

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY
PRESENTS

RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE STUDY



SEASON 1

A GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Text by Brittany Grooters
Illustrations by Brooke Pennington

LEADER GUIDE

RVL Discipleship: The Study, Season 1

Leader Guide

© 2023 Ray Vander Laan

Focus on the Family and the accompanying logo and design are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

RVL Discipleship is a trademark of Ray Vander Laan.

Copies may be made for personal and small group use. Any other use requires prior written permission of Focus on the Family.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Quotations identified as ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-68428-702-4

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
LET'S GET STARTED—FOR LEADERS	6
THE WORDS OF THE SHEMA	8

EPISODE GUIDES

The Commitment	9
The Pond	20
The Tree	32
The Coals	45
The Wine	55
The Stone	66
The Blind Man	76
The Sand	86
The Tohu	96
The Shalom	109

HEBREW WORD GLOSSARY	121
ABOUT RVL	122
BIBLIOGRAPHY	123
ABOUT THE PUBLISHER	123



INTRODUCTION

If you're anything like the rest of us in the Western world, the word *discipleship* probably makes you think of a church small group activity. You might attend (most of) the meetings, until you run out of video episodes or everyone gets too busy around the holidays. Ironic that life can sometimes get in the way of learning how to live, right? But we often think of discipleship in this way: a short-term program meant to teach and entertain us along with some people we kind of know from church.

And if we're honest with ourselves, might that be why we picked up this study? Because this is what Christians *do*?

Imagine that God outlined a clear map for His people—the Bible. We took that map, and, in true “group project” fashion, some of us studied it more than others. (I mean, why trudge through the book of Numbers when you've got a well-paid teaching pastor for that kind of thing?) But imagine that we took that map, collectively learned the facts and how to explain the map and teach it and use it to support our arguments . . . and then we stopped there.

God didn't stop there.

What if we not only knew the path God had mapped out for us, but we also chose to walk in it? That, in its simplest form, is what it means to be a disciple.

In *RVL Discipleship: The Study*, we will consider what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus in a first century Jewish context—and what it means for us today. This study is organized into four seasons, each building on the last as we uncover how to walk the path God has set before us.

The seasons are organized like this:

SEASON 1 | As we will unpack throughout the study, Jesus' disciples really knew their Bible. It is vitally important for us to value Scripture in the same way. Season 1 outlines how we are meant to interact with the text: 1) approaching it from the context in which it was written; 2) exploring how Jesus used the Scriptures in His teaching; 3) understanding how His followers were meant to be changed by what they learned; and 4) identifying the major paradigm that ties the whole Bible together.

SEASON 2 | Discipleship was formalized with the rise of rabbis in Jewish culture, but the concept really started much earlier than that. This idea of knowing God's path and faithfully walking in it began when He decided to choose a partner, one who would be His ambassador to a broken world. Building on the tools and central themes from season 1, we will follow Israel's story as God's partner throughout the Old Testament, ultimately building up to Jesus' arrival.

SEASON 3 | What was daily life like for the Jews of Jesus' day? How did they practice their faith under Roman occupation? And most importantly, what did it mean to be a rabbi? This season focuses on Jesus, the man: our God made flesh, who chose to reveal Himself as a first century rabbi to a first century Jewish audience.

SEASON 4 | The final season of this study focuses on the practical role of disciples in the first century, unpacking the cultural and scriptural implications and applying them to modern-day followers of Jesus.

God is on a mission, and it's the same mission He's had since Genesis 1. The truly mind-blowing thing about it is, we get to join Him.

Wherever you are in your faith journey, this group study is a great place to start.



LET'S GET STARTED

LEADER GUIDE

Welcome to season 1 of *RVL Discipleship: The Study*. This group experience is designed to need minimal preparation on the part of the group leader, and you will find everything you need to facilitate successful meetings in the following pages. Let's dive in!

MEETING PREP

Before each group session, you'll want to read through the corresponding episode guide here in your leader guide. Each episode guide offers the same content as the participants see in their guides, along with extra leader instructions, advice and answers to discussion questions, and tips to keep the conversation going printed in gold.

