

Flipped



The Provocative Truth That Changes
Everything We Know About God

DOUG
PAGITT

Discussion Guide

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Introduction

- 1.** Doug writes, “I have wondered how the provocative, powerful, beautiful, message of Jesus ended up producing the kind of religious life I see...” Have you ever wondered something similar? (p. 1)
- 2.** He goes on to ask if it has to stay this way. What do you think? (p. 2)
- 3.** What does it look like to confuse familiarity with understanding in reading the Bible? (p. 2)
- 4.** *Flipped* has three goals for you as you read: to help you see change as a sign of growth, help you behold the big, beautiful story of God and find new ways to live in it, and to invite you to a full and vibrant life with God. If these goals were realized, would it change the way you view your life in God currently? (pp. 4-5)
- 5.** *Flipped* invites us to think about Paul’s statement, “In God we live, move, and exist.” Doug writes, “Living, moving, and existing pretty much covers every microsecond, every atom in our being, every aspect of existence.” How does that change the way you see your life in God? Is that comforting or not? (p. 4)

Chapter 1

- 1.** Have you ever experienced a flip like Doug describes in the opening section of Chapter 1, “The kind of idea that stays with you and eventually makes a home in your thinking”? (p. 7)
- 2.** Doug writes, “It’s very possible God is not who you have always assumed God to be.” Have your ideas about God shifted before? Do you believe ideas about God can/should shift? (p. 8)
- 3.** For Doug, the flip that led to this book was a complete rethinking of the way he understood God. What changed in Doug’s view of God? (p. 9-10)
- 4.** “The central idea about God was that God is different.” Doug is writing about a modern view of God that assumes distinction or difference from humanity as a primary way to understand God. Name some ways you’ve been told that you and God are distinct. (p. 10)
- 5.** “...We live in the heart of God rather than the other way around,” Doug refers here to a common idea in Christian circles and thought, that we have God in our hearts, and invites us to consider that we are in the heart of God instead. How does that change the way you see you and God? (p. 11)

- 6.** Doug writes about "...trying to live beyond the idea that God is in some places but not in others, in some people but not in other people, in some times but not in other times." In what ways does this change the way you see the world, the people around you, and your relationships with them? (p.13)
- 7.** Doug encourages you to think about the flip not as a one-time shift in thinking or as an arrival but as a journey. Does this feel freeing to you? Unsettling? (p. 15)

Chapter 2

- 1.** Doug points out the negative cultural connotations of flipping. We tend to see changing our minds as a negative. How does Flipped challenge that idea? (pp. 17-18)
- 2.** How is being alive a good way to think of our spiritual journey as it relates to the positive aspects of change? (p. 19)
- 3.** Doug clarifies the meaning of the word repentance. How does this clarification change the terms of repentance? (pp. 18-19)
- 4.** Doug relates the flip to Jesus's saying "You have heard it said, but I say to you..." Jesus often challenged people to see beyond their assumptions regarding long-held beliefs and practices. In what ways are we similarly trapped by our oft-repeated, long-held traditions? (p. 21)

- 5.** “We are rarely flipped by ideas that are totally foreign but when a new idea triggers something we have wondered about in the past, a flip might be coming.” What ideas have you been tinkering with that may lead to a flip? (p. 23)
- 6.** Doug suggests that sometimes fear keeps us from making a flip. Sometimes we don’t want to “los[e] sight of what is familiar.” What keeps you from flipping? (p. 24)
- 7.** Doug tells about his friend Thom who helps prisoners transition into freedom by helping them change the way think about themselves. It is interesting to think about freedom as a state of mind. In what ways does your thinking keep you from freedom? (pp. 25-26)
- 8.** Doug writes about his becoming a runner. He says the flip happened in his head before he had run more than a few miles. He suggests that becoming is primarily about thinking. What would you become if to you could change the way you think about yourself? (p. 31)
- 9.** “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” If thinking were enough to get you there, where would you be in your life? (p. 32)

Chapter 3

- 1.** Doug writes about the transactional system of religion in terms of If/Then contingencies. What do you think this means? How do you see this play out in your life?
- 2.** In what ways do ancient idols correlate with the religious system of our day? (p. 35)
- 3.** Doug writes that Paul's call at the Areopagus declared "the fullness of God is active in humanity without assistance from any religious system." If we embrace this idea, what does it look like in our world? How does it change your idea of religion? (p. 37)
- 4.** What is the difference between connection to God and integration with God?
- 5.** How could recognizing that difference change the way you view your relationship with God?
- 6.** Doug points out that "flipping the order of the words from "God is in all" to "all is in God" is more than a semantic move." By that he means that the reality implied by each of these statements is quite different. How would these realities differ? (p. 40)
- 7.** If we change our thinking from "God exists" to "God is existence," how does that change our view of God and ourselves? (p. 43)

