

A Study of the Great Ideas
(God and Man)



A Publication
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The Study of the Great Ideas in the Great Books

Introduction

A good education should include an opportunity for students to wrestle with some of the weighty questions that come with living. Who am I? Why am I here? Is there a God? Who is He? What does He require of me? What is valuable or worthwhile? What are the principles of right and wrong? For centuries great thinkers have proposed answers to these and other questions. The implications of their answers are all around us. We call it culture and Western Civilisation as it exists is a veritable cornucopia of competing worldviews – all of them out to get control of our minds and to move us to live as becomes a disciple of their way.

Surely, ideas have consequences. They do not exist in a vacuum. As one thinks, so he is. There can be little disagreement that the study of ideas is important. However, there are probably more than 400 basic ideas to explore and discuss. To look at them all would be to take the proverbial route that is a mile wide and an inch deep. Therefore, we have sought to help students understand what might be considered the most foundational of all these ideas: God and Man; Truth and Lies; Goodness and Evil; Beauty and Ethics. The order of the studies is significant as it follows, more or less, the progression of the Trivium; that is, grammar level understanding (God and Man) to rhetorical application in a look at what constitutes beauty and ethical living. Upon completion our hope is that students will be able to articulate that an understanding of truth, for example, significantly impacts the idea of what is good or even what is beautiful. Further an understanding of what is good will affect the view of what is right and wrong; what is just; what is freedom; what is equality. The connectedness goes on and on, becoming for the student his or her worldview; that is, how they will live in this present age.

In 2003 we launched our first level of *Tree of Life's Study of the Great Ideas Through the Great Books*. *The Study of the Ideas of God and Man* has proved to be challenging and stimulating for many students. In 2004 we introduced our second level: *The Study of the Ideas of Truth and Lies*, exploring some core questions that arise when young people begin to read critically. 2005 saw the addition of *The Study of the Ideas of Good and Evil*. Our four year study of the Great Ideas was rounded out with the completion of *The Study of the Ideas of Beauty and Ethics*. However, as students who have gone through every level have discovered, their wrestling with the Great Ideas has only begun. Enjoy the journey!

The Study of the Ideas of God and Man

Does God exist?

If so, who is He?

If He can be known, how can I know Him?

What does He require of me?

To affirm or deny the existence of God carries with it more consequences for thought and action than any other question one can ask. Because of the extreme importance of this topic, no Great Books study would be complete without an exploration of it.

As you work through the material in this course, you will consider the views of a number of authors who lived in a variety of cultures at different times in history. Your conclusion to the primary question of God's existence as well as issues that naturally follow: the question of divine nature and the relation of the world/man to the gods/God will profoundly influence your conception of the world in which you live, the position you occupy in it, and the life to which you are called.

Whether you and others consider man to be the supreme being of the universe, equal to all other "things" on the earth, or subservient to a superior being, will surely shape your worldview. For example, if God does exist, you need to conclude whether He is to be feared or loved. Is He to be defied or obeyed? Is He merely a concept in your mind or is He personal?

Whether you exclude or embrace a divine being will practically influence your view of man and the world around you. While we have not specifically focussed on the idea of man in this course, it follows naturally that what you learn and come to believe about the questions that surround a study of God, will shape your understanding and actions related to man and the world. Keep this in mind as you study this year. Simply put the more we know of God, the more we know of ourselves and our responsibility in life and eternity.

In a very real sense a study of the idea of God could begin and end with the Bible. Without a doubt it has been the most influential book ever written. Whether you believe it is the inspired, infallible Word of God or merely a good example of early literature, you cannot deny that the ideas contained in the Bible, more than any other book, have shaped the way western culture has developed.

In the Bible we see essentially all the ideas about God or the gods that man could ever conceive. In some way or another God has illustrated the consequences of embracing paganism, heathenism, Gnosticism, and other isms. He has also shown the great comfort from following in The Way.

Over the years great men and women have written on the enduring themes that are laid out for us in Scripture. In no way does this course make the assertion that any of the Great Books are part of the Canon. However, what these people have to say can and should help us understand the Truth, Goodness, and Beauty that accompanies a right understanding of who God is, how we can know Him, and what He requires of us.

To establish the boundaries for our discussion, we will start with a basic assumption: God either exists or He doesn't. On one side you have someone like John Calvin who, in his famous Institutes of the Christian Religion, said,

“That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God Himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of His Godhead...that all men...may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service...”

On the other side of the coin you have someone like Nietzsche who said, “God is dead...or, if he exists...he seems incapable of making himself understood.”