Each member of your group should have access to the participant guide for this study. Some will prefer to view it on their phone or tablet, while others may want to have printed copies of each episode's material. Discuss the general preference with your group ahead of time, and arrange to have printed copies available if needed.

During meeting times, you should have pens or pencils within participants' reach. Make sure your seating is arranged so that everyone can see the teaching video and also interact easily with one another during discussion.

You will want to have a few extra Bibles on hand for anyone who prefers hard copy to a Bible app.

LEADING A MEETING

Each episode guide in this book includes instructions for every section, so you will have no trouble leading your group through the meeting. Each meeting is designed to last about an hour, which includes watching the teaching video.

You will go through each of the following steps during every meeting:

1. Recite the **Shema** together (*optional, 2-3 minutes*).
2. Read the **Introduction** aloud and **Talk about It** (*7-10 minutes*).
3. **Watch**. Play the teaching video and take notes (*10-14 minutes*).
4. **Video Discussion**. As a group, work through discussion questions as you process the video episode (*20+ minutes*).
5. Read the **To Wrap It Up** section aloud to conclude, and end each meeting with **Prayer**, either as the group is inspired or by following the prompts listed (*7-10 minutes*).

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Have everything set up ahead of time. Make sure all your materials are within reach, and decide in advance how to play the teaching video.

Groups often run out of time before getting through all the discussion questions. You may even find that the group spends most of its time on just one topic if it really hits home. So, look over the Video Discussion questions ahead of time, and prioritize the ones you think will be most engaging or helpful for your group.

Most groups have one or two participants who love to talk. As the group leader, do your best to steer the conversation so you don't get derailed onto too many tangents. You might want to point out the suggested time limits occasionally: "Okay, we've spent about six minutes on this section so far, so let's jump to the next question."

Most groups also have a handful of people who do their best *not* to talk. Be kind in these instances. Give people space if they aren't ready to answer a personal or revealing question, but do encourage your quieter participants to answer once in a while.

Consider answering first when it comes to more-personal discussion questions, in order to help others feel more comfortable about sharing in turn.

Don't tease or make fun of a fellow participant's experience or answers. There should be plenty of laughter in a group discussion, but never at someone else's expense.

If you don't know the answer to something, say so! Nobody has all the answers. And frankly, sometimes *not* knowing together becomes a bonding experience. Always be willing to admit if you're drawing a blank. Make it a goal for the entire group to look into the unknown topic: "Let's see if we can come back next time with some answers."

Remember to pray for your participants regularly. Ask the Holy Spirit to be present with your group throughout the week(s) between meetings and to teach each of you more about Himself.

THE WORDS OF THE SHEMA

The full text of the *Shema* includes two passages from Deuteronomy and one from Numbers. For this study, we will focus on the first part only, along with the passage Jesus added in the Gospels:

HEBREW

Shema Israel,
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,
b'khol levavkah,
uve'khol naphshekah,
uve'khol me'odekah.
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.

ENGLISH

Hear O Israel!
The LORD is our God—the LORD alone.
Love the LORD your God
with all your heart,
with all your soul,
and with all your might,
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.





EPISODE 6

THE STONE

"This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."

1 Samuel 17:46 (ESV)



THE SHEMA

(2-3 minutes)

OPTIONAL: If your group has decided to begin each meeting by reciting the Shema, have each member take a moment to reflect on the meaning behind the words before you begin. If your group has elected not to include this part, skip to the Introduction.

ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

HEBREW

Shema Israel,
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,
b'khol levavkah,
uve'khol naphshekah,
uve'khol m'odekah.
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.

ENGLISH

Hear O Israel!
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.
Love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
with all your soul,
and with all your might,
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

(2-3 minutes)

Choose one or more group members to read this section aloud, or take a few minutes for each of you to read on your own.

It's easy to imagine that someone like Moses would count as a disciple. I mean—burning bush? Parting the sea? *Seeing God face to face*? Come on.

It's easy to imagine other famous believers making the cut as well. Think William Wilberforce, Corrie ten Boom, or Richard and Sabina Wurmbbrand. They were faithful against impossible odds. Think Billy Graham. Elisabeth Elliot. John Chau. The list goes on and on.

