

# **Study Guide to Accompany *Paradise Lost: The Religious Life of Charles Darwin***

## **INTRODUCTION**

*Paradise Lost* tells the personal and professional story of Charles Darwin. Although documentaries on Darwin have been made previously, none have intentionally explored his life from the unique angle of his religious experience. The film is best viewed in a single sitting, but it is also broken up into segments. The film could therefore be viewed in two installments (#1 Intro, Spring, Summer, and Fall; #2 Winter and Conclusion) in order to accommodate a Sunday school setting. Thus, the film could be shown in two one-hour sessions with discussion time at the end of each session. The discussion questions provided below can be used at the end of the film or at the end of each session.

## **SESSION 1 – Introduction, Spring, Summer, Fall**

1. Do you personally struggle with the relationship between science and religion? Why or why not?
2. Does it make a difference to you that Darwin once went to divinity school? Why or why not?
3. What do you make of Paley's argument for God's existence? How does it compare to the Intelligent Design movement of today?
4. What is your impression of Aristotle's notion of a static, unchanging universe? How does it compare with our modern scientific view?
5. How might you have been affected by Darwin's missionary experience during the Beagle voyage?
6. How do you feel about the following quote from Darwin's writings?

"Beautiful as is the morality of the New Testament, it can hardly be denied that its perfection depends in part on the interpretations that we now put upon metaphors and allegories."
7. Reception of the *Origin of Species* continues to stir controversy, as evidenced on the bumpers of many automobiles. Jesus fish, Darwin fish, Jesus fish eating Darwin fish, and many other versions of the "fish war" appear on the backs of cars. Do you think Darwin would have approved of this? What image might you use to symbolize your ideas concerning science and religion?

## SESSION 2 – Winter, Conclusion

1. What is your impression of deism, a belief system also held by most of our country's founding fathers?
2. What do you make of the relationship between Darwin's theory of natural selection and the ideas of 'Social Darwinism,' capitalism, and communism?
3. How did the issue of suffering affect Darwin's faith struggle? How could the church have better responded to Darwin's struggles in this area?
4. What do you think about Darwin's relationship with his wife Emma? Do you think a religious person and a non-religious person can have a strong marriage? Why or why not?
5. How do you interpret the difference between atheism and agnosticism?
6. Has your view of Darwin changed as a result of learning more about his life? Why or why not?
7. How do the varying worldviews of the scientists presented at the end of the film affect your understanding of the relationship between science and theology?
8. What do you think of the following Tennyson quote?

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
believe me, than in half the creeds."

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**, *In Memoriam*  
*A.H.H. 96, ll. 11-12.*

Do you think this applies to Darwin's life? Why or why not?