Between these two divergent positions we have everything from “soup to nuts”. The Greeks and Romans were polytheistic in their practice of religion. It has been said that together they worshipped over 36,000 deities of one form or another. Some of these gods they even saw as personal in nature. Many saw the gods as glorified super heroes. In Edith Hamilton's Mythology the pagan gods of the Greeks, Romans, and Norse are seen for all their fickleness. They had a beginning, change character like New England weather, and, other than their immortality and great powers, were little different from the man in the street. For more extensive evidence of this the student will want to read Homer and Virgil, among others.

The ideas of deism and pantheism also find expression throughout the ages. While deism affirms that there is a god, it often sees him as some sort of absentee landlord, neither becoming involved nor caring much about what happens in the world. God does not govern, therefore he neither rewards or punishes. In turn he does not have to be feared or served. Later deists saw God as having laid down certain laws to govern all men yet this is not done through the interference of religion. Men like Rousseau and others who championed many ideas of the Enlightenment saw God in this light. Pantheists, on the other hand, were closer to atheists. They denied the existence of a transcendent, supernatural being or beings and saw God

everywhere. In short God is Nature. A lot of poetry that we read contains this romantic view of God as being in the trees, flowers, clouds, etc.

While the deist rejects supernatural revelation, faith, and religion as being the work of reason, the agnostic makes the opposite denial. Nothing supernatural can be known by reason. It can neither be proved or disproved. The Gnostic stands against the agnostic and claims that reason can penetrate the divine mysteries. Of course there also exists people who have taken a stand on all points in between, attempting to harmonize faith and reason in pursuit of the knowledge of God.

The point of this whirlwind tour of some of the main views of the idea of God is to simply say that you will come into contact with them in your reading. It cannot be avoided. No attempt has been made to assign a Great Book for each school of thought concerning God. Instead the books were chosen to provide you with a broad view of how western culture came to understand who God is and what difference that makes. Some of the novels, short stories, and poems might better be classified as being about man, but, as was previously mentioned, no study of God can escape application to what this means to man. It is hoped that all of the selections will bring enjoyment to the reader.

However, it is ultimately hoped that by completing the requirements that follow, you will have a more comprehensive understanding of what God isn't, and, more importantly, that you will better know who He is; not just know about God, but know God as He has revealed Himself to us in His Word. May God direct and bless your studies.

Outline

The following schedule is given in the hopes that it will help you work your way through the course requirements with greater ease than if left to set up your own schedule. You will of course understand that you might spend an entire year studying only one the required books - indeed with some you could spend a lifetime. However, it is not within the scope of this Great Ideas course to fully mine all that there is to learn from the books that you will read. It is hoped that you will certainly get something from them and, at the very least, that you will be less intimidated by the thought of tackling more of the great literature of Western civilization by the time you finish this year than you were before you started.

The following schedule is just a guideline and the amount of time to be spent on each work is only a suggestion. You may find that you need an extra week to work through Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion while not as much time as is suggested to study another book. So be it! However, try to keep the big picture in sight at all times. The course is designed to be completed in one "academic" year (about 30 weeks). You should make every effort to do

so. For the average student this may mean committing three hours or so each day to reading, answering questions, and preparing essays. You may even find that extra time will need to be spent completing the reading selections. In fact, it's always a good idea to look ahead and see what is coming next in the schedule. This will allow you to get started on that novel that will need to be read following the difficult study guide on which you are currently working. That said, try to work on the material when you are freshest. The material demands your best and you will benefit most if you put an honest effort into the course work. It is expected that you will complete the requirements in the order they are presented. All the best!



Suggested Schedule for Study of the Great Ideas

God and Man

How to Read a Book (2 weeks)
Call of the Wild (1 week)
Mythology (3 weeks)
Essay on Mythology (1 week)
The Yearling (1 week)
The Last Days of Socrates (2 weeks)
Short Story Unit (2 weeks)
The Bible (2 weeks)
Animal Farm and Forbidden City (2 weeks)
Confessions (3 weeks)
Essay on Confessions (1 week)
Robinson Crusoe (1 week)
Poetry Unit (2 weeks)
Julius Caesar (1 week)
Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1 week)
Frankenstein (1 week)
Calvin's Institutes - Book One (3 weeks)
Final Essay - God and Man (1 week)
Total - 30 weeks

* Part of the requirements for this course is to work through the material in the text, Streams of Civilization Vol. 1. You will note that time has not been scheduled above for this. There is, however, a study guide in your binder and you should set aside time each day for working at these requirements (approximately 45 to 60 minutes). A steady pace (about one chapter every five school days and about two weeks to research and write each essay) will have you complete the work by the end of the 25 to 30 weeks.

