of a fictitious conversation that would take place if Jesus were to walk up and sit down next to you. Be brutally honest about the topics of conversation that you would want to bring up. Reading back through your conversation reflect on how your presuppositions of Jesus may have played into your conversation. Do you think you can know who Jesus is without something outside of you telling you who He is?
- 3) Reflect with me for a moment. I am sitting at a coffee table here in a trendy district of downtown Portland. The culture here is rich and seems about to burst the seams of this hole-in-the-wall gathering place with a wide mix of races, beliefs, and fashion statements. The loud voice to the right of me draws my attention to a man who is making his way toward me. He has dark skin and his face is halfway hidden by greasy black hair. The long strands disappear into the neck of a soiled navy blue hoodie. He stops at the table next to mine and manages to slur a request for change to a man who has just sat down with a steaming coffee. The man reaches deep into his jeans and pulls out a few coins. He places them in the outstretched hand of the beggar. Muttering his thanks the beggar drags his feet my direction.

Put your self in my spot and let yourself react to this man coming toward you, knowing that in a moment you will be faced with the choice of giving this man your money or looking at him and muttering something awkward like “sorry man, I don’t have any change,” Of course you’ll fail to mention that you have enough bills in your wallet to get him a hotel for the night and a hot shower. What is your reaction? What would you do?

Well I’ll tell you what I did. I looked down and hoped that the man would walk past me. And he did. Heartbreaking isn’t it?

If you imagined yourself responding as I did and you are a Christ follower, as I am, then you and I are in desperate need of heart change. All you can do, all I can do, is repent and ask God for change. He will change us, you know. We cannot change ourselves but neither could the woman at the well and that is why Jesus offered her living water. Jesus came to change our hearts and my response to the beggar is a perfect example of how badly I need the change.

If you feel led I would encourage you to stop this study and move into a time of repentance and cry to God for change.

Chapter 10: The Gospel of Jesus

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)
- Take two minutes to reflect on this statement found on p. 153 "...it is difficult for us to see the gospel as anything other than a list of true statements with which a person must agree."
- Now take a piece of paper write out your thoughts addressing this question. What is wrong, if anything is wrong, with the nature of a message being reduced to facts that either must be consented to or rejected? Is there anything that you know about the nature of truth that provides a point of conflict with this approach to a message or to truth itself?
- Lead your group into a discussion about abortion. Lead them into a discussion about homosexuality. Lead them into a discussion about pornography and strip clubs. Our tendency is to reduce these topics to facts, to "rights" and "wrongs" and then to walk away either feeling justified or guilty. If we are called to live in relationship with truth, to abide in it, then how do we walk away from a black and white, facts only, approach to these topics? How do we engage these topics as life and as messy? How do we stand in the space that the kingdom is carving for us in the midst of abortion, homosexuality, porn, prostitution, strip clubs, sweat shops, discrimination, pharisaical self-righteousness, war, and hunger?
- Take a piece of paper and write your best understanding of the word "faith". After reading through this chapter would you say that your understanding of faith is a relational faith in a Being or a faith in mere facts that may or may not be true?

- Talk through the things that have become a spiritual checklist for you. Talk with your group about where and how these things were meant to be a relational exchange.

Weekly Pathways:

- 1) Go to the store and buy some fresh bread and perhaps have your group pitch in for some good wine. Sit around your table and eat together. As you eat remember Christ and go around your circle sharing stories of how Christ has broken into your mess and how he has put a white wedding dress on you, a former whore, and how he has proposed to you and how he now courts you, and how one day he will marry you and there will be a feast and celebration with bread and wine far better than the food you now eat! Tell how this romance has played itself out in your life. Remember. Remember. If you are not a Christ follower, listen to the stories of this mysterious groom and wonder whether you are drawn to give your hand to Him in marriage.

Chapter 11: A Circus of Redemption

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)
- What do you do for a living? Where do you live? What are your hobbies? Who is your favorite band? Questions like these are often asked by people who want to put you into a category of worth. You often answer these questions with feelings of confidence or shame or hopefulness. Answer these questions and

reflect and talk about whether or not you find your identity within your answers or if your answers merely stem from an identity that you have been given by God

(I think 'what you do' needs to be defined a bit more)

- How do you find yourself relying on the games you play in this circus of life for redemption and worth?

Weekly Pathways:

- 1) Imagine you strike up a conversation with a sharply-dressed woman at the airport and your conversation happens to venture in the direction of what you both do. She proceeds to tell you that one year ago she and three of her girlfriends took an idea they had hatched at a slumber party and began working on making that idea a reality. One year later this woman is a CEO and 15% owner of the fastest growing company in America, not to mention one of the fastest in the world. The woman is now on her way to New York to witness her company open it's first day on the NYSE and to receive an award from the *American Business Journal* for being the fastest growing company in America. Describe your feelings as you spoke with this woman? How did you think of her? How did you act around her? Journal your reactions.

