

[www.ThankGodForEvolution.com](http://www.ThankGodForEvolution.com)

[www.TheGreatStory.org/dvd.html](http://www.TheGreatStory.org/dvd.html)

**Suggested use:** This guidebook is intended for leaders who will use the *Thank God for Evolution!* book and DVD as the basis for a **12 session** discussion course (up to **15 sessions** with viewing of supplemental DVD materials). This curriculum is highly recommended for BOOK CLUBS, covenant and cell groups of religiously liberal CHURCHES, and other discussion forums. A CHRISTIAN version is downloadable at the same site: <http://thegreatstory.org/tgfe-dvd-study.html>

**Intent:** This study guide was prepared by Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd, with the aim of encouraging participants to engage their **intellect**, make connections to **their own life experience**, and to **speak from the heart**. We intend to help participants **discern and enrich their philosophical or spiritual/religious worldview and everyday lives** by offering an over-arching story for situating one's sense of the divine, one's values, and the very meaning one makes of life. Crucially, for those who do resonate with the multi-billion-year journey of our evolutionary heritage, there are a multitude of ways to interpret and find meaning within it.

The approaches suggested here are also intended to promote **wide participation** and to counter the natural tendency for a few individuals to monopolize discussion time. The guide provides enough structure to fully support groups that prefer to be led at every step. But it also encourages leaders and group members to take initiative in fostering topics and paths of discussion.

**Benefits of this book/dvd combination:** Book-based discussion groups falter if participants feel pressure to complete assigned readings without fail. In this program **nonreaders will be empowered** to participate because: (1) each session begins with a series of short recitations from the book, and (2) the group also views a **DVD segment**.

### Materials:

- *Thank God for Evolution!* **BOOK** purchased by each member of the group
- 1 copy of the companion **DVD** for the group leader (\$30); a **DVD player**
- 1 copy of this **Study Guide** for the group leader (free PDF download)

- 1 copy of the **CD** "Peter Mayer Sings the Great Story" and **CD player** [www.thegreatstory.org/order-mayer.html](http://www.thegreatstory.org/order-mayer.html)
- **timer** and **chime** or **bell**

**Suggested Group Size and Duration:** We suggest that participants be seated living-room style or in the round. To ensure an intimate size of circle and an opportunity for everyone to speak, recommended group size is **4 to no more than 16** regularly attending participants. Suggested duration for each session is **1.5 to 2.0 hours**.

## Program Elements

- 1. In-Gathering.** Groups that encourage bonds of fellowship (such as church cell groups) will begin with their preferred methods of in-gathering, such as check-ins, covenant readings, or other ritual elements. NOTE: If some participants express an interest in contributing their creativity to session creation, shaping the In-Gathering specific to each session would be the ideal place to encourage such initiative.
- 2. Recitation of samples from the BOOK.** After the in-gathering, participants will volunteer to recite selected short readings from the assigned chapters. Leaders are encouraged to ask for different volunteers to read each passage aloud, so that as many voices as possible are heard. This guidebook will specify recommended selections for each session.
- 3. Group viewing of the recommended segments of the DVD.**
- 4. Silent reflection.** (signaled by a bell or chime)
- 5. Discussion in the round.** Leader invites participants to each briefly share responses to a question designed to invite even the shyest to contribute. Consider recruiting a volunteer to use a timer (and ring a bell or raise a hand) when the allocated time for each person has passed.
- 6. Continue discussion.** This guidebook will offer additional questions for discussion specific to each session. The leader, however, will sense if the group is already deep into meaningful discussion, requiring little (if any) additional guidance.
- 7. Closing.**
  - a. Reading assignment** for next session
  - b. Musical contemplation.** Listening to a song from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story" CD is our suggestion, and we will recommend a particular song for each session. Printed lyrics to copy and distribute to each participant are included in this study guide, too.

# ***Thank God for Evolution!***

## **Study Guide for Mixed Religious, Secular, and Religiously Liberal Groups**

(version March 2008)

### **Calendar of Sessions & Reading Assignments**

**Session 1:** Overview and Group Greeting

**Session 2:** Prologue, Introduction, Chapter 1 29 pages

**Session 3:** Chapters 2 and 3 29 pages

**Session 4:** Chapter 4 17 pages

**Session 5:** Chapter 5 18 pages

Session 5 Supplement: [optional for extra DVD viewing]

**Session 6:** Chapters 6 and 7 31 pages

**Session 7:** Chapters 8 and 9 27 pages

**Session 8:** Chapter 10 29 pages

**Session 9:** Chapters 11, 12, and 13 37 pages

**Session 10:** Chapters 14 and 15 26 pages

**Session 11:** Chapters 16 and 17 38 pages

Session 11 Supplement: [optional for extra DVD viewing]

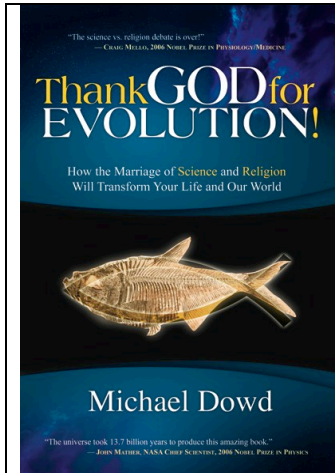
**Session 12:** Chapter 18, Conclusion, Epilogue, Appendix A & B  
49 pages

Supplementary Session 13: [optional for series wrap-up]

# ***Thank God for Evolution!***

## **Study Guide for Mixed Religious, Secular, and Religiously Liberal Groups**

### **Session 1: Introduction & Orientation**



Note: page references in this study guide apply to the **BLUE cover** edition published by Council Oak Books.

In this first meeting, the leader(s) will guide the group in understanding the program elements that will apply to all subsequent weeks.

Consider that some of the participants may be highly skilled in guiding group dynamics, and you may wish to recruit those individuals to assist you and to rotate leadership responsibilities among the sessions to come.

#### **Goals:** Helping participants to

- (1) get to know one another
- (2) feel invested in the group's success
- (3) be inspired to pursue the assigned readings
- (4) relax into knowing that if they lapse in their readings, they will still be able to participate in discussion because of recitations that will begin each session, along with viewing of DVD segments
- (5) understand and embrace the importance of speaking from the heart (rather than making purely intellectual statements)
- (6) establish the importance of honoring diverse opinions and interpretations—thus sharing one's views without debating views
- (7) begin building trust among group participants, so that deep feelings and personal experiences can be shared safely
- (8) know and support the program elements and discussion patterns that will structure future sessions

#### **Materials:**

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
- The companion DVD to the book.
- List of chapter readings for all sessions to give to each participant
- chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
- the CD, *"Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"*
- CD player with speakers
- copies of the lyrics (below) to Peter Mayer's song, "Awake"
- copies of the Session Calendar to hand out to all participants

## Program Elements

### Leader to do in advance:

Make copies of the song lyrics “Awake” and of the 1-page Session Calendar to distribute to each participant.

The template of the Session Calendar appears on page 3 of this Study Guide. The template for the song lyrics appears on page 8.

Note: Before you make copies of the Session Calendar, write in the DATE of each meeting next to the name of the session, and decide whether you will use any of the three possible “supplemental” sessions. *[Leader guidance for the three supplemental sessions appears on the last 3 pages of this full study guide.]*

**1. In-Gathering.** (chairs in circle) Specially designed by program leaders to accomplish the listed goals above. Make sure to include your own or another’s **personal testimonial** as to why this program/curriculum was chosen. Note: This part of the program may take much or nearly all of the time for newly formed groups.

### 2. Recitation (10 to 15 minutes)

**a. Endorsements.** Begin by asking for 5 volunteers, in turn, to recite the **Nobel Laureate endorsements** that appear on the first printed page of the book’s front matter. You might also have noted the names of the other endorsers who resonate most with (or challenge) your group: notate those names in your copy of the book and perhaps recite their entries, too. Note: Endorsements appear in three places: back jacket, 6 pages before title page, and 5 pages following the index.

**b. Recitation of “Author’s Promises”.** Pass your copy of the book around, such that each paragraph on pages xxi – xxii are read aloud by a different participant.

### 3. DVD viewing: (none)

### 4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)

**5. Discussion in the round.** [It is important to encourage everyone to share briefly before discussion is opened. Based on the number of participants, determine how much time each person will be given to respond to the opening question, which is to be answered by all. Recruit someone to be the TIMEKEEPER and to chime or ring a bell gently when a person's time is up.] Here are the suggested opening questions for all to respond to:

**Q:** *"What attracted you to sign up for this multi-week program?"*

**Q:** *"After hearing the diversity of endorsements and the Author's Promises, how are you feeling about diving into the reading assignments and participating in the sessions to come?"*

**6. Discussion continues.** Possible questions:

**Q:** The words GOD and EVOLUTION both appear in the title of this book. And the subtitle is "How the Marriage of SCIENCE and RELIGION Will Transform Your Life and Our World." *Which of the two poles — religion or science — are you most comfortable with? Where do you anticipate that your outlook might be most challenged in the readings and in our discussions that ensue from those readings?*

**Q:** *As you embark on the readings, what are your own biggest questions or concerns on the topic of how science and religion relate to one another?*

**DISTRIBUTE the full 12-session list of Reading Assignments.**

"Take a look at this list and peruse the course of the reading assignments. Very importantly: *You don't have to do any of the reading to still be able to come to the meeting and participate.* How is this possible? Because at the beginning of every meeting we will ask volunteers to recite for the whole group key passages from the book readings.