- 8.** Doug writes, “In any classic, limited, transactional system, some people are allowed to do things that others are not. And sometimes this limited If/Then view can seem to be just what the Bible requires.” Is this your experience with the Bible or what you have heard about the Bible? (p. 46)
- 9.** Seeing ourselves as in God and God as existence changes the question from “In whom or in what does God reside?” to “How integrated are we with God?” How could this shift change the way you approach your life with others? (p. 48)
- 10.** Doug quotes a prayer that Paul writes to the Ephesians at the end of Chapter 3. The prayer may be familiar to you. In it Paul prays that his readers would be able to “grasp love’s length, height and depth.” How would grasping that change your church/life? (pp. 49-50)

Chapter 4

- 1.** Doug writes about our tendency to think that we need some kind of mediator or adapter to connect with God: “The assumption that you and I can’t possibly hope to connect with God on our own is built into nearly every doctrine and structure we have inherited from religious teachings and experiences.” How do you think this has shaped our religious landscape? How has it served us or not? (p. 53)
- 2.** Doug writes, “A transactional approach shifts the power from God and from the individual and invests it in the adapter.” Why is this dangerous to faith? (p.54)

3. Doug writes about the feeling of being cut off from God. Most of us have felt that at one time or another. How have our religious systems contributed to this sense of distance? Does visualizing ourselves as being In God reduce that sense? (p. 55)

4. Doug writes about scarcity as motivator that “builds longing, anticipation, and gratitude.” These are powerful emotions. Does the fact that the church as an “adapter” can stir these emotions seem helpful or harmful to you? (p. 57)

5. Doug is clear that the If/Then system can come in handy in many practical ways: “But while the benefits of structuring computer code according to the rules are obvious, the results of the If/Then requirements in human interaction and in our understanding of God are devastating.” How? Why? (p. 59)

6. What has your experience been with adapter religion?

7. Doug writes, “When we realize that we do not need a pre-determined adapter in order to interact with God, we will live differently.” How will this free us to live differently? (p. 63)

8. Paul writes that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Doug writes that he thinks that nothing means nothing and changes everything. Do you? If so, what changes? (p. 63)

Chapter 5

- 1.** Doug writes about the difference between a problem and a drama. How does viewing something as a drama instead of a problem change our response to it? Why does this matter? (pp. 65-66)
- 2.** Doug's friend Brian was truly offended by the God portrayed in the traditional reading of the Abraham story. What do you think of the God in that story based on traditional readings and your current understanding? (p. 69)
- 3.** If the story of Abraham is an archetypal story rather than purely historical story, how does this change the traditional reading? (pp. 73-76)
- 4.** How does Doug's rereading shed light on and reverse the If/Then inherent in the traditional reading of this story? (p. 75)
- 5.** How does rereading this story in terms of a flip—being called from old ways of thought to new—change the way you see God working in your life?
- 6.** Doug highlights the names of God used by the early Jews. How has the ancient understanding of God as the unspeakable/undefinable one been lost in our simply using the word God. (p. 77)
- 7.** Doug highlights how rereading Abraham's story can give hope to people who are struggling with old patterns of behavior or addiction. How does this rereading help you rethink your own patterns? (p. 81)

- 8.** Are their sacrifices you have felt called to by Elohim that Yahweh would call off? (p. 83)

Chapter 6

- 1.** Doug writes, “Any argument that uses the ‘Hey, God did this for you; you really owe God a little something in return’ is transactional. While seeming to be an honest calling for us to do our part, it actually is a threat to our life in God.” How does this kind of approach threaten our life in God? (p. 86)
- 2.** According to *Flipped*, the story in our head that motivates our behavior makes a big difference. How and why? (p. 86)
- 3.** Doug quotes Jesus’s call for “all who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads” to come to him for rest. This promise seems contradictory to much that religion asks of us. How do you see/experience this juxtaposition? (p.89)
- 4.** After giving a brief history of the Jewish Sabbath, Doug reminds us that Jesus flipped the common understanding of the Sabbath when he said, “The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren’t created for the Sabbath.” Doug writes, “Jesus’s Flip on the Sabbath should guide all of our efforts, especially religious ones.” What would it look like in your life/church if you believed that the laws of God were created for your/humanities’ benefit? (p. 92)

5. Doug tells the story of the widow with two mites and explains how his first understanding of that story “was influenced by the idea that we should give ourselves for God’s benefit. I had not yet been exposed to the idea that our life in God is for the benefit of humanity.” There is a big difference between these two ideas. Talk about how the directional shift in who our actions benefit alters your thinking. (p. 98)

6. His understanding of that story completely flipped. How? Talk about what a similar shift in understanding could mean for you. (pp. 101-02)

