



Beneath the Tamarisk Tree

Discussion Questions

Beneath the Tamarisk Tree may be a good resource to use for church book clubs, home groups or study groups for Christians, as well as people who may just be interested in learning more about the teachings of Jesus.

It raises a range of issues that you may like to ponder for yourself or discuss with others.

The following questions are published in the back of the book and are repeated here with some additional Bible references that may help further discussion, study or simply act as a useful check that all is in line with the Word of God.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New International Version (Anglicised 1984 edition)

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Chapter 1 – ‘The Awakening’

1. The perfect nature of heaven is fun to imagine. What do you imagine heaven may be like?

Genesis 1:1, Revelation 4:2-6, 1 Corinthians 2:9, 2 Peter 3:13

2. What aspects of creation on earth do you find to be the most mesmerising? How may these be magnified in their beauty in a heavenly setting?

3. What pointers to your imaginings can you find referenced in the Bible?

Revelation 22:1-5

4. In John 4:10 Jesus talks of himself giving us ‘living water’. What do you think this means?

John 4:10, John 7:37-39

5. Despite the clear promise from Jesus in Luke 23:43, *‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise’*, our central character wakes up in heaven but still doubts. How do you think you would react in this situation?

6. What promises of Jesus do you doubt?

Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 145:9, 1 Chronicles 16:34, Psalm 100:5, James 1:17, 2 Samuel 7:28, Nahum 1:7, Psalm 84:11, John 10:10, John 6:37, John 14:21, John 15:14–15



Chapter 2 – ‘A New Beginning’

1. In this chapter Jesus mentions he has many names. What names of God do you know? What do they mean and which of them can you personally relate to?

Genesis 22:14, Exodus 15:26, Exodus 17:15, Judges 6:24, Psalm 23:1, Jeremiah 23:6, Ezekiel 48:35, Romans 8:15, Revelation 22:13, Psalm 57:2, Luke 2:21, Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 7:14, Zechariah 3:8, Revelation 5:5, Genesis 17:1, John 10:11, Exodus 3:13-15, Isaiah 42:8

2. Jesus mentions in the story that his Holy Spirit can take many forms. To ease the narrative and our understanding, in chapter two the Spirit takes the form of a young girl. What other forms do you think the Spirit can take? (Some are mentioned in the Bible.)

Matthew 3:16, Acts 2:2-4, Job 27:3, Isaiah 11:2, John 14:26, John 6:63

3. Dismas clearly thinks that he does not deserve to be in heaven. Do you think he deserved to be there? Why?

Romans 3:10, Romans 3:23-24, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9

4. It may be unlikely that we will need to be baptised in heaven. But in this chapter it is a useful picture of our cleansing and renewal. It echoes Jesus' command in Mark 16:16 to believe and be baptised. What are your views of being baptised?

1 Corinthians 12:13, 1 Peter 3:21, Acts 8:12, Acts 22:16, Colossians 2:12-13, Galatians 3:27, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:1-7

5. In this book, Jesus comments that ‘being a parent is such an important job’. In what ways do you agree with this?



Chapter 3 – ‘Crowned with Splendour’

1. Our main character feels a pang of guilt for remembering bad experiences when in heaven, as though they should have gone. How much of your life do you think you will remember in heaven? Will we forget the bad times or feel the pain of the bad experiences, when in heaven?

Revelation 21:4, 1 Peter 2:24, Isaiah 53:4-5

2. How much do you think our childhood experiences affect us in our adult life, forming a key part of our personality? Can we ever fully recover from bad experiences?

Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 30:2, Jeremiah 30:17, Isaiah 40:29-31, 1 Peter 2:24

3. Names are important, a part of our self-identity and our identity in Christ. Jesus presents Habib with a white stone with his new name written on it, to help cement his new name in his heart. What do you think it means to have a new identity in Christ?

2 Corinthians 5:17, John 1:12, Genesis 1:27, Romans 6:6, 1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 3:20, Psalm 139:14, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Revelation 2:17

4. A crown is one of the rewards of heaven mentioned in the Bible, with different crowns awarded to believers. Do you think there will be literal crowns in heaven? What other rewards of heaven do you think may be in store for us?

Matthew 5:12, 1 Peter 5:4, 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:12, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 1 Corinthians 9:25-27, Luke 6:35, Colossians 3:23-24, John 3:16



Chapter 4 – ‘Alone in the Shadows’

1. Habib comes across Jesus praying. Why would Jesus need to be praying? What do you think he could be praying about? What does this show us about the heart of Jesus?

Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:34, John 17:15-20, Matthew 6:8, Matthew 18:20

2. Habib mentions that the light in heaven is so different to what he has been used to. What do you think the source of light in heaven may be?