For most sessions, we will also view a segment or two from the **companion DVD** to this book. *[Pass around the DVD for participants to peruse its cover and contents.]* Thus, there will always be plenty of material presented during the meeting itself, so that even the delinquent readers can shamelessly come to class and full-out participate!"

**SPECIAL: Obtaining group concurrence of structure for future sessions.** If the group is newly gathered specifically for this course, you can skip this step. But if the group is an ongoing book club or church cell group, you will want to ensure that the members buy into the structure for future meetings, especially if the structure greatly departs from what they are used to. If so, review with them the elements used in this introductory session and request group feedback on these structural components. Arrive at some decision on how future sessions will be structured and whether and how leadership will be shared.

## **7. Closing:**

### **7a. Reading assignment – 29 pages:**

Prologue, Introduction, Chapter 1

### **7b. Musical contemplation: “Awake” (4 minutes)**

(of CD “Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story”)

Distribute words on next page to each participant.

Play the song.

## Awake

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

Clouds are swift, rocks are ancient  
Mountains are high, oceans great  
Winds are restless, trees are patient  
And you my child are awake

Waves are crashing, rivers churning  
Planets twirling, stars ablaze  
Storms are raging, atoms whirling  
And you my child are awake

*To perceive these wondrous things  
To count the beats of a blackbird's wings  
To tell a story and dance and sing*

All the splendors of creation  
Are very happy that you came  
Because they needed someone to see them  
And you my child are awake

*To perceive these wondrous things  
To count the beats of a blackbird's wings  
To tell a story and dance and sing*

Seeds are hopeful, dewdrops fleeting  
Oak trees are crooked, redwoods straight  
And they are not known to the sleeping  
But you my child are awake  
You my child are awake, you my child . . .



## Session 2: Prologue, Introduction, Chapter 1 (29 pages)

### Topics:

- the importance of creation stories
- key characteristics of the Epic of Evolution
- “metareligious” and bridging science and religion

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
- chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
- DVD: *Thank God for Evolution!* and equipment to view it on
- the CD, “*Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story*”
- CD player with speakers
- **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter’s song, “Blue Boat Home”

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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

### 2. Recitation (6-8 minutes) – call for volunteer readers

- Page 1 – all
- Page 3 & 4 – last para on p. 3 to the section head on p. 4
- Page 13 – the epigraph by Primack and Abrams
- Page 15 – all
- Page 22 – The para that begins, “Imagine parents . . .”

### 3. DVD viewing (7 minutes) Disk 1: (“Personal Journey”) through end of “Introduction” (end at the blue chart, titled “THE EPIC OF EVOLUTION IS . . .” Maybe pause it there and leave onscreen.)

*Return chairs into a circle for discussion.*

### 4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes) “Before we begin discussion of the book and the dvd segments, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others.”

### 5. Discussion: [It is important to encourage everyone to share briefly before discussion is opened. Based on the number of participants, determine how much time each person will be given to respond to the opening question, which is to be answered by all. Recruit someone to be the TIMEKEEPER and to chime or ring a bell gently when a person’s time is up.] The suggested opening question:

**Q:** "In his book and in the DVD, Michael Dowd asserts that an overarching story that tells us who we are, where we came from, and how we should live in the world is vital to personal and cultural wellbeing. So here is the question: ***What creation story did YOU receive as a child?*** Was it important for you then, and is it important for you now?"

**6. Discussion continues.** Possible questions:

**Q:** "***What came up for you most powerfully*** in your reading at home, in the recitation that began this session, or in the segment of the DVD we viewed?"

**Q:** Michael Dowd asserts that this "Evolutionary Epic" is not in competition with traditional religious stories, but that it can "feed and nourish all stories." He uses the word "**metareligious**" to refer to this capacity. Certainly, we will not be able to judge whether he succeeds in this goal until the end of his book. But at this juncture, "***What are your thoughts on whether this is indeed a desirable goal, and whether it can be achieved in beneficial ways?***"

**Q:** The DVD segment ended with a list of **6 characteristics of the Epic of Evolution**. You will see these reprinted at the bottom of the handout of song lyrics. A similar list appears on pages 19-20 of the book. "***Does this list excite you any way?***"

**7. Closing:**

**7a. Reading assignment – 29 pages:** Chapters 2 and 3

"Be forewarned that chapter 2 is the densest science section of the book. Nonetheless, it's a good way for those with little interest in science to easily learn the core elements of the science of evolution — not as it is caricatured in the public arena, but as it is actually known by scientists today in the main stream of biology.

"Be forewarned that chapter 3 is exactly the opposite. Chapter 3 is written sermon-style, so it is flowing, personal, and may challenge the sermon-phobic among us! Nevertheless it is an excellent way to glimpse some of the core concepts that Dowd will cover in detail in later chapters."

**7b. Musical contemplation: "Blue Boat Home" (4 mins)**

from CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

[Distribute words on next page to each participant.]

## Blue Boat Home

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

Though below me, I feel no motion  
Standing on these mountains and plains  
Far away from the rolling ocean  
Still my dry land heart can say  
*I've been sailing all my life now*  
*Never harbor or port have I known*  
*The wide universe is the ocean I travel*  
*And the earth is my blue boat home*

Sun, my sail, and moon, my rudder  
As I ply the starry sea  
Leaning over the edge in wonder  
Casting questions into the deep  
*Drifting here with my ship's companions*  
*All we kindred pilgrim souls*  
*Making our way by the lights of the heavens*  
*In our beautiful blue boat home*

I give thanks to the waves upholding me  
Hail the great winds urging me on  
Greet the infinite sea before me  
Sing the sky my sailor's song  
*I was born upon the fathoms*  
*Never harbor or port have I known*  
*The wide universe is the ocean I travel*  
*And the earth is my blue boat home*

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THE EPIC OF EVOLUTION IS . . .

- Metareligious: enriches traditional stories
- A creation story that is not yet over
- Focused on this-world reality
- Shaped by the global perspective of science
- Celebrates radically different interpretations
- The story of the changing story

## Session 3: Chapters 2 and 3 (29 pages)

### Topics:

- the science of biological evolution
- sermon on “trusting the universe”

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
- chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
- the CD, “*Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story*”
- CD player with speaker
- **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter’s song, “My Soul”

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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

### 2. Recitation (12-15 minutes) – *call for volunteer readers*

- Page 25 to first section head of 26
- Page 26 (last para) to bottom section head on 27
- Page 37, para “As we have seen” to p. 38 section head
- Page 49 – All 5 paragraphs in the first section
- Page 51 – just the longest para, which begins “Having faith”

### 3. DVD viewing: *none for this session.*

**4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)** “Before we begin discussion of the chapters you perused at home and of the segments we just read aloud here, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others.”

**5. Discussion:** [It is important to encourage everyone to share briefly before discussion is opened. Based on the number of participants, determine how much time each person will be given to respond to the opening question, which is to be answered by all. Recruit someone to be the TIMEKEEPER and to chime or ring a bell gently when a person’s time is up.] Here is the suggested opening question:

**Q: *What came up for you most powerfully in your reading at home or in the recitation that began this session?***

## 6. Discussion continues. Possible questions:

**Q: Chapter 2 is an overview of the science** underlying biological evolution. Let's first invite those who normally would NOT pick up a science book to share with us whether they found that chapter helpful, perhaps even exciting in some way. For example, *did you learn something new that helps you make sense of the world or something in your life?*

**Q:** [After all the nonscience people have responded . . .] Now let's hear **reactions to chapter 2**, the science chapter, from those who regularly enjoy reading about science.

**Q: Chapter 3** is written in a different style from the rest of the book, in that it is based on **sermon** components that Rev. Dowd has delivered in churches during the six years that he and his wife have lived on the road as "evolutionary evangelists." Before we talk about our reactions to the theology it presumes, let's examine the science. *Did anyone learn something about the history of the Universe or of life or culture that really struck a chord with you? Did you learn something that in some way shifts how you view the world?*

**Q:** Let's now turn to the theology in chapter 3. Rev. Dowd is clear that he is using metaphorical language when he talks about **"trusting" the Universe**. *Did anyone have a powerful response —positive or negative — to this notion of trusting the Universe?*

## 7. Closing:

**7a. Reading assignment – 17 pages:** Chapter 4, "Private and Public Revelation" "The reading assignment is very short, just one chapter, because this topic is core to the author's entire project. So we need to ensure that we have sufficient time to discuss this core topic at our next session."

**7b. Musical contemplation: "My Soul" (5 mins)**  
(from CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story")  
Distribute words on next page to each participant.