7. Doug writes, “So let’s talk about what it means to be In God and how that opens new opportunities for healing the human spirit, fostering life in community, and living responsibility with the earth.” Let’s. (p. 105)

Chapter 7

1. Chapter 7 opens with a discussion of the implied biblical mandate to be perfect. Doug talks about trying to maintain some level of perfection in an effort to fulfill what he believed to be the call of Jesus. He found that “having an unreachable goal for life is exhausting and relationally toxic.” Do the demands of If/Then religion ever feel exhausting to you? Has a transactional way of thinking enriched your relationships? (pp. 107-09)

2. Doug's idea of perfection flipped when he discovered that God was not asking for moral perfection but was making us free from If/Then thinking so that we could be open to loving everyone. So perfection is perfect love or love that includes everyone. In some ways this seems as challenging as keeping a set of moral rules. Does it to you? Why? Why not? (pp. 110-11)

3. When something terrible happens, why is it our tendency to start separating people into the “good guys” and the “bad guys”? (p. 112)

4. Doug points out that God's love is not contingent on anything. He “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Doug believes God wants us to love in that same non-contingent way. This is far easier said than done. What do you make your love contingent on? (p. 115)

5. Doug points out that it is far easier to hate or to blame someone who is far and seemingly different from us—someone unknown to us. In the unknown we can create whatever we need to make ourselves feel justified in our negative feelings. But, often, when we know someone, it is much harder to continue to hold those negative feelings. How does knowing someone's story change our feelings toward them? (p. 115)

6. Doug writes, “Love is not the reward; it is the norm, the constant. It is the way of God, the perfect way.” Do you believe this? If you were able to truly internalize this, how would it change your life/faith? (p. 116)

7. Doug goes on to say that instead of being the reward for right living, love is the initiator. In the If/Then system of thought, love is often the Then that comes only after the If has been fulfilled. How does seeing love as the initiator change your view of right living? (p. 117)

8. Doug writes some difficult things about military violence in this chapter. He writes that military violence only makes sense if you “declare some people as innocent and other as not.” Do you believe this? Is it possible to declare some innocent and others not in light of Jesus’s call to perfect love? (p. 120)

9. Doug writes about being confronted with a difficult juxtaposition of peace and violence at an event with the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu. What do you make of the tension between peace and force in this situation? (pp. 122-23)

Chapter 8

1. Chapter 8 opens with a discussion of the need for asymmetry to create matter. Doug writes, “The thing about symmetry or balance is that it implies that all things are as they should be, that everything is settled.” Has your experience with faith made you feel as though getting things as they should be is the goal? (pp.125-28)

- 2.** “In reality it’s messy, it’s changing, it’s out of balance, and that is the basis for life.” Doug points out that change and mess are not just unavoidable realities of life but are actually necessary for life. Does this idea change the way you see your work in the world? (p. 129)
- 3.** Doug tells the story of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar in Jericho, who was willing to disrupt to get Jesus’s attention and thereby change his situation. Both Bartimaeus and Jesus act in unexpected ways in this story. How? (pp. 129-34)
- 4.** Doug points out that Jesus “shifted the power dynamic” when he asked Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” What do you make of this? How does the question shift the power dynamic? (p. 132)
- 5.** Jesus’s asking Bartimaeus to say what he wanted can shape how we think about our desires. Often we believe our desires are things we should hide. Or sometimes when a desire runs deep, we feel embarrassed that we want something that much and don’t want to say it out loud. How does articulating our desires change our expectations and reality? (pp. 131-33)
- 6.** Can this shift the way you think about verses like James 4:3, “You have not because you ask not,” changing it from an If/Then proposition to an empowering In God possibility?
- 7.** Doug writes, “That system tells us that we should be concerned with what God wants while setting aside our desires. It presumes that our desires are at odds with God’s and does not leave room for the ‘what do you want?’ story.” How does letting go of the idea that your desires are at odds with God change the way you see your future? (p. 143)

- 8.** Doug draws a distinction between the practice of self-sacrifice for the sake of resetting and living with intentionality vs self-sacrifice because of the “assumption that the pleasures in your life are necessarily the opposite of what God wants for you.” Does this distinction matter? Do you live under the assumption that God is opposed to your pleasure? (p. 135)
- 9.** “[I]f God suspects you love something more than you love God, that is the thing that will be taken from you.” This gets at the heart of an implication of the Christian tendency to see self-sacrifice as a God-approved way to prove/test faith. It also hits on one reason we’re afraid to articulate our desires. We fear if we say it out loud, God will know and take it away, which assumes that we can hide our desires from God and attributes the worst kind of pettiness to God. Does this story help you flip our assumptions about how God feels about your desires? (p. 135)
- 10.** Doug writes, “[The Bartimaeus story] is a call to life, not to simple cravings or vapid wants.” What does he mean by that? (p. 140)
- 11.** “We are called to know ourselves and to love ourselves. This requires trusting God and trusting ourselves. We are invited to see our life and faith not in competition with God but in harmony and integration, so that we can live, move, and exist In God.” How does self-knowledge lead to integration with God? (p. 141)