John 8:12, Genesis 1:3, Revelation 21:23

3. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, *‘For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.’* See also Romans 14:10-12. In the story, the lapis lazuli plinth represents the judgment seat of God, a place where we recount our lives to Jesus. What do you think it will be like to have to recount all things you have said and done to Jesus, for his judgment?

2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 14:1-12, 1 Corinthians 4:5

4. Then thinking about the loving and compassionate nature and intentions of God, how might you now reimagine it?

Romans 8:1, James 1:12, 1 John 4:16, Galatians 5:22-23

5. Do you think that good deeds are necessary for your salvation? What Bible verses can you find to support your view?

Ephesians 2:8-10, John 14:6, Romans 3:23, Romans 10:9, Galatians 2:16, Titus 3:5, Matthew 5:16



Chapters 5 and 6 – ‘A Sweet Fragrance’ and ‘Hope Destroyed’

1. Riha gives Dismas ‘the sky’ for his birthday present. What aspects of creation speak to you most clearly about God’s power and majesty, and feel to you like a gift from God?

Genesis 1:1, Job 12:7-10, Psalm 96:11-12, Psalm 19:1, Psalm 104:24-25, John 1:3, Isaiah 40:26, Psalm 139:14, Psalm 8:3-4

2. The poet Tennyson wrote the famous line: *’Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all.* Do you think Dismas would agree?

1 Chronicles 16:34, Deuteronomy 7:9

3. Towards the end of chapter six, the anger at his circumstances and loss begin to overwhelm Dismas. How do we start to deal with anger and bitterness in our lives?

Ephesians 4:26-31, James 1:19-20, Psalm 37:8-9, Hebrews 12:15, Matthew 6:14

4. Riha was a companion for Dismas for a very short time, but she still made a big impact on him. How does fellowship with each other play a key role in our lives?

1 John 1:7, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Matthew 18:20, Hebrews 10:24-25, Romans 12:5, Romans 12:13

5. At the end of chapter six, Dismas is helpless in being able to support Riha in her fight for life. How does helplessness affect our relationship with God?

Psalm 121:1-3, Isaiah 41:10, Romans 8:18, Deuteronomy 31:6, Jeremiah 29:11, 2 Corinthians 12:9



Chapters 7 and 8 – ‘Into the Depths’ and ‘Captured’

1. Chapter seven begins with Habib soaking in the light (Ephesians 1:18) and receiving a revelation of hope from Jesus. Can you find hope in knowing that heaven may be a season of reunions and reconnections?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, Ephesians 1:18, 1 Peter 1:3-4, John 14 1-3, Luke 23:43

2. Many would think that Dismas, as a street child and petty criminal, is completely insignificant. Knowing that he ends up in heaven, does that make you think differently about others that the ‘world’ may see as insignificant, or even yourself?

Matthew 18:2-5, Matthew 18:10, Ephesians 2:18-19, 1 John 3:1, Zephaniah 3:17, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 3:23

3. Dismas’ response to his situation is to lash out at the world and hate all around him for the trauma it has caused. If he had known Jesus’ love for him during this hard time, how do you think his response may have been different?

Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 8:37-39, 1 John 4:19

4. Dismas existed in a fallen world, as do we. How can we not get overwhelmed with the evil and suffering around us?

1 John 5:4, John 16:33, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, Hebrews 12:1-3, Romans 8:15-17



Chapter 9 – ‘Reconnection’

1. In Romans 10:9 it says: *If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* And in Romans 10:13 it states: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* Do you believe that entering heaven is really this simple?

Romans 10:9, Romans 10:13, Acts 16:30-31, John 3:16, John 14:6, Ephesians 2:8-9

2. Do you believe you are going to heaven? If so, why?

Romans 10:9-10, Romans 10:13, 1 John 5:13, John 3:16, Acts 16:31, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 3:18

3. Do you think you will be surprised to find out that some people like Dismas have ‘made it’ to heaven? In what ways does it challenge you, in realising that even those who have committed the worst wrongs, or behaved in the most detestable ways, can still be accepted into heaven?

Romans 3:23-24, John 3:15, 1 John 1:9, Romans 5:7-10, Matthew 7:1-2

4. Forgiveness is a difficult concept to grasp, especially if we feel we have been the victim. Unforgiveness holds Habib back from being able to freely take communion. In what other ways does unforgiveness hold us back?