## My Soul

There are a hundred billion  
snowflakes  
Swirling in the cosmic storm  
And each one is a galaxy  
A billion stars or more  
And each star is a million earths  
A giant fiery sun  
High up in some sky  
Maybe shining on someone

And deep inside a snowflake  
I am floating quietly  
I am infinitesimal  
Impossible to see  
Sitting in my tiny kitchen  
In my tiny home  
Staring out my window  
At a universe of snow

*But my soul is so much bigger  
Than the very tiny me  
It reaches out into the snowstorm  
Like a net into the sea  
Out to all the lovely places  
Where my body cannot go  
I touch that beauty and embrace it  
In the bosom of my soul*

And so brief and fleeting  
Is this tiny life of mine  
Like a single quarter note  
In the march of time  
But my soul is like the music  
It goes back to ancient days  
Back before it wore a human face  
Long before it bore my name

*Because my soul is so much older  
Than the evanescent me  
It can describe the dawn of time  
Like a childhood memory  
It is a spark that was begotten  
Of the darkness long ago  
What my body has forgotten  
I remember in my soul*

So we live this life together  
My giant soul and tiny me  
One resembling forever  
One like smoke upon the breeze  
One the deep abiding ocean  
One a sudden flashing wave  
And counting galaxies like  
snowflakes  
I would swear we were the same

*Oh my soul belongs to beauty  
Takes me up to lofty heights  
Teaches sacred stories to me  
Sanctifies my tiny life  
Lays a bridge across the ages  
Melts the boundaries of my bones  
Paints a bold eternal face  
On this passing moment  
Oh my soul*

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from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

## Session 4: Chapter 4 (17 pages)

### Topics:

- private v. public revelation
- flat-earth v. evolutionary faith
- facts as God's native tongue

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
  - chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
  - DVD: *Thank God for Evolution!* and equipment to view it on
  - the CD, *"Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"*
  - CD player with speakers
  - **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter's song, "Camping by the Sun"
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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

### 2. Recitation (8–12 minutes) – call for volunteer readers

- Page 57, begin at first para of text, "We are at a turning point"; continue onto p. 58 (but skip gray box), then p. 59 (and end at new section head).
- P. 64 (begin after epigraph). End just before final para of p. 65.
- Page 66, begin last para "Too many . . ." and finish on p. 67, just before the para that begins "To begin to craft".
- Page 68, begin with head, "Facts Are God's Native Tongue," and end just before the gray box on p. 69

**3. DVD viewing: Disk 1:** Begin with "Three Great Gifts" and continue on through "Public and Private Revelation. (6 minutes) Then return to the Menu and click on "Facts/God" (3.5 minutes) **Disk 2:** "Scientific Discoveries & God's Revelations" (but end it when he pulls out his beads and says, "Now let me describe what I have here") (5 minutes).

**4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)** "Before we begin discussion of the chapter you perused at home, the recitations, and the DVD clips, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others."

**5. Discussion:** [It is important to encourage everyone to share briefly before discussion is opened. Based on the number of

participants, determine how much time each person will be given to respond to the opening question, which is to be answered by all. Recruit someone to be the TIMEKEEPER and to chime or ring a bell gently when a person's time is up.] Here is the suggested opening question:

**Q: *What came up for you most powerfully in your reading at home or in the recitation or DVD that began this session?***

## **6. Discussion continues.** Possible questions:

**Q:** The distinction that Michael Dowd makes between PUBLIC and PRIVATE revelation is core to his version of "evolution theology." That is why only this one chapter was assigned reading for this session. ***Does Dowd's distinction between PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REVELATION help you understand science or understand religion in a new way?***

**Q:** On p. 65 Dowd talks about how ***commentaries of scripture*** (such as the Nicene Creed) may be more difficult for religious liberals to recite than scripture itself. [Recite the para that begins, "Because the Nicene Creed . . . Note: You may also wish to recite the full text of the Nicene Creed, which appears on the next page of this study guide.] Then ask this question: ***Does anyone here have personal experience of having been troubled by the necessity to recite in church a statement of literalistic belief in scripture, such as the Nicene Creed?***

**Q:** Dowd boldly contrasts "**evolutionary faith**" with what he calls "**flat-earth faith**". *Do you regard this as an important distinction—or does it strike you as offensive?*

**Q:** In the story about the **Grand Canyon** (page 58), Dowd takes a rather unusual stance that makes it hard to peg him as liberal or conservative. *Did you find this story surprising? Was his viewpoint persuasive?*

## **7. Closing:**

**7a. Reading assignment – 18 pages:** Chapter 5, "The Nested Emergent Nature of Divine Creativity" "The reading assignment is very short again, just one chapter, because Dowd asserts that the discovery of nested emergence in the universe is the greatest of all "public revelations" that have come through the



sciences. So we need to ensure that we have sufficient time to fully discuss this concept at our next session."

**7b. Musical contemplation: "Camping by the Sun"**

(4.5 minutes) of CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

Distribute words on next page to each participant.

## **NICENE CREED**

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## Camping by the Sun

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

I like it here and so do you  
On the one that's green and blue  
With everything that life requires  
A big hydrogen camp-fire  
We could be here quite a few days  
The next place is four light-years away  
When you're camping by the sun

*Yippee-yay-yeh, yippee-yay-yo*  
*Outer space is mighty cold*  
*Unless by chance, you have found*  
*A nice, warm star to fly around*  
*Unless you're camping by the sun*

Like the earth roped the moon  
The sun's got us in its own lasso  
We're doing dishes and we're taking showers  
At sixty-five thousand miles an hour  
It makes you want to play the guitar  
And sing songs with Jupiter and Mars  
When you're camping by the sun

*Yippee-yay-yeh, yippee-yay-yah*  
*Outer space is very dark*  
*Unless with luck, you have found*  
*A nice, bright star to fly around*  
*Unless you're camping by the sun*

*Yippee-yay-yeh, yippee-yay-yo*  
*Outer space is dark and cold*  
*Unless by chance, you have found*  
*A bright, warm star to fly around*  
*Unless you're camping by the sun*

And just before you close your eyes  
When the sun's on the other side  
You can wonder at the countless thousands  
The other fires and who's around them  
And if the sticks for their hot dogs  
Are ninety-three million miles long  
When you're camping by the sun

## Session 5: Chapter 5 (18 pages)

### Topics:

- the nested, emergent nature of divine creativity
- we are made of stardust
- death as natural and generative at all levels of reality

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
- chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
- DVD: *Thank God for Evolution!* and equipment to view it on
- the CD, "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"
- CD player with speakers
- **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter's song, "The Play"

NOTE TO LEADER: An **earlier DVD** with Michael Dowd's wife, Connie Barlow (author of 4 popular science books), presents in detail the topics of "**We Are Made of Stardust**" (1 hour) and "**Death Through Deep-Time Eyes**" (1 hour). The DVD is titled "Celebrating Evolution." You might wish to acquire this DVD set and offer a SUPPLEMENTAL SESSION FOR VIEWING (1 or 2 hours), or simply make it available for lending within the group. "Celebrating Evolution" DVD set can be purchased online at: <http://thegreatstory.org/dvd.html>. Guidance for this Supplemental Session appears at the end of this Study Guide.

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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

"For this session the recitation, DVD viewing, and discussion will be divided into two parts: first, "Nested Emergence and Stardust" and then "Death as Sacred."

### (a) Nested Emergence and Stardust

#### 2a. Recitation: "Nested Emergence" and "Stardust" (8-10 mins) *call for volunteer readers*

- Page 75 - Recite whole page except skip the final two lines
- Page 76 - Begin with the final two lines "We now know" and continue onto page 77, ending just before the para "As we will examine . . ."
- Page 79 - Recite the entire poem by Joyce Keller.
- Page 79 - Begin with the section title, "We Are Made of Stardust," and continue onto page 80, continuing through the 2<sup>nd</sup> full para

- so you end with “as Sagan enthused.”
- Page 83 - Recite just the gray box.

**3a. DVD viewing: (4 minutes) Disk 1: “Nested Emergence”**

**4a. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)** “Before we begin discussing the chapter you perused at home, along with the recitations and the DVD clips, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others.”

**5a. Discussion:**

**Q:** Let’s begin with the topic of “**nested emergence.**” Dowd suggests that “the nested emergent nature of divine creativity” is the greatest of the “public revelations” afforded through science. *Does this viewpoint resonate with you? And how does it affect your view of divine action in the world? Your view of God?*

**Q:** Moving to the “**Stardust**” theme, Dowd reports that many people have awakened to the wonder and intimacy of the Epic of Evolution when they have learned that the atoms of their bodies are “recycled stardust.” The stardust section begins on page 79, introduced with a quotation by Carl Sagan. In his 1980 “Cosmos” television program, Carl Sagan ended the series with these words: “We are the local embodiment of the Cosmos grown to self-awareness. We have begun to contemplate our origins—starstuff pondering the stars!”

*First, who among us had a kind of powerful awakening when watching Sagan’s Cosmos back in 1980 or in reruns of the program later? . . . Would anyone like to share their story?*

*Did anyone here learn that we are made of stardust just now – by reading the book or listening to the recitation? . . . And did that new understanding resonate powerfully with anyone?*

**(b) Death as Sacred**

**2b. Recitation: “Death” (4–6 minutes)**

- Page 84 - Begin reading from the top and finish after the starred sentence: “Death is no less sacred than life”
- Page 87 – Read just the gray box (finish on next page).
- Page 86 – [end with this reading]: read the gray box, titled “Death—Don’t Blame God”

**3b. DVD viewing: (7 minutes) Disk 2: "Death and Extinction"**

[Note: You must eject Disk 1 and load up Disk 2. Begin at the chapter titled "Death and Extinction, but be ready to stop the DVD when Dowd says, "Let's stop for questions."]

**4b. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)**

**5b. Discussion:**

**Q:** *Before we move into personal responses to the theme of "Death as natural and generative at all levels of reality", let's first see whether any of us **were taught as children** that death came into the world only because Adam sinned in the Garden?*  
[invite one or two stories]

**Q:** *Did anyone have **a powerful experience** reading about death in Dowd's book, or in listening to the recitations here or watching the DVD segment on death?*

**Q:** *On page 87, Dowd writes: "Crucially, we can adopt a new and expanded view of death as natural and generative while respecting diverse poetic imaginings about what happens to consciousness, soul, or spirit after death." Let's test his statement **by inviting any among us who believe in some form of life or consciousness after death** to share whether they find that the fact of death as natural and generative can square with their beliefs? For example, do you find yourself resisting or embracing the evolutionary understanding of why there is death in the world?*

**7. Closing:**

**7a. Reading assignment – 31 pages: Chapters 6 and 7**

"Because there is so much disharmony in our society over when to use the word 'God' and what that word means, these two chapters are extraordinarily important — no matter where you stand in the spectrum of belief or nonbelief. So please find time to do the reading. But if you can't complete it, come anyway, because we will **view 37 minutes of DVD** next session that will cover the same material."