If you don't recognize some of these names, look them up. Their lives were *extraordinary*. When we look at the history of God's people through the ages, it can be easy to assume that only those with incredible stories are qualified to be disciples.

So, what if you're not Moses? What if you're a software engineer from Ohio? Or you drive a garbage truck in middle-of-nowhere Oklahoma? What if you're a dentist, a college student, a janitor, a stay-at-home parent? What does it mean to be a disciple when you think your life looks kind of *ordinary*?

So far in this study, we've looked at how to approach the Bible. We have formed a toolkit of ways to consider the context and to begin understanding how the original writers and readers would have experienced it. We have also talked about how the Bible is one story, an idea we will continue to develop throughout the study.

It's time to consider what to do with all this information. What's the next step? How does an ordinary person like you or me become the disciple of such an extraordinary God?

Let's get into today's material and discuss.

TALK ABOUT IT

(5-7 minutes)

In preparing to watch the video, read the following question aloud and discuss as a group.

Who are your heroes of the faith, either from the Bible or from throughout history? Why are they inspiring to you? As you prepare to watch today's video, discuss as a group.

WATCH THE VIDEO

(10 minutes)

Before you press Play, make sure everyone has everything they need so they don't have to get up during the video. Encourage participants to take notes, either on their devices or on the pre-printed pages.

PLAY THE EPISODE 6 VIDEO

As you watch the video for episode 6, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, **that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel**, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."*

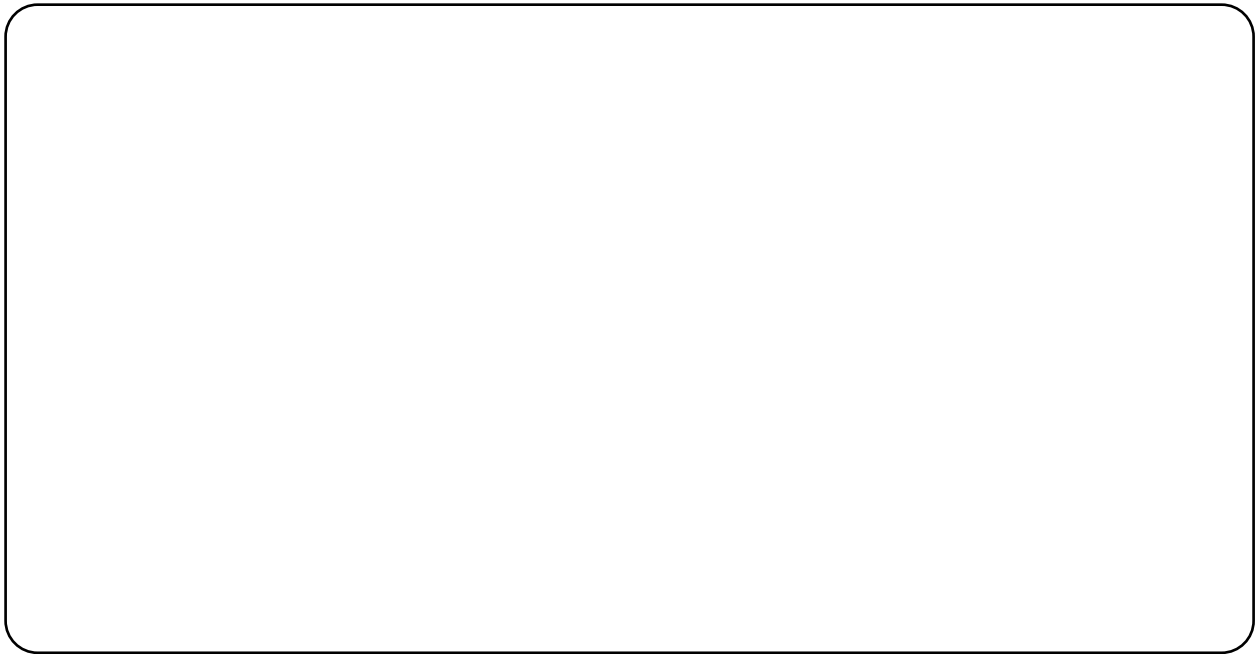
1 Samuel 17:45-47 (ESV, emphasis added)



Yadah means:

to know by experience, not just with head knowledge

Other notes:

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for taking notes. It occupies the central portion of the page.