Chapter 9

- 1.** Doug opens chapter 9 with thoughts on our “yearning for something more” even in the midst of our simple lives. He states that being In God is good news for that yearning. How? (p. 145)
- 2.** “With the life of faith, one often feels that committing to one tradition requires closing our eyes to all the stories and ways of others.” Do you relate to this statement? How does being In God change that? (p. 146)
- 3.** Doug discusses the both/and nature of light in that it is both wave and particle. He uses this metaphor to explain how we are both connected and distinct. He addresses a fear that the idea of being In God may stir up, that of not mattering as an individual, when he writes, “What contribution can I make that will stand out as having come from my individuality, my unique combination of talent and abilities and initiative?” Is this a fear you can relate with? Why or why not? (p. 149)
- 4.** “...Jesus’s saying ‘You are the light of the world’...remind[s] us that we are a particle expression of God, visible in all kinds of colors and useful for all kinds of purposes. Our individual manifestations of that light are in the life of God, not distinct from it.” How does this affirm the importance and truth of both our individuality and our integration. (p. 156)

5. Doug gives a short history of the Jewish tradition of calling the Torah the light of the world. This makes Jesus's calling people the light of the world scandalous. What are the implications of this shift from the light being what is written to what is living? (p. 157)

6. "You have your own unique place on the spectrum, your own heat source, your own set of experiences, your own personality. If you don't shine your particular light, it won't be shown. But also know that it doesn't all depend on you. You are part of the Big Story." Does this affect the way you see yourself? Does it make you feel hopeful? Afraid? Indifferent? (p. 159)

Chapter 10

1. "Remember, we live, move, and exist in God. So learning from Jesus can, and does, come from everywhere truth is found." How could embracing this idea change your relationship with truth? (p. 168)

2. Doug writes that in the first century, "Sin was not understood as an offense against God but as any force that destroys and entraps humanity. ...Then and now, God wants people to live free from sin for the benefit of humanity. Living free from sin is not for God's benefit but ours." How does this change your understanding of God's opinion of sin and of you when you sin? Does it change the way you see biblical commands? (p. 170)

3. Doug states, “The point of freedom is so we can find life.” Why is freedom necessary to finding life? (p. 173)

4. Doug writes about his friend Dieter Zander and his life since a stroke that affected the left side of his brain. Dieter once saw God as his boss. Now he believes God wants him to play. It is a well-established fact that children learn through play. The best learning happens when they are free to make mistakes in their play. How does being In God allow us to play without fearing the inevitable mistakes? (p. 178)

5. Dieter’s story is quite impactful. What thought patterns since his stroke have led him to freedom? How can his story lead us to greater freedom? (pp. 178-81)

Chapter 11

1. Doug writes, “In my earliest years as a Christian, I was pretty sure that every time something bad happened to me, it was because God wanted it to happen—to punish me, to teach me something, to force me into a more committed faith. ... It was a view of God as the ultimate hard-nosed coach who would do anything to train us well.” Do you relate to this view of God? What have your experiences taught you about it? (p. 187)

- 2.** He goes on, “In that system, we have two choices: work really hard to fit the system or work really hard to hide from God.” Have you felt yourself stuck between these two choices? Explain. (p. 187)
- 3.** “Growth and change are key to life,” Doug writes. “[...]t seems that the older we get, the harder it is to leave those stages behind.” Do you relate to the increasing difficulty of growth as we move into adulthood? If so, what do you think about it? (pp. 188-89)
- 4.** Doug tells the story of Adam and Eve attempting to hide from God and asserts, “Hiding stops the process of growth.” Do you believe that? How does hiding keep us from growing? (p. 191)
- 5.** “Healthy spirituality is the end of hiding. Spirituality ought to help us become more open, more free, less fearful, less ashamed, less hidden, more known.” Is this your experience with faith/religion? (p. 191)
- 6.** Doug’s friend Elizabeth helped him flip his thinking about Psalm 139. In her reading of the passage, God’s presence becomes oppressive and the psalmist wants to hide. Doug believes the If/Then system is the root cause of this desire to hide and in some way also seems to provide the means to hide. How does the If/Then system provoke the desire to hide and provide the illusion of hiding? (p. 193-97)
- 7.** Being In God removes both the need and the means to hide. Do you experience this idea as a positive change? Are there places in your life where you are known and seen and don’t feel the need to hide?