**7b. Musical contemplation: "The Play" (5 mins)**

(from CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story")

Distribute words on next page to each participant.

## The Play

When I go outside at night  
And look up and the stars are bright  
Sometimes I lay on the ground  
And imagine that the sky is down  
And if the earth should then let go  
I'd fall into the stars below  
I'd fall into the stars below

And when I see the red sunset  
In its quiet splendor, I reflect  
That that sun's not going down at all  
But the earth is turning somersaults  
And through a sunlit sea it trails  
And we are on that great big whale  
We're riding on that great big whale

*When I try to grasp  
The simple fact of this existence  
And think of all the fantasies  
And fairytales and wishes  
None strike me as more unlikely  
Or magnificent than this is*

Hands and faces seen up close  
Galaxies through telescopes  
Crimson hillsides in the fall  
And more astounding than  
them all are pondering minds  
with eyes that see  
These are deep mysteries  
Deep mysteries

*When I try to grasp  
The simple fact of this existence  
And think of all the fantasies  
And fairytales and wishes  
None strike me as more unlikely  
Or magnificent than this is*

*Like a strange, enchanting play  
Of impossible dimensions  
The setting and the stage  
Run light-years in all directions  
And the breathless scenes and  
The storyline defy comprehension*

And when I think of all the roles  
In this production, all I know is  
I'm in the cast, but could it be  
I'm also in a front row seat  
To sit in my amazement, gazing  
To ooh and ahh and sigh and say  
My, what a wonderful play  
My, my, my, my...

---

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

## Session 6: Chapters 6 and 7 (31 pages)

### Topics:

- language, metaphor, and religious concepts
- What do we mean by "God"?
- How do we envision "the Universe"?
- "day language" v. "night language"
- What is prayer?
- the role of humanity in an evolving universe

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
  - chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
  - DVD: *Thank God for Evolution!* and equipment to view it on
  - the CD, *"Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"*
  - CD player with speakers
  - **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter's song, "Birthday Party"
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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

NOTE TO LEADER: Because the DVD segments pertaining to chapters 6 and 7 are so lengthy (a total of 37 minutes), skip the recitation and simply use the DVD parts recommended here. Also, to conserve time, the questions listed here for discussion are very focused.

**3. DVD viewing: (23 minutes) Disk 1:** Begin with "God and Reality" and continue smoothly through "Crea~~the~~ism", "Believe v. Know", and "The Whole." Then **return to menu** and click on (14 minutes) "Day/Night Language". End when the title of the next segment appears.

LEADER: [Conduct a recitation as suggested below ONLY if you have no access to the DVD or to a DVD player:](#)

### 2. Recitation (9–12 minutes) – call for volunteer readers

- Page 93, recite entire page except last two lines.
- Page 94, begin reciting final paragraph and continue through end of first paragraph on page 95.
- Page 96, first 2 paragraphs.
- Page 99, last para that begins "The monotheism" and continue onto page 100 through the second full paragraph, which ends:  
" . . . nowhere evident in the material realm."



- Page 103, recite just the first paragraph of text (after epigraph).
- Page 104, recite only the final paragraph, "We cannot solve . . ."
- Page 108, recite only the para that begins, "God, from this"
- Page 114, recite only the para that begins, "I am presenting"

**4. Silent reflection:** (2 minutes) "Before we begin discussion of the chapters you perused at home and the DVD segments, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others."

**5 & 6. Discussion:** Note to Leader: Because God language and notions of prayer can be so contentious, we suggest you center discussion on the first two questions, as follows. These will surely stimulate talk for most (if not the entire) time. The first question is posed to NONTHEISTS; the second question is posed to THEISTS.

**Q:** Thus far in this course, Dowd has been occasionally using God language in both usual and unusual ways. Let us begin with a question for those among us who have little personal use for God language. For the NONTHEISTS among us, here is the question: *Consider Dowd's description of what he means by **the word "God"** and why he personally chooses to use God language: Do his choices in this regard make sense to you — and do they seem helpful?*

**Q:** Let us now hear from the THEISTS among us, and from any who personally choose to use God language. Here is the question: *Does Dowd's description of what he means **by the word "God"** and how he personally relates to **prayer** appeal to you—or do you find his take on these spiritual matters lacking in ways important to you?*

**Q:** Here is a related question to discuss: Dowd states that a goal in writing this book was to help bridge the chasm between science and religion. *Does anyone here feel that, while perhaps disagreeing with certain aspects of Dowd's approach, they nevertheless do regard this book as a possible way **to help family members, colleagues, and friends** on the opposite side of the religious divide from you begin to appreciate your own views and beliefs?*

**Q:** On page 103, Dowd introduces another key distinction, the distinction between **day and night language**. *Did anyone have an aha experience around this concept? Did it bring you new clarity in some way?*

## **7. Closing:**

### **7a. Reading assignment – 27 pages: Chapters 8 and 9**

"The assigned reading takes us into Part III of the book. This new part is titled, "The Gospel According to Evolution" (with "gospel" meaning "good news"). The good news of this core section of the book is grounded in very recent and ongoing discoveries in the fields of **evolutionary psychology** and **evolutionary brain science**.

"Dowd's experience in presenting these concepts to live audiences suggests that, for at least some among us, this set of readings and the next will be the most meaningful and perhaps life-changing of the entire course. So be sure to find some time to tackle them. As usual, if life gets in the way, come to class anyway, because there will be plenty of recitation and DVD viewing to help you comprehend the basics."

### **7b. Musical contemplation: "Birthday Party" (5 mins)** (from CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story") Distribute words on next page to each participant.

## The Birthday Party

from "*Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story*"

I saw the Buddha open up his eyes one Sunday morning  
Say he's invited to a party for Christ, and he must be going  
He heaved himself up with a groan, standing slowly  
Came down those steps of stone, and asked me  
Where to catch the next train to Jerusalem

In India he sang with Hindus as they prayed  
By the Ganges when the dawn came  
Near Arabia, he saw Mohammed on the train  
And asked if he would join him  
Passing those teeming towns, they talked for hours  
All about the truth and how it's discovered  
Trading bits of news and stories from these thousand years

Saying "great idea, this party for Jesus"  
Then Mohammed said "hey Buddha, it's great to see ya"

Finding the place with the help of Abraham  
Waving from the doorway  
They greeted faces from a thousand holy lands  
Present day and always  
Everybody talking, laughing, fiercely debating  
Saying how desperately the world is changing  
Then somebody lit the two-thousand candles

And they all toasted Jesus, born in a stable  
Then Jesus said "hey, let's not be such strangers"

## Session 7: Chapters 8 and 9 (27 pages)

### Topics:

- “REALizing” religion — interpreting religious concepts for here/now
- “REALizing” the Christian concepts of “the Fall” and “Original Sin”
- our evolved “Quadrune Brain”
- Mismatch Theory and other lessons from evolutionary psychology

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
  - enough copies of the **BRAIN CHART** appended here to give to all
  - chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
  - DVD: *Thank God for Evolution!* and equipment to view it on
  - the CD, “*Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story*”
  - CD player with speakers
  - **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter’s song, “God Is a River”
- 

## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

### 2. Recitation (15–20 minutes) – call for volunteer readers

- Page 128, begin with first full para (“What I mean by REALize”) and close with the end of the 4-part list.
- Page 131, begin reading at the section head, “Don’t Throw Out” and continue onto page 132, stopping where gray box begins.
- Page 133, all of page; continue to next section head on p. 134.
- Page 141, begin with para “It is a truism”; continue to 142 and end just before “Nature versus Nurture” title
- Pages 142–43, recite the “Male/Female Differences” section
- Begin last two lines on p. 147, “The Ted Haggard story”, and continue onto next page, ending at the section head.
- Begin on page 150 right after the gray box and continue through the end of the first paragraph on p. 151.
- Recite the one paragraph that spans the bottom of p. 152 and top of p. 153. It begins, “Let us approach . . .”
- Page 154, the final paragraph.

**3. DVD viewing: (7 minutes) Disk 1:** Begin with “Transforms Lives and Relationships”, and continue smoothly through “Mismatch” and then on through “A Story of Awakening.” [Note: Sometime in late 2008, Dowd and Barlow will produce a new DVD entirely on evolutionary brain science and evolutionary psychology.]

**4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)** “Before we begin discussion of the chapters you perused at home, the recitations, and the DVD clips, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others.”