VIDEO DISCUSSION

(20+ minutes)

Read each question aloud and discuss with the group. You may go in the order below or prioritize the ones you think will be most beneficial for your group. Informative answers and tips for steering the conversation are also included.

QUESTION 1

When have you experienced the feeling of being in God's story in your own life? It might have been a big moment, a time when you watched God show up powerfully in a time of ministry. It might have been a more everyday experience, sensing God's presence over coffee with a friend or in a conversation with a coworker. Both are profound! Describe the experience that comes to mind to the group.

*As in other discussions, start the conversation with your own response if your group is slow to engage. It might have been as simple a situation as while reading a Bible story to your child. But if you've never felt you were in the story before, be honest! Consider spending some of your prayer time together asking the Lord to help you *yadah* the story.*

QUESTION 2

The prophet Samuel anointed David as the future king of Israel long before the young shepherd ever faced Goliath, let alone took the throne. How would you have expected God to prepare David for such an important future? How might this reframe the way you think about the ordinary types of skills you're developing today?

If your group needs extra time for introspection, allow a minute or two for that. For the first question, training David in things like how to rule wisely, how to manage people, or how to lead an army are likely answers.

QUESTION 3

So, what's your stone? What are your skills or passions? What jobs or responsibilities do you find yourself occupying right now? How can you throw these "stones" as a disciple?

Celebrate and encourage one another as you identify what your stones might be.

TO WRAP IT UP

Choose one or more group members to read this section aloud, or take a few minutes for each of you to read on your own.

It would be easy to count David along with the list of heroes we considered in today's Introduction. But when David faced Goliath, God didn't ask him to be anything other than himself: a backwoods kid who could throw rocks.

David knew God's story. He believed in God's story. But most importantly, he was willing to be in God's story, whatever that looked like. Somehow, this young shepherd understood that if he would bring his one reliable skill to the table, God could turn him into the man He had created David to be. And because he was willing to throw his stone, the world had a chance to *yadah* the power of God.

So, will you join the story? You just have to throw your stone. Nobody else can do it for you. Will you be a software engineer, a dentist, a garbage truck driver, a stay-at-home parent in that story?

Will you throw your stone as a disciple, that the world may *yadah* God and His kingdom?

END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

(5-7 minutes)

You might pray as a group, with everyone praying aloud as they feel led. When it's clear everyone is done praying, you can be the one to conclude. Alternatively, your group may prefer to split up into smaller groups of two or three and take turns praying for each other individually. Whichever approach you choose, set the expectations before you begin. Then wrap things up at the appropriate time.

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about:

- Pray over each member of the group as you consider what your individual stones are. Pray for courage and passion to throw your stones as disciples of Jesus.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your time in the Scriptures, revealing more of His heart and character every time you read.

END GROUP MEETING

To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the PS section on your own before the next meeting.

If you have time left over, or if your group meets for more than an hour, feel free to read through the PS material as a group and talk about it.

A PS

This section is meant for participants who want to dig deeper on their own between group meetings. If your group wants to go through some or all of this section together, choose a method to read the following aloud, and then discuss. You may choose one member to read an entire example or take turns, each person reading one paragraph.

Geography and Five Boys from Nowhere

Most of Jesus' ministry took place in a relatively small area, in the Galilee region north of Jerusalem. He spent much of that time in three small towns: Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. Arranged not far from one another on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, these three towns were known as the Triangle.

Most of Jesus' miracles recorded in Scripture took place in these towns, which makes them seem highly significant to us today. But back then, these towns were nothing special. Bethsaida, for example, probably housed about 800 people. The residents were mostly lower class, blue-collar workers, eking out a simple existence in a rural setting. Nobody would have given the time of day to someone from a place like this.

Why does this matter for you and me? Because as it turns out, five of the original disciples came from this rural village in the middle of nowhere. Peter and Andrew (brothers) lived in this town. Phillip may or may not have been related to them, but they all grew up together there. The Bible doesn't say exactly where James and John lived, but we do know they were in a fishing business with Peter and Andrew, which implies that they were from Bethsaida as well.