Study Guide for How to Read a Book

Background: It is fashionable these days to speak of reading the *Great Books*. You know the Great Books don't you? They're the "every thinking person wants to read; knows they should read; doesn't really know how to go about reading; can't understand them once they start, so they give up" kinds of books. These are the books with authors' names like Homer, Herodotus, Euclid, Virgil, St. Augustine, Luther, Shakespeare, Pascal, Rousseau, Melville, Tolstoy, and Solzhenitsyn. They are not all books with which we might agree. Quite frankly we would find ourselves disagreeing with much that they say. However, they are the books that have shaped Western culture. *The Republic*, *The City of God*, *The Prince*, *Don Quixote*, *Paradise Lost*, *Candide*, *Faust*, and, of course, *The Holy Bible*. We recognise the titles. We may even have lingered for varying periods of time within their pages. However, very few of us have read these books. I mean *really read* them.

Why? These books are not easy reading. They push us and tax our faculties. They do not let us take the easy way out. We would just as soon catch the movie or read the Readers' Digest version. But, we must not. We must learn how to read so that we can find out for ourselves what they say; what the authors of these classics are saying to us.

The authors of the text for this course are not so concerned about reading a lot of books. In fact, they agree with Thomas Hobbes when he said, "If I read as many books as most men do, I would be as dull-witted as they are." Mr. Hobbes, humility aside, touches on a key point to being a good reader. We too often equate good reading with the volume of books read or the speed with which they are read. No, good reading is more than that. **Good reading is when the author and reader meet and the reader understands what the author is teaching.** It seems like a simple task when put in simple words. But is it so easy?

What is good reading? What kinds of skills are needed to read the Great Books? Is it possible for someone like yourself to acquire these skills? What benefit can you hope to gain from your efforts? What kind of books should you be reading? Are there books that should be avoided? These and other questions are answered in *How to Read a Book*.

On April 8, 1933, William Lyon Phelps, American educator and author, delivered the following radio broadcast. In it he discusses the value of owning books. As you read it, I hope you catch a vision for reading - not just a score of novels or newspapers, or magazines, or other "earthly" compositions; for while these are suitable to inform and/or entertain us, they cannot often be classified as great books. No, it is hoped that you begin the lifelong process of reading books that teach you about the world and, more importantly, something about yourself. Read well - not in quantity, but in quality.

Owning Books

by

William Lyon Phelps

(Taken from *The World's Greatest Speeches*, Copeland and Lamm editors)

Dover Publications 1973

The habit of reading is one of the greatest resources of mankind; and we enjoy reading good books that belong to us much more than if they are borrowed. A borrowed book is like a guest in the house; it must be treated with punctiliousness, with a certain considerate formality. You must see that it sustains no damage; it must not suffer while under your roof. You cannot leave it carelessly, you cannot mark in it, you cannot turn down the pages, you cannot use it familiarly. And then, some day, although this is seldom done, you really ought to return it.

But your own books belong to you; you treat them with that affectionate intimacy that annihilates formality. Books are for use, not for show; you should own no book that you are afraid to mark up, or afraid to place on a table, wide open and face down. A good reason for marking favourite passages in books is that this practice enables you to remember more easily the significant sayings, to refer to them quickly, and then in later years, it is like visiting a forest where you once blazed a trail. You have a pleasure of going over the old ground, and recalling both the intellectual scenery and your own earlier self.

Everyone should begin collecting a private library in youth; the instinct of private property, which is fundamental in human beings, can here be cultivated with every advantage and no evils. One should have one's own bookshelves, which should not have doors, glass windows or keys; they should be free and accessible to the hand as well as the eye. The best of mural decorations is books; they are more varied in colour and appearance than any wallpaper, they are more attractive in design, and they have the prime advantage of being separate personalities, so that if you sit alone in a room in the firelight, you are surrounded with intimate friends. The knowledge that they are there in plain view is both stimulating and refreshing. You do not have to read them all. Most of my indoor life is spent in a room containing six thousand books; and I have a stock answer to the invariable question that comes from strangers. "Have you read all of these books?" "Some of them twice." This reply is both true and unexpected.

There are of course no friends like living, breathing, corporeal men and women; my devotion to reading has never made me a recluse. How could it? Books are of the people, by the people, for the people. Literature is the immortal part of history; it is the best and most enduring part of personality. But book-friends have this advantage over living friends; you can enjoy the most truly aristocratic society in the world whenever you want it. The great dead are beyond our physical reach, and the great living are usually almost as inaccessible; as for our personal friends and acquaintances, we cannot always see them. Perchance they are asleep, or away on a journey. But in a private library, you can at any moment converse with Socrates or Shakespeare or Carlyle or Dumas or Dickens or Shaw or Barrie or Galsworthy. And there is no doubt