**5. Discussion:** Pass out copies of the **CHART**, “Your Evolved Brain” [It is important to encourage everyone to share briefly before discussion is opened. Based on the number of participants, determine how much time each person will be given to respond to the opening question, which is to be answered by all. Recruit someone to be the TIMEKEEPER and to chime or ring a bell gently when a person’s time is up.] Here is the suggested opening question:

**Q:** Michael Dowd calls this section of the book, “The Gospel According to Evolution.” The word “Gospel” means “good news”. *Does the **Story of our Evolved Brain** strike you PERSONALLY as good news? Why or why not?*

**6. Discussion continues.** Possible questions:

**Q:** For those among us who are excited by the concepts Dowd presents in these chapters, *Would anyone like to share more personally **on how this perspective may help reframe** your view of past or ongoing difficulties and thus how you might move into the future in a more hopeful or positive way?*

**Q:** A hallmark of the **spiritual quest** is encouraging **compassion** for ourselves when we make mistakes — and compassion for the flaws we perceive in others. *Do you think that bringing this evolutionary perspective into your life would help you become more compassionate, perhaps more forgiving?*

**Q:** In the recitation from page 150, you heard Michael Dowd claim that, “The salvation of the **liberal Christian churches**, and the grounding in reality for **conservative churches**, depends on their adopting for everyday use and translating into appropriate religious language these and other findings of **evolutionary brain science** and **evolutionary psychology**.” *Do you agree with Dowd on the significance of these scientific insights for helping to evolve the religions?*

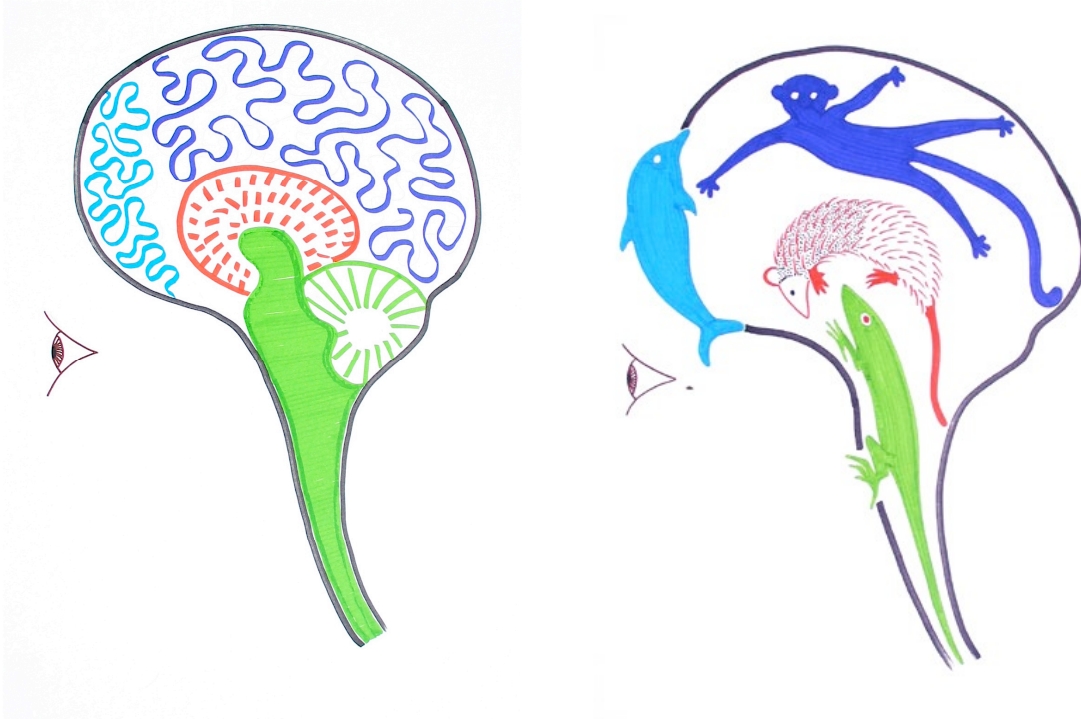
## 7. Closing:

**7a. Reading assignment – 29 pages:** Chapter 10, "REALizing Personal Salvation". Two announcements:

- *Please try to remember to bring to the next session your copy of the Brain Chart that we handed out today, as the theme of our evolved brain will continue then.*
- *If anyone is so inspired, do the exercise that begins on page 163 titled, "Discerning Your Calling" — and then report back to the group next session.*

**7b. Musical contemplation: "God Is a River" (4 minutes)**  
(of CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story")  
Distribute words (below, 2<sup>nd</sup> page down) to each participant.

## Your Evolved Brain



Reptilian (brain stem, cerebellum) . . . . . "LIZARD LEGACY"

Old Mammalian (limbic system) . . . . . "FURRY LI'L MAMMAL"

New Mammalian (neocortex) . . . . . "MONKEY MIND"

Advanced (frontal lobes) . . . . . "HIGHER PORPOISE"

*Note: similar charts appear on page 135 of Michael Dowd's book:  
"Thank God for Evolution!"*

*These charts can be downloaded in color at:*

<http://thegreatstory.org/charts/triune.html>

## God Is a River

In the ever-shifting waters  
Of the river of this life  
I was swimming, seeking comfort  
I was wrestling waves to find  
A boulder I could cling to  
A stone to hold me fast  
Where I might let the fretful waters  
Of this river 'round me pass

And so I found an anchor  
A blessed resting place  
A trusty rock I called my savior  
For there I would be safe  
From the river and its dangers  
And I proclaimed my rock divine  
And I prayed to it "protect me"  
And the rock replied

*God is a river, not just a stone  
God is a wild, raging rapids  
And a slow, meandering flow  
God is a deep and narrow passage  
And a peaceful, sandy shoal  
God is a river, swimmer, so let go*

Still I clung to my rock tightly  
With conviction in my arms  
Never looking at the stream to keep  
My mind from thoughts of harm  
But the river kept on coming  
Kept on tugging at my legs  
Till at last my fingers faltered  
And I was swept away

So I'm going with the flow now  
These relentless twists and bends  
Acclimating to the motion  
And a sense of being led  
And this river's like my body now  
It carries me along  
Through the ever-changing scenes  
And by the rocks that sing this song

*God is a river, not just a stone  
God is a wild, raging rapids  
And a slow, meandering flow  
God is a deep and narrow passage  
And a peaceful, sandy shoal  
God is a river, swimmer, so let go*

*God is the river, swimmer, so let go*

---

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"



## Session 8: Chapter 10 (29 pages)

### Topics:

- REALizing (making real) the doctrine of “personal salvation”
- How the different parts of our brain can interact for our wellbeing
- Evolutionary Integrity (also called Deep Integrity)
- REALizing the Christian concepts of “saving faith” and “the gospel”

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
- your own copy of the **BRAIN CHART** handed out last session
- chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
- the CD, *Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story*
- CD player with speakers
- **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter’s song, “The String”

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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

### 2. Recitation (20–25 minutes) – call for volunteer readers

“Our recitation will be longer than usual because there is no DVD segment recommended for this session.”

- Page 155 – Read the entire page and continue onto page 156 (but skip the gray box). End at the top of 157, just before the new section head.
- Page 157 – Begin with the section head and continue all the way onto page 159, finishing just before the gray box.
- Page 161 – Begin reading the paragraph that starts “Fortunately” and continue reading to the bottom of the page.
- Page 162 – Read aloud the entire page.
- Page 168 – Read just the gray box on this page.
- Page 169 – Read just the para beginning, “As I walk . . .”
- Page 170 – Begin reading at the section title near the bottom, and continue to the very bottom of the next page, page 171.

### 3. DVD viewing: none this time

**4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)** “Before we begin discussion of the chapters you perused at home and the recitations, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way

that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others.”

**5. Discussion:** [It is important to encourage everyone to share briefly before discussion is opened. Based on the number of participants, determine how much time each person will be given to respond to the opening question, which is to be answered by all. Recruit someone to be the TIMEKEEPER and to chime or ring a bell gently when a person’s time is up.] Here is the suggested opening question:

**Q: *What came up for you most powerfully in your reading at home or in the recitations that began this session?*** Note: For those of you who did the “Discerning Your Calling” exercise, please hold off talking about that now, as we’ll close this session by asking to hear from you. Right now, let’s all reflect on the new concepts pertaining to our evolved brains.

**6. Discussion continues.** Possible questions:

**Q:** The readings gave us an evolutionary look at **substance and sex addictions and codependence**. For those among us familiar with how these challenges are normally dealt with in recovery programs, *do you think an evolutionary perspective would be a helpful addition?* Specifically, *do you think Dowd’s framing of addictions and codependence as, in a way, **expected rather than aberrant** responses to modern life might be helpful in encouraging sufferers to more readily move beyond denial and thus to seek assistance? Would it be helpful for sufferers of these afflictions to first appreciate how these very same drives once served their distant ancestors — how none of us would be here without them?*

**Q:** On page 159 Dowd writes, “Guidance for nurturing **teens** (and our staying sane in the process) is one of the biggest blessings offered by evolutionary psychology.” *Do you think this perspective should be incorporated into **how we educate our teens about love, sex, drugs, and making good choices in life?*** Also, back on page 139 Dowd talks about how helping teens cultivate a “Higher Porpoise” can be crucial to their wellbeing. *Overall, how might an evolutionary perspective supplement the guidance we give to our youth?*

**Q:** Let’s talk about the perspective that evolutionary psychology brings to the trauma of **marital infidelity**, especially those

instances that follow on the heels of an increase in status and thus an increase in the sex-drive hormone: testosterone. *Is an evolutionary understanding a liability in this regard? That is, does it just give the unfaithful partner a good excuse? Or can it be healing? Can it foster forgiveness, while providing the depth of understanding and practical tools to decrease the possibility of a subsequent fall from the marital bond?* On one of his websites, Michael Dowd reports an amazing story — which happened after his book was published. Here is the story:

- In 2007, as part of his "Thank God for Evolution" presentation, Michael talked about our evolved brain and mentioned how scientists have discovered that "If we get a promotion, are voted into office, or in some other way experience a big boost in status, **our testosterone levels shoot through the roof**. Because testosterone is the hormone that influences the sex drive, unless we are aware of this and take precautions to ensure accountability, we can wreak havoc in our lives and those of our loved ones." Afterwards, a man drew Michael aside and said, "I have never told anyone this before, because I was too ashamed. But here is my story: When I was promoted to head my division, **my life began to fall apart**. I couldn't understand it. Within a year I had five affairs and my marriage was in ruins. I couldn't understand how this could have happened to me!"