Leviticus 19:17-18, Mark 11:25, Matthew 5:23-24, 1 John 1:8-10

5. Why do you think that extending forgiveness to people who have hurt you is important?

Colossians 3:13, Matthew 18:21-22, 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, Hebrews 12:15, Matthew 5:44, Romans 12:20, Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 6:12

6. Do you feel that some people’s actions are impossible to forgive?

Matthew 6:14-15

7. Why do you think that taking the bread and wine is an important part of your relationship with God?

1 Corinthians 10:16, Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 11:25



Chapters 10 and 11 – ‘Condemned by the Law’ and ‘The Cross’

1. The Jewish people were required to sacrifice a perfect lamb in order to receive forgiveness for their sins from God. What similarities can you see between this sacrifice and the death of Jesus on the cross?

John 1:29, 1 Corinthians 5:7, Isaiah 53:7, 1 Peter 1:19, 1 Peter 2:21-22

2. The horrific nature of crucifixion is often sanitised, but the reality is that it was brutal and vicious. Is it helpful to have a clearer knowledge of what Jesus went through in his punishments?

Matthew 27:32-56, Mark 15:21-37, Luke 23:26-46, John 19:16-34

3. What did Jesus actually achieve for us through his suffering and death?

John 1:29, Romans 3:25-26, Hebrews 2:17, Romans 5:9-11, Galatians 3:13-14, Romans 3:24, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 Peter 3:18, Colossians 2:13-14, Isaiah 53:5-6, John 15:13

4. In the Old Testament there are many prophecies pointing to the coming Messiah, his life and death. Can you think of any that are highlighted in the details of Jesus' death?

Isaiah 53:4-7, Psalm 22:1, Psalm 22:16-18, Amos 8:9, Psalm 34:20, Zechariah 12:10, Deuteronomy 21:23

5. Remembering the promise he received from Jesus when on the cross, at the point of his death, what do you think was Dismas' expectation of what would come next?

Luke 23:43



Chapter 12 – ‘Restored’

1. In this chapter, Jesus promises Habib that Father God does not abandon his children. But did Father God abandon his one and only Son, Jesus?

Mark 15:34, Psalm 22:1, Matthew 26:53-54, Philippians 2:6-8

2. Why do you think God asked Jesus to endure the cross?

John 3:17, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 Peter 3:18, Mark 10:45, Romans 3:23-24, Romans 3:25, Hebrews 9:14

3. In this chapter, Jesus refers to children in heaven ‘who come here early’. Do you think this happens?

Mark 10:14-16, Matthew 18:10, Psalm 127:3

4. The Holy Spirit anoints Habib with oil, resulting in an outpouring of joy. Read Isaiah 61. What other promises of God can be released in us?

Isaiah 61, Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 43:2, Isaiah 54:10, Isaiah 58:6, Matthew 11:28-29, Jeremiah 29:11, Philippians 4:6-7, Philippians 4:19, Romans 8:28, James 1:5, Romans 8:38-39

5. Do you believe that Jesus knows your pain, has taken it upon himself and has dealt with it?

1 Peter 2:24, Psalm 34:18, Psalm 147:3, Revelation 21:4, Romans 8:18, Isaiah 53:4, Isaiah 53:11



Chapter 13 – ‘Homecoming’

1. The angel’s name, Shamar, means ‘guardian’. What do you think about there being angels who battle for us and work to protect us? Can you find any biblical references to back this up?

Psalm 91:11-12, Matthew 18:10, Job 38:4-7, Luke 15:10, Revelation 14:6, Daniel 10:12-13, Hebrews 12:22,

2. Habib does not see the face of God, but recognises him as being at the centre of heaven. Do you think we will be able to see the face of God in heaven?

Exodus 33:20, Genesis 32:30, Exodus 33:11, Revelation 22:4

3. The whole of heaven is celebrating the return of Jesus and it erupts in worship. How would you describe worship?

John 4:24, Psalm 103:1, Psalm 150:6, Chronicles 29:11, Psalm 71:8, Psalm 68:4-4, Psalm 95:6, Psalm 63:3-4,

4. In heaven we will have complete freedom in our worship. Do you feel you have a similar freedom now? What might you begin to do in order to worship in a freer way?

1 Chronicles 16:23-24, Psalm 75:1, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 12:28, Psalm 100:1-2, Psalm 149:3-4, 2 Samuel 6:14

5. Habib’s response to the heavenly celebration is for worship to rise from deep within him. Can you think of a time when your only response to God’s majesty has been to worship?

6. Habib is reunited with his mother and finally has a place in which he can abide for eternity. Jesus promises the same to us in John 14:2: *My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?* How does this eternal promise reassure you?

John 14:2, 1 John 2:25, 1 Peter 5:10, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Revelation 7:16-17, Revelation 21:3-4