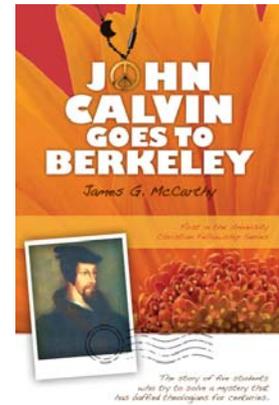


## GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *John Calvin Goes to Berkeley*

THESE QUESTIONS CONTAIN SEVERAL SPOILERS.

DO NOT READ THEM UNTIL YOU HAVE FINISHED READING THE BOOK.



### CHARACTERS

1. With which character did you most closely relate? Which of his or her strengths or weaknesses do you share?
2. Describe Alex Kim's personality and how he grew during the course of the school year.
3. What did you like or dislike about Angela? How could she have improved her relationship with Rod Sutherland?
4. What did you like or dislike about Elliot?
5. Was Jamie's participation as a member of the Berkeley Five a help or a hindrance in their quest to find a solution to the mystery of predestination?
6. Rod was bent on convincing the others that Calvinism was correct. In addition to his desire to get into seminary, what drove him?
7. What did you think of Pastor Shelton? Was he a good or poor spiritual leader for Rod?
8. Why did Susan Dan find it so difficult to become a Christian?
9. Parts of the story of *John Calvin Goes to Berkeley* were inspired by real-life events that occurred during the author's ministry on the UC Berkeley campus (1987-1996). Five such scenes are listed below. Hidden among them is a sixth event that is purely fictitious. Can you spot it? If so, draw a circle around it. (Its number can be found at the top of page 39 in the book, but don't turn there until your group has had a chance to discuss their choices.)
  1. Coleman jumping onto the UCF table and flattening it.
  2. Coleman auctioning off the Bible and Elliot buying it before a crowd of several hundred students.
  3. Susan Dan being expelled for cheating during a biology exam and later coming to Christ.
  4. Joe beating up two fraternity students who were taunting an old preacher in front of the university.
  5. The university nearly expelling Alex as a result of inaccurate reporting in the *Daily Californian*.
  6. Jamie standing up in a Berkeley café on Good Friday and reading Isaiah 53 to everyone present.

## IMAGERY

1. There are several references to the University Christian Fellowship *table* in this story. What does it represent?
2. What did Patty Hearst and Susan Dan share in common? Was the author's use of this fact fair and justified?
3. Why was Susan Dan initially hesitant about having the dental surgeon fix her broken teeth with porcelain veneers? What did this reveal about her inner thoughts at the time?
4. In chapter twenty-five, why do you think the author interlaced scenes of Angela and Rod arguing after the Bible study with scenes of Alex observing Coleman foraging through trashcans for food?
5. How did Alex, Angela, Jamie and Rod's understanding of predestination affect each of their attitudes toward Coleman?
6. During his time of prayer and study in the Sierra Mountains, Alex observed an ant and briefly interacted with it. What might this ant represent? What other "insect" in the story illustrates this same point?
7. What allusion to God's dealings with the prophet Elijah is found in the scene with the ant on the mountaintop? How does this contribute to the imagery of the ant?
8. What allusion to Psalm 119:105 can you find in chapter thirty-one as Alex and the others walk toward Sather Gate? What does this communicate?
9. Describe how Sproul Plaza became a character in the story and contributed to its message?

## THEOLOGY

1. Describe any firsthand experience that you have had with the controversy between Calvinists and Arminians.
2. How did Jonathan Belfitt's closing remarks to the crowd gathered in Sproul Plaza foreshadow the solution finally discovered by Alex and the others?
3. Alex, Jamie, Angela, and Elliot concluded that repentance is a prerequisite to saving faith. Do you agree?
4. Alex summarized his understanding of how a person is saved in four points (chapter thirty-three). Do you agree or disagree with him?
  1. The Spirit convicts.
  2. A sinner repents.
  3. The Father enlightens.
  4. The person believes and is born again.
5. Angela felt that Rod's beliefs about predestination distorted the character of God, making him into a monster. What do you think? Is Reformed predestination consistent with the character of God?
6. Though the book is critical of the Reformed view of predestination, it also argues for mutual respect among Christians who disagree on this difficult topic. How did the author communicate his respect for John Calvin and Westminster Theological Seminary?

## THEOLOGY FOR THE MORE ADVANCED READER

1. The feature article of the March 12, 2009, issue of *TIME Magazine* was titled “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now.” It listed Calvinism as number three and described it as “Evangelicalism’s latest success story.” The article quotes Ted Olsen, a managing editor at *Christianity Today*, who commented, “Everyone knows where the energy and the passion are in the Evangelical world,” that is, Calvinism, and names three of its chief proponents: “pioneering new-Calvinist John Piper of Minneapolis, Seattle’s pugnacious Mark Driscoll, and Albert Mohler, head of the Southern Seminary of the huge Southern Baptist Convention.” The article goes on to report that “the Calvinist-flavored ESV Study Bible sold out its first printing, and Reformed blogs like *Between Two Worlds* are among cyber-Christendom’s hottest links.” What evidence have you seen of the growing influence of Calvinism in the church today?
2. From Rod Sutherland’s perspective, why was Jamie’s treatment of the Peruvian girl referred to in chapter one theologically wrong?
3. In chapter thirty-three, Elliot told Michael, “Ephesians 1:4 may tell us more about election than any other verse. It says, God ‘chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.’ The verb *chose* is in a form that shows that the Father took us for himself. His act of choosing is qualified by the phrase ‘in him,’ referring to Jesus, which means that the Father chose us with our close connection to Christ in view.” Jamie then added, “Which is conditional election. The Father chose us *in Christ*, not apart from Christ or to be placed into Christ.” How do you see it? Is God’s election conditional or unconditional?
4. Calvinists teach that before the creation of the world God chose certain individuals for salvation. His choice was based solely on his sovereign will and was not dependent in any way upon his foreknowledge of who would believe and who would not. Arminians teach that God chose for salvation those whom he knew would respond to his grace, believe in Jesus, and persevere to the end. Alex and his friends concluded that “election refers to the truth that the Father chose for himself those whom he knew in his Son. Predestination refers to the fact that he has determined to bestow incredible blessings upon them” (chapter thirty-three). What do you believe is the correct meaning of election and predestination?
5. The controversy within University Christian Fellowship began with a dispute over the interpretation of John 6:44, where Jesus teaches, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” In your opinion, does Alex’s solution answer the questions raised by this verse concerning the role of God and the role of the individual in salvation?
6. In chapter sixteen, Michael tells the students, “If you study predestination within the context of the dispute between Calvinists and Arminians, you’re going to be taking on a lot of theological baggage. Their assumptions will become your assumptions, their questions your questions. It can happen without you even realizing it.” Do you agree? Is it best to study the topic of predestination within the context of the historical debate between Calvinists and Arminians or apart from it, looking only to Scripture?