*Okay, would anyone like to start this discussion of an evolutionary look at marital infidelity?*

**Q:** The final three sections of Chapter 10 (beginning on page 176) apply evolutionary brain science to **Christian themes**. These sections are titled, "Christ-Like Evolutionary Integrity", "REALizing Saving Faith", and "REAL-izing the Gospel". These sections thus are examples of how Dowd attempts to show that Christianity (and, by implication, other religions too) can actually be **enhanced** by an evolutionary understanding — rather than diminished by or merely reconciled to the science of evolution. *Was anyone particularly inspired by these Christian sections? If so, would you like to share with the group what was most meaningful for you?*

## **7. Closing:**

**Q:** *Did anyone actually do the exercise on page 163 titled, "**Discerning Your Calling?**" . . . Was it a powerful experience for any of you? . . . If so, who would like to tell the group about your experience?*

**7a. Reading assignment – 37 pages: Chapters 11, 12, 13**

“Because these next readings are chock full of actual practices for improving our lives and relationships, let’s all make an effort to try out at least one such practice before we meet again. If you are not so led, then as you do the reading, perhaps pick out one or two practices that you THINK you might like to try out in the future.

“Accordingly, let’s conduct our discussion at our next meeting in a very different way: The discussion will primarily entail reports of those who have tried out a practice and want to SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE of whether and how that practice worked for them. In addition, the rest of us can speak to the group about which practices we think we might like to try out in the future—and why.”

**7b. Musical contemplation: “The String” (4.5 minutes)**  
(from CD “Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story”)  
Distribute words on next page to each participant.

## The String

I have found a hole  
In the center of the heart  
Through which a thread goes  
Enters and departs  
It's fastened in the middle  
To inside of me  
From where it then continues  
through  
The heart of everything

So when I get a feeling  
Like a pulling on the chest  
I have to ask if that was me  
Or one of the rest  
Sometimes it's painful  
Sometimes just a tap  
Sometimes it happens violently  
And knocks me on my back

*When pain is not just mine alone  
That's when I know  
Somebody's tugging on the string*

And when I start shaking  
Like a tremor in the ground  
Or an organ pipe in rank  
When it's resonating sound  
Such a fine emotion of such  
intensity  
Takes a hold, and I know  
That it can't be only me

Then I guess that someone  
Maybe far away  
Has grown a little tired  
Of the instrument they play  
And somehow has discovered  
That universal thread  
And reached out a courageous  
hand  
And plucked that chord instead

*When life seems like it's  
Only music then I know  
Somebody's playing the string*

And sometimes when I stand  
Beneath the sky at night  
I take up the slack  
Till the string is tight  
And staring at the stars  
I take a step or two  
And I see them move  
I think I see them move

Everything's connected  
Like peas are in a pod  
Or beads upon a necklace  
Decorating God  
Going around the rosy  
We're all in the ring  
Hand in hand, like a strand  
Through the heart of everything

*from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"*

## Session 9: Chapters 11, 12, and 13 (37 pages)

### Topics:

- Evolutionary Integrity Practices
- Evolving our most intimate relationships (more practices)
- Evolving 12-step recovery practices

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
- your own copy of the **BRAIN CHART** handed out last session
- **PRINT THE APPENDED LIST OF PRACTICES**, so that a scribe you recruit can keep track of who did what practice
- chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
- the CD, *"Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"*
- CD player with speakers
- **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter's song, "Like a Mountain"

## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

Note to LEADER: **No DVD viewing** this time.

Note to LEADER: Have the print-out of "Practices" ready to fill in.  
(The master is appended a few pages below.)

### 2. Recitation and Recruitment (**how ever long it takes**) –

"In the last session we announced that discussion this time would be quite different. Rather than posing questions we will ask those who **actually tried out one or more of the practices** presented in chapters 11, 12, and 13 to share with us their experiences.

"But first, I need to get a sense of how many sharings there will be, so that we can allocate the time accordingly. I'll name the practices one by one and see who volunteers to speak about which ones. Agreed?

"*Will someone **volunteer to be the scribe**?* I have a print-out of the name of each practice, so the only thing you need to do is fill in the names of those who volunteer to speak about their experience."

[Continue after the scribe is prepared to take notes. . . ]

"Please follow along in your copy of the book, as I name each practice.

"Let's actually step back a chapter and pick up on one very important practice that appeared in our prior readings:

- Page 174 – "Growing in Deep integrity" - *Who attempted to do that exercise? . . . Would you be willing to tell us about it later?*
- Page 195 – "Noticing 2 or More Sensory Stimuli at the same time"
- Page 196 – "Speaking in Tongues"
- Page 199 – "Integrity Circles"
- Page 199 – "Soliciting Feedback"
- Page 200 – "Reframing the Past"
- Page 203 – "Looking for Opportunity"
- Page 204 – "Inventory Your Character"
- Page 205 – "Come Clean"
- Page 205 – "Light-Hearted Integrity Checks"
- Page 206 – "Taking Responsibility for Your Wake"
- Page 207 – "Magic in any relationship" (the gray box)
- Page 210 – "Letters of Gratitude"
- Page 210 – "Cultivating Generosity"
- Page 211 – "Discerning Your Calling"
- Page 212 – "Mentoring"
- Page 216 – "Heart to Heart Talk" (gray box)
- Page 218 – "Playfulness and Humor" (tried for more of?)
- Page 218 – "Meaningful Songs and Ritual" (added anything new?)
- Page 220 – "Where's My Avocado?" (gray box)
- Page 224 – "Deep Integrity Affirmations"

**4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)** “Before we begin talking about our experiences with the practices, let us enter a space of silence.”

## **5 & 6. Discussion:**

[Leader: Use “popcorn-style” – Invite sharings of the practices in no particular order. Just whoever volunteers first. Note: If few people actually attempted to do a practice, you can also ask people to volunteer to talk about which practice is most attractive to them and how they think it might help in their lives. Make sure you leave some time to do the latter, anyway.]

[Leader: If there is extra time, you may wish to pose this question:]

**Q:** An evolutionary understanding of our brain does not so much suggest new practices as **help us understand WHY existing practices work** — and how we might evolve them to work even better. It provides a kind of **framework** into which we can place the practices that are important to us. It does this by encouraging us to assess **which part of our evolved brain is causing us trouble** in a particular instance, and which parts we might engage to lessen the trouble. So here is the question: *How does this evolutionary perspective **enrich your appreciation of the spiritual and self-help practices that are already part of your life?***

## **7. Closing:**

### **7a. Reading assignment – 24 pages: Chapters 14 and 15**

Here we move beyond personal self-help to look at how an evolutionary understand can help us with societal concerns.

### **7b. Musical contemplation: “Like a Mountain” (5 mins)**

(of CD “Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story”)

Distribute words (2 pages below) to each participant.



## PRACTICES

- Page 174 – “Growing in Deep integrity”
- Page 195 – “Noticing 2 or More Sensory Stimuli at the same time”
- Page 196 – “Speaking in Tongues”
- Page 199 – “Integrity Circles”
- Page 199 – “Soliciting Feedback”
- Page 200 – “Reframing the Past”
- Page 203 – “Looking for Opportunity”
- Page 204 – “Inventory Your Character”
- Page 205 – “Come Clean”
- Page 205 – “Light-Hearted Integrity Checks”
- Page 206 – “Taking Responsibility for Your Wake”
- Page 207 – “Magic in any relationship” (the gray box)
- Page 210 – “Letters of Gratitude”
- Page 210 – “Cultivating Generosity”
- Page 211 – “Discerning Your Calling”
- Page 212 – “Mentoring”
- Page 216 – “Heart to Heart Talk” (gray box)
- Page 218 – “Playfulness and Humor” (tried for more of?)
- Page 218 – “Meaningful Songs and Ritual” (added anything new?)
- Page 220 – “Where’s My Avocado?” (gray box)
- Page 224 – “Deep Integrity Affirmations”

## Like a Mountain

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

Driving near Mount Shavano  
It seemed to be looking me over  
Feeling that gaze down below  
I pulled the car off on the shoulder

Staring at the rock and the sky  
My heart began beating more slowly  
Till I lost track of time  
And forgot where it was I was going

*Suddenly, I saw life from the brink  
I watched an age pass me by like a wink  
For just one heartbeat, I believe I could think  
Like a mountain*

Mountain, we measure our lives  
By tens and by twenty years only  
Teach us the ways of a million-year mind  
What a million-year heart could be hoping

*Suddenly, I saw life from the brink  
I watched an age pass me by like a wink  
For just one heartbeat, I believe I could think  
Like a mountain*

*And oh, if I'm wise I will strive and I'll pray  
To turn that one tick in time into a day  
And lead this poor picture-flash life in that way  
Like a mountain*

## Session 10: Chapters 14 and 15 (26 pages)

### Topics:

- Collective Sin and Salvation – REALizing these doctrines
- Cultural evolution of collective intelligence

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
  - DVD: *Thank God for Evolution!* and equipment to view it on
  - chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
  - the CD, "*Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story*"
  - CD player with speakers
  - **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter's song, "Earth Town Square"
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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

### 2. Recitation (15 to 20 minutes) – call for volunteer readers

- Page 233 – Begin reciting first paragraph of text and continue onto page 234, just the first 3 lines (before the new section)
- Page 235 – Begin at the top of the page and finish just before the final paragraph. End with " . . . our even knowing it."
- Page 236 – Begin with the second para ("A nested") and end on page 237, just before the new section head.
- Page 241 – Begin para "In this Universe"; end with "Crucifixion" indeed line, just before final paragraph.
- Page 247 – just the David Sloan Wilson epigraph at bottom.
- Page 252 – Read 2 consecutive paras, the first begins "Any of us"

### 3. DVD viewing: (9 minutes) Disk 1: "Evolutionary Integrity"

**4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)** "Before we begin discussion of the chapters you perused at home and the recitations, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others."