Being a fisherman was nothing glamorous, either. It was kind of like working at a fast food restaurant—perfectly respectable, but not something most people aspire to. These five certainly weren't the kind of men that other rabbis would have wanted as disciples, as we will explore in more detail later in this study. And yet, Jesus came to the middle of nowhere and asked five completely average boys to be His disciples. They had basic education and one discernible skill—fishing. But because they were willing to join the story, God used them, along with seven other men and seven women, to turn the entire world upside down.

If you've ever felt as if you came from nowhere, that you weren't important enough, or that there was nothing particularly special about you—just know that none of that matters. It doesn't matter where you come from. It doesn't matter how important or interesting you think your job is. All that matters is, are you willing to join the story?

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

In the time before your next group meeting, practice asking God each morning, “How should I throw my stone today?” Consider carrying a small stone in your pocket as a reminder throughout the day that when you’re in God’s story, what you do matters.



Watch this FREE
5-part video series

MORE TOOLS FOR DEEPER STUDY

Bringing the Truth of the Bible to the World Around You

Free 5-part video series *“Bringing Biblical Truth to a Broken Culture”*

Throughout Scripture, we see God moving and working not through the strong, but through the weak. Each of us can help expand the Kingdom through humility, faith, and love—even in a world that seems increasingly hostile to the truths of Scripture.

This **FREE**, 5-part video series called *“Bringing Biblical Truth to a Broken Culture”* looks to the 1st century and the apostle Paul for guidance on how 21st century believers can shine the light of Christ to those around them.



TEXT RVL to 32728 for updates on new seasons and additional resources from Ray.





FREE GIFT
with Donation

MORE TOOLS FOR DEEPER STUDY

Immerse Your Entire Family in Scripture

A Month of Devotions with Ray Vander Laan

Now that you've finished Season 1, experience 30 family devotions featuring unique, original art from the bestselling, *That the World May Know* film series. Devotions are from Ray Vander Laan, teacher and biblical historian known for exploring Scripture in its historical, geographical, and cultural context by teaching on location at the actual ancient, historical sites where biblical history occurred.



TEXT RVL to 32728 for updates on new seasons and additional resources from Ray.



HEBREW WORD GLOSSARY

Shema | to hear; to obey or respond to

Echad | one; only or alone

Ve'ahavta | to love

Levavkah | your heart; your operating system, what physically keeps your body alive. Jews would include one's mind in this category.

Naphshekah | your soul; your emotions, feelings, passions

Me'odekah | your might; your physical strength or actions; the assets, resources, or sociopolitical capital that gives you power on some scale

Remez | an allusion, a hint or clue that connects one idea to a separate story or idea by using the same words or phrases. While this practice was widely used by Jesus' day, it was not referred to as *remez* until later.

Yadah | to know intimately, through deep experience

Mashal | a story, often fictitious, that explains and applies a text

Moshel | a ruler, or wise ruler

Beth | house; one's home or the place where one lives; a family group; that place where your whole life is built

Tohu | formless

Vohu | empty

Tohu v'vohu | formless and empty; also conflict and disharmony; disorder and dysfunction; deterioration or decay; confusion and brokenness. The opposite of the character of God. Symbolized in Scripture by churning water.