Also imagine as you are catching your bus home from the airport and you strike up a conversation with a woman on your bus, bus 39. You ask her where she is going and she tells you she is going to work. Once again the conversation drifts

toward what you both do. She tells you that she answers phones for a company in the downtown area. Curious as to what type of people call at this time you push her for more and finally she tells you that she is a call girl for a popular 1-900 company in the downtown area. Describe your feelings as you spoke to this woman. How did you think of her? How did you act around her? Journal your reactions.

Describe what your reactions to each of these situations tell you about yourself and how you view yourself, where you get your worth, where you find redemption.

Chapter 12: Morality

- Discuss with your group the previous week's assignments, what they were like for you, what you learned, what made you think, etc. (if you aren't involved in a study group then talk with a friend at some point during your week.)
- Discuss the way that you feel, the way that you see yourself after you have sinned.
- Do these feelings come out of fear and need to be ok, or do they come out of a realization that you have deeply wounded a Being whom you are in deep relationship with?
- Morality has become a very loaded term in the time and culture that we find ourselves in. Take two minutes to write down what thoughts, words, and pictures come to mind when you hear the word morality.

- Do your presuppositions that come along with the word morality fit how scripture unpacks morality as being a relational interaction with our bridegroom?
- Take some time to talk through how you think we as believers are, or are not, demonstrating the love of God to our culture. Are we waging war on culture or loving culture? Talk about different situations where you see both happening.
- When you look at culture do you see people fighting each other or calling each other with love? Why do you think this is?
- I find that the easy thing to do when thinking and talking about these different issues is to become very discontent with how people around me are engaging culture. I find myself complaining and ragging on different people or groups, even people that follow the same Jesus that I do. When you really think about this reaction, it is very arrogant. I am comparing how I think I would react to other's reactions in a very lifeboat type of way. Instead of thinking of what my response is supposed to be in this mess of culture war between the "moral" and the "immoral" I judge how others are responding. Talk about how you are called to respond to culture, how you are called to engage culture.
- Talk about how you are called to engage those from the "moral" camp who are waging war on culture.
- Read the story of the woman caught in adultery found in John 8. What would it look like to live with a morality that drew you into intimacy with Jesus, the type of morality that Jesus called the adulterous woman to when he told her to go and sin no more?

- What does it look like to walk away from the type of morality that the other guys in the story used to compare themselves to the woman and feel that they had the right to execute her?

Chapter 13: Religion

- John 6:44 says “You're not in charge here. The Father who sent me is in charge. He draws people to me--that's the only way you'll ever come. Only then do I do my work, putting people together, setting them on their feet, ready for the End.” What does this do to the arrogance that you and I often allow ourselves to have when we start thinking that we've figured Christianity out and that we are right and that we have found our own way?
- Reflect on this statement found on p.203 for a few minutes and then go around the room and talk about your thoughts and reactions, perhaps confess to each and pray for change.

“If we are going through religious motions to get people to think of us as religious, praise us, and that, we are receiving our false redemption from a bunch of people who are going to be dead in fifty years. This a shabby replacement for and eternal God.”

- Talk through what your experience has been when you are merely going through motions versus when you feel the freedom to relationally engage with a God who seeks you out and wants to be known to you.

Chapter 14: The Gospel of Jesus

- Derek Webb, a musician, has done a lot to rescue the stories of Jesus and the Gospel from the grips of formulaic Christianity. In one of his songs, titled *Wedding Dress*, Derek tells the story of the gospel through the eyes of one of the prophets, Hosea. Reflect on this song and journal your reflections

If you could love me as a wife
and for my wedding gift, your life
should that be all i'll ever need
or is there more i'm looking for?

And should i read between the lines
and look for blessings in disguise
to make me handsome, rich, and wise
is that really what you want?

I am a whore, i do confess
but i put you on just like a wedding dress
and i run down the aisle.
I'm a prodigal with no way home
but i put you on just like a ring of gold
and i run down the aisle to you.

So could you love this bastard child
though i don't trust you to provide
with one hand in a pot of gold
and with the other in your side.
I am so easily satisfied
by the call of lovers less wild
that i would take a little cash
over your very flesh and blood.

Because money cannot buy
a husband's jealous eye
when you have knowingly deceived his wife.

- Have two Christ followers in your group who know the story of the Gospel tell it to the group. Then go around the group and have people share how their stories have come in contact and interacted with the story of Jesus and the Gospel. End

the group thanking God for the story that He has written in each of your lives and for the story that he continues to write over the mess that we live in as humans.