**5. Discussion:** [It is important to encourage everyone to share briefly before discussion is opened. Based on the number of participants, determine how much time each person will be given to respond to the opening question, which is to be answered by all. Recruit someone to be the TIMEKEEPER and to chime or ring a bell gently when a person's time is up.] Here is the suggested opening question:

**Q: *What came up for you most powerfully in your reading at home, in the recitation here, or in the DVD segment we just watched?***

**6. Discussion continues.** Possible questions:

**Q:** The author, Michael Dowd, freely uses **God language** in the readings we have recited in this section. He sometimes also uses phrases drawn from biblical scripture or Christian doctrines, though he usually identifies these as **"night language"** — clearly outside the realm of factual science. *Have you personally grown accustomed to his way of mixing day and night language?*

**Q:** *Do you resonate with the author's agenda of **using an evolutionary perspective to help solve societal problems** and to inspire active engagement in the solutions?* For example, on page 236, he has an indented paragraph in which he talks about "the fundamental immaturity of the human species." *Are these applications of evolution to the societal level insightful for you?*

**Q:** The final recitation (page 252 on "the core commons") evoked a sense of **expanding circles of care and concern**. *Would anyone like to share their own personal life trajectory of expanding your circle of care? You might also speculate on where you think your next expansion will be, and how that might happen?*

**7. Closing:**

**7a. Reading assignment – 38 pages:** Chapters 16 and 17

"Here Dowd makes a grand survey of the past (chapter 16) in order to gain the insights for thinking about our collective future (chapter 17). Importantly, Dowd takes a square look at what he calls "the bad news" before he takes a hopeful turn. So brace yourself!

"You might be interested to know that the topics and details in both of these chapters are also presented in DVD form drawn from Dowd's public performances. We'll have the details on what that DVD is at our next meeting."

**7b. Musical contemplation: "Earth Town Square" (4 mins)**  
(from CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story")  
Distribute words on next page to each participant.

## Earth Town Square

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

Once, we were lonely islands, divided by horizons  
A hundred thousand tribes surviving  
Scattered far and wide  
Hearing only stories, of distant territories  
Peering out across the miles between our shorelines

Then, we harnessed nature's forces  
Straddled backs of horses  
Waging wars and crossing borders as our numbers grew  
We bought and sold and traded, oceans were navigated  
And fates entwined by rails and roads and telephones  
And soon, we cracked the code of flight  
Spoke via satellite at the speed of light, and

*Now, it's feeling like a small town  
With six billion people downtown  
At a little sidewalk fair  
In Earth Town Square*

There are Germans selling Audis  
Filled with gasoline from Saudis  
To Australians sipping Kenyan coffee  
In their Chinese shoes  
Argentines are meeting Mongols  
Over french fries at MacDonald's  
And the place looks strangely  
Tiny when you see it from the moon  
And there's music in the park, kalimbas and guitars  
Bagpipes and sitars

*Now, it's feeling like a small town  
With six billion people downtown  
Even Babel can't compare  
To Earth Town Square*

And as each hour goes by, ten thousand more arrive  
And the din gets louder on Main Street  
Where you can watch downtown boom  
And wonder if we'll make room  
For everybody there  
In Earth Town Square

## Session 11: Chapters 16 and 17 (38 pages)

### Topics:

- The Cosmic Century Timeline
- Aligning self-interest of the part with the wellbeing of the Whole
- The role of the human; who we are
- Outlook for the next 250 years

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
- DVD: *Thank God for Evolution!* and equipment to view it on
- chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
- the CD, *Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story*
- CD player with speakers
- copies of the lyrics (below) to Peter's song, "Africa"

NOTE TO LEADER: An **earlier DVD** with Michael Dowd presents in detail the topics of "The Cosmic Century Timeline" and "The Next 250 Years". You might wish to acquire this DVD and offer a SUPPLEMENTAL SESSION FOR VIEWING (2 hours), or simply make it available for lending within the group. It can be purchased online at: <http://thegreatstory.org/dvd.html>. For a Christian approach, use the DVD segments on Dowd's **"Evolutionary Christianity"** DVD set. For secular and mixed religious audiences, the same topics are covered by Dowd on **"The Great Story"** DVD set.

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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

### 2. Recitation (5 to 7 minutes) – call for volunteer readers

"We will have a shorter time of recitation than usual because the two DVD segments we will view cover so much territory."

- Page 259 – Read from the top and end at the new section title.
- Page 263 – Read from the stars ("Ours has been") and continue to page 264, ending after its first paragraph.
- Page 295 – begin at the starred "Worldwide religious revival" and continue to p. 296, ending at the first set of stars.

### 3. DVD viewing: Disk 1: "Sacred Direction of Evolution" (10 minutes), then return to menu and click on "Who We Are" (5 minutes)

**4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)** “Before we begin discussion of the chapters you perused at home, along with the recitations and the DVD segment we viewed, let us pause for a minute of silence to help us participate in the dialogue in such a way that both our head and our heart will guide our remarks and our listening of others.”

**5. Discussion:** [It is important to encourage everyone to share briefly before discussion is opened. Based on the number of participants, determine how much time each person will be given to respond to the opening question, which is to be answered by all. Recruit someone to be the TIMEKEEPER and to chime or ring a bell gently when a person’s time is up.] Here is the suggested opening question:

**Q: *What came up for you most powerfully in your reading at home, in the recitation here, or in the DVD segments we just watched?***

**6. Discussion continues.** Possible questions:

**Q:** Let us talk about **Who We Are**, as the human. The idea that we humans are the Universe **awakening to its own story**, celebrating its own glory, has generated religious awakenings in people. This has been going on ever since **Julian Huxley** and **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and then **Thomas Berry** in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, started teaching in this way. *Did anyone here have a sense of awakening, renewed inspiration, from Dowd’s portrayal of our species as the Cosmos awakening to its own majesty?*

**Q:** In chapter 17, Dowd provides a quick survey of what he calls “Major Challenges in the Next 250 Years.” After his analysis of “**the bad news**” trends, he talks about “wildcards.” Wildcards are unpredictable but possible events that would cause severe harm to humanity (such as asteroid impacts and supervolcanoes). He then surveys the **positive trends** and what he calls, “the likely good news.” *Did you find this chapter distressing, hopeful, or some combination — and why?*

**Q:** Let’s turn to page 296. *Would someone read aloud the text between the two sets of stars? . . . [after the recitation] Might embedding your own life within such a frame of **heroic participation** give you, too, a sense of deep calling?*



## 7. Closing:

**7a. Reading assignment – 49 pages** (much less if you ignore the appendixes): **Chapter 18 and the rest of the book (Conclusion, Epilogue, and the 2 Appendixes)**

"Chapter 18 is where Dowd becomes his boldest: He quotes appreciatively the hard-hitting New Atheists, including Sam Harris. This is where he takes the extremes of atheism and religious dogmatism and attempts to chart a course that might be attractive to both camps. Vatican astronomer Chris Corbally endorsed Dowd's book by urging his fellow Catholics to "Take courage and read it!" When you begin this chapter, you will immediately understand why!

"Make sure you peruse Appendix A, too. Titled "Good and Bad Reasons for Believing," it is a reprint of an essay by Richard Dawkins. Here Dawkins critiques religious dogmatism without his customary bite. The essay is endearing, almost sweet, because Dawkins originally wrote it as gentle advice to his then-ten-year-old daughter.

"Appendix B is titled 'REALizing the Miraculous.' Here we are back to Dowd's own writing. It is a must-read for believers, for nonbelievers whose friends and families do not share their views, and for those who are simply curious about how Dowd uses his evolutionary perspective to appreciate the miracle stories of the early Christian scriptures. Dowd shows how both believers and unbelievers can find real-world meaning in the miracle stories interpreted from an evolutionary stance.

"The Conclusion and Epilogue are both very short. So if you have time to read nothing else, do read these. If you've been curious about Dowd's personal journey and his own struggles with 'inherited proclivities,' you will definitely want to read the "Testimonial" section of the Epilogue.

"Also, absolutely read the first paragraph of the Acknowledgments and see how it strikes you. Toward the end of the Acknowledgments you will find out precisely which parts of the book his science writer wife wrote in his behalf."

**7b. Musical contemplation: "Africa" (6.5 mins)**  
(from CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story")  
Distribute words on next page to each participant.

## Africa

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

They say the sights and sounds down in Africa  
Seem like ones you've seen and heard before  
Even though you arrive, for the very first time  
You have a sense of returning

They say there is a dream down in Africa  
Dreamt about five million years ago  
It's a dream to survive, a dream of standing upright  
And setting out on a new life

*So I say to my hands, can you remember Africa?  
And I say to my feet, do you remember Africa?  
Do you remember? Do you remember Africa?*

You can hear a song down in Africa  
Between the eastern mountains and the coast  
It's a song that you know, rising up from the bones  
And it's telling your story

There is a human heart born in Africa  
Beating now for eons, it is your own  
A tenacious ancient will, quite alive inside you still  
And it's dreaming on, it's dreaming on

*So I say to my hands, can you remember Africa?  
And I say to my feet, do you remember Africa?  
Do you remember? Do you remember Africa?*

## Session 12: Chapter 18 Conclusion, Epilogue, Appendix A & B (49 pages)

### Topics:

- Responding to the New Atheists
- REALizing holy scripture
- Real-world applications of otherworldly Christian concepts
- Evidence v. belief (by Richard Dawkins)
- Evolutionary interpretations of miracles (including “the virgin birth” and Christ’s resurrection and ascension)

### Materials:

- Leader copy of the book, *Thank God for Evolution!*
- chime or bell to signal begin and end of Silent Reflection, and to gently signal when a discussant is to wrap up their remarks
- the CD, “*Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story*”
- CD player with speakers
- **copies of the lyrics** (below) to Peter’s song, “Holy Now”

NOTE TO LEADER: Notice that **the discussion format is different**. Make sure you read through the entire program in advance so that you can be prepared to close off discussion when necessary to ensure that all 5 of the reading assignments are dealt with in the available time.