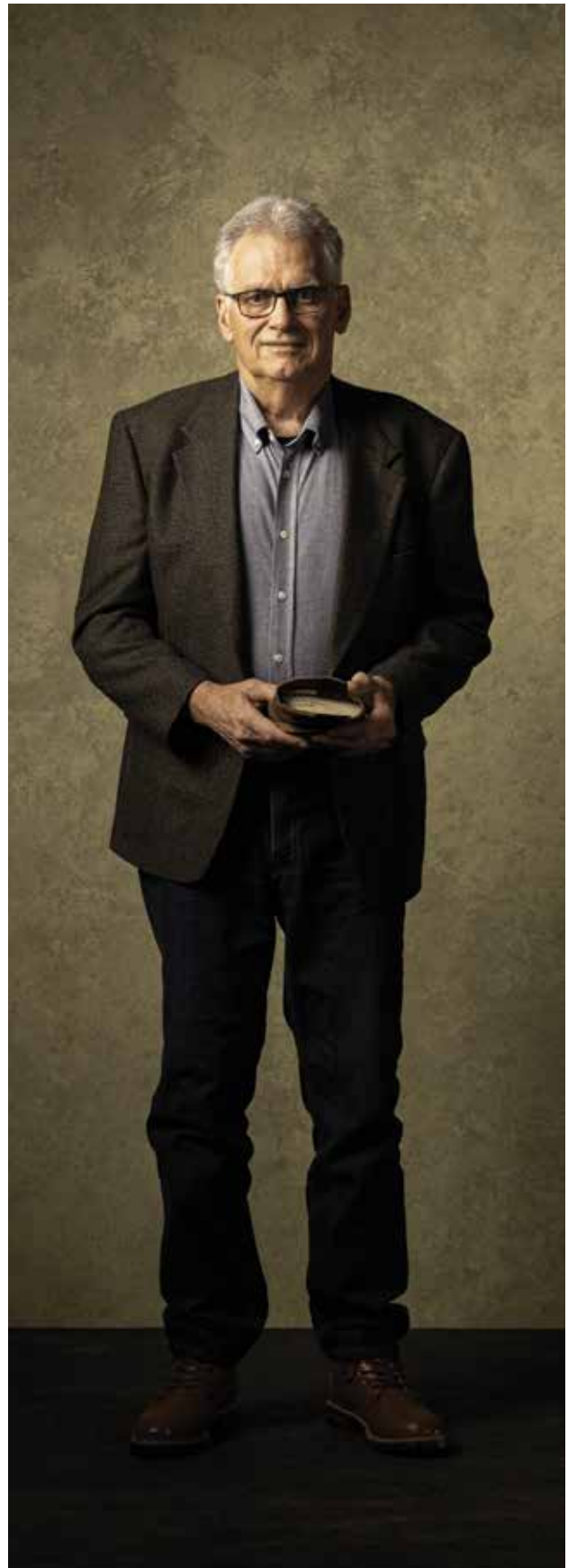
Tehom | the abyss; the dark and the deep; sometimes used to describe hell

Shalom | perfect peace and harmony; ordered and flourishing function; deep meaning and completeness. Describes the character of God Himself.

ABOUT RVL

Since receiving his Master of Divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1976, Ray Vander Laan has been actively involved in studying and teaching Jewish culture using the methods of Jewish education. He has continued graduate studies in Jewish Studies in the United States, Israel, Turkey, and Egypt. He has been a teacher for more than thirty-five years and is an ordained minister with the Christian Reformed Church. He has also authored a book titled *Echoes of His Presence*, published by Focus on the Family. Vander Laan founded That the World May Know Ministries in 1998 and has taken more than 10,000 people with him on his study tours of Israel, Turkey, and Egypt.

Ray's preaching and teaching ministry is focused on understanding the Bible in light of the historical and cultural context in which God placed it. This perspective on the Bible highlights God's call for His people to be a transforming influence on their culture. He uses research of the top scholars in the fields of archaeology, history, and biblical study as tools to explore the scriptural text ever more deeply. His gifts, expertise, and calling are to link that cultural information and the Bible so that its message applies to our lives today in very practical ways.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jacob & The Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Collins, Jon, and Tim Mackie. "What Is the Bible?" *The Bible Project*, BibleProject, 15 Feb. 2017, bibleproject.com/explore/video/what-is-Bible/.

Josephus, Flavius. "Wars, Book 4." *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, translated by William Whiston. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008, pp. 664–96.

Voice of the Martyrs, The. "Chapter 9." *Wurmbrand: Tortured for Christ, The Complete Story*, The Voice of the Martyrs, S.I., 2023.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Focus on the Family is a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive. We provide help and resources for couples to build healthy marriages that reflect God's design, and for parents to raise their children according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles.

We're here to come alongside families with relevance and grace at each stage of their journey. We support families as they seek to teach their children about God and His beautiful design for the family, protect themselves from the harmful influences of culture, and equip themselves to make a greater difference in the lives of those around them.

No matter who you are, what you're going through, or what challenges your family may be facing, we're here to help. With practical resources—like our 1-800 Family Help line, counseling resources, and websites—we're committed to providing trustworthy, biblical guidance and support.