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## Program Elements

### 1. In-Gathering (chairs in circle)

[Leader announces shift in structure as follows]

“Because Chapter 18, the Conclusion, the Epilogue, and the two Appendixes are each so distinctive, the Study Guide suggests that we take each of the five in turn, and pair a recitation with discussion for each. So first we will view the 10-minute DVD segment, and then we’ll handle recitation and discussion for each of the 5 elements of the assigned reading.”

### 3. DVD viewing: (10 minutes) Disk 1: “Religions Evolve”

### 4. Silent reflection: (2 minutes)

## CHAPTER 18:

**Recitation:** Chapter 18 is titled "Our Evolving Understanding of God's Will."

- *Would someone volunteer to read the **Sam Harris** quote on page 300?*
- Now, Dowd's response: *Who will read the paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 300 with "I was first introduced"? Then keep reading onto the next page, ending after the second paragraph with the words, "including children and infants."*

**Q:** *Let's talk about our own reactions — both to the Sam Harris quotation, and to Dowd's response. . .*

- Please turn to page 310. *Who will read the first full paragraph, beginning on line 3, and then continuing to stop at the section title? [after the recitation] . . . Any responses?*
- Let's close off our discussion of Chapter 18 with one of Dowd's **boldest statements**. Please turn to page 311. *Who will read aloud the two starred paragraphs?*

## CONCLUSION and EPILOGUE:

**Recitation:** "The conclusion is very short, just a single page. Let us turn to page 319. *Who will volunteer to read it aloud?*" . . . [after the recitation] . . . Now that we are at the end of the book, let us pause for a moment of silence to reflect on whether and how our felt experience of our lives and our sense of the divine and the Universe may have shifted over the course of reading this book. . . . [pause] *Would anyone who has experienced a profound shift be willing to speak of it?*

Note to LEADER: *The above question is vital. Let all who wish to speak get a chance to do so. Continue with the remaining questions only if time allows.*

**Q:** *In the Epilogue, what did you think of Dowd's **testimonial**, where he reveals his own struggles with what he calls, "our inherited proclivities"?*

**Q:** Let's turn to the section titled **Vision**, page 324. *Was anyone particularly moved by any of the topics Dowd covered in this 2-page section? . . . If so, please read that paragraph aloud and then tell us why it caught your eye.*

Note to LEADER: Continue on with the Appendixes only if there is time, and if it doesn't feel anticlimactic to do so.

### **APPENDIX A: "Good and Bad Reasons for Believing" (Dawkins)**

**Recitation:** Let's turn to Appendix A, page 327. Dowd selected another Sam Harris quotation to begin this essay by Richard Dawkins. *Who will step up to the plate and volunteer to read this quotation, continuing on through Dowd's single-paragraph introduction to the essay?*

**Q:** *Of those who actually read this essay by Richard Dawkins, who would like to share their response? And does it make sense to you why Dowd chose to reprint this essay in his book?*

### **APPENDIX B: "REALizing the Miraculous"**

**Recitation:** Let's turn to Appendix B, page 335. *Who will volunteer to read all of that page?*

**Recitation:** Before we begin discussion, let's have one more reading. Throughout the book, Dowd has drawn quotations from the 2006 book, *View from the Center of the Universe*, by astrophysicist Joel Primack and cultural historian Nancy Abrams. *Who will read the epigraph by this couple that appears at the top of page 336?*

**Q:** *Was anyone perhaps **surprised** by their own reaction to this treatment of the miracle stories? If so, please share what happened for you?*

**Q:** *Any other **deeply felt** responses to this Appendix?*

## **7. Closing:**

**7a.** [Leader: Announce whether this is the end, or whether a wrap-up session will follow as the final meeting.]

**7b. Musical contemplation: "Holy Now" (5 mins)**  
(of CD "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story")  
Distribute words on next page to each participant.

## Holy Now

When I was a boy, each week  
On Sunday we would go to church  
And pay attention to the priest  
As he would read the holy word  
And consecrate the holy bread  
And everyone would kneel and bow  
Today the only difference is  
Everything is holy now  
Everything, everything  
Everything is holy now

And when I was in Sunday school  
We would learn about the time  
Moses split the sea in two  
Jesus made the water wine  
And I remember feeling sad  
That miracles don't happen still  
But now I can't keep track  
'Cause everything's a miracle  
Everything, everything  
Everything's a miracle

*Wine from water is not so small  
But an even better magic trick  
Is that anything is here at all  
So the challenging thing becomes  
Not to look for miracles  
But finding where there isn't one*

When holy water was rare at best  
It barely wet my fingertips  
But now I have to hold my breath  
Like I'm swimming in a sea of it  
It used to be a world half there  
Heaven's second rate hand-me  
down  
But I walk it with a reverent air  
'Cause everything is holy now

*Read a questioning child's face  
And say it's not a testament  
That'd be very hard to say  
See another new morning come  
And say it's not a sacrament  
I tell you that it can't be done*

This morning, outside I stood  
And saw a little red-winged bird  
Shining like a burning bush  
Singing like a scripture verse  
It made me want to bow my head  
I remember when church let out  
How things have changed since  
then  
Everything is holy now

It used to be a world half-there  
Heaven's second rate hand-me  
down  
But I walk it with a reverent air  
'Cause everything is holy now

---

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

(Supplementary)

## **Session 13: Series Wrap-Up**

Possible activities:

- Watch **the entire Disk 1 DVD**, *Thank God for Evolution!* (1.5 hours)
- **Final reflections** on whether the book shifted one's outlook or even transformed one's life or relationships.
- Close with the **one song** on the Peter Mayer CD that has not yet been played: "One More Circle"
- Call for volunteers to **act out an evolutionary parable**,. Scripts available for free download at:  
<http://thegreatstory.org/parables.html>

Suggested parables: "Menagerie of the Mind", "Startull", or "Lucky Little Seaweed" (each takes 15 to 20 minutes)

## One More Circle

from "Peter Mayer Sings The Great Story"

We have been weighed down by sadness like a stone  
We have yearned, we have yearned  
We have sometimes felt so utterly alone  
While we turn, while we turn

And we've been stricken by the wonder of it all  
Stricken dumb, stricken dumb  
We have sometimes felt so faint we want to fall  
Overcome, but all in all

*I'd say this year in flight together has been fun  
What say we make one more circle around the sun*

We have raised our fists in anger and we've tried  
To work it out, work it out  
That we need each other, we cannot deny  
There is no doubt, there is no doubt

So let us weave another dream in outer space  
While we're turning, while we're turning  
On this planet home that holds our human race  
We still are learning, but all in all

*I'd say this year in flight together has been fun  
What say we make one more circle around the sun*

*I'd say this year in flight together has been a good, good one  
What say we make one more circle, one more circle  
One more circle around the sun*



## Session 5 Supplement: Stardust and Death

If your group meets ongoingly, and thus you can easily extend the number of weeks dedicated to this program, we highly recommend that you insert this session between Session 5 and Session 6.

Session 5 examines how our bodies are made of stardust, and why it is that death is natural and generative at all levels of reality. Both of these topics entail some easy-to-understand and inspiring science — and both may produce religious awakenings in those exposed to the ideas and science. So here is the suggestion:

- **View portions of the DVD, *Celebrating Evolution***, with Connie Barlow as the instructor/speaker. (Connie Barlow has written 4 popular science books on evolution; she is the wife and mission partner of Michael Dowd).

**Disk 1** contains the **Stardust** pieces, beginning with “Just Like the Lion King” and continuing on through “Cosmic Communion” Ritual.

**Disk 2** contains the **Death** material: “Death Through Deep-Time Eyes”; Song; Litany.

TOTAL TIME: About **2 hours**.

POSSIBLE CLOSING: You may wish to purchase fairy-dust glitter in advance and **conduct a “Cosmic Communion.”** For variations of the ceremony, consult:

<http://thegreatstory.org/StardustRitual.html>

Note: *Celebrating Evolution* DVD can be purchased online at:

<http://thegreatstory.org/dvd.html>

## **Session 11 Supplement: Companion DVD programs for Chapters 16 and 17 of the book**

If your group meets ongoingly, and thus you can easily extend the number of weeks dedicated to this program, we highly recommend that you insert this session between the regular Session 11 and Session 12.

Depending on whether or not your audience has a strong Christian focus, choose one of these DVD disks:

### ***The Great Story DVD (with Michael Dowd)***

**Disk 1** parallels chapters 16 and 17 of the book  
(best for secular or mixed religious groups)

### ***Evolutionary Christianity DVD (with Michael Dowd)***

**Disk 2** parallels chapters 16 and 17 of the book  
(for Christian groups)

TOTAL TIME for either choice: about **2 hours**.

Both DVDs can be purchased at:

<http://thegreatstory.org/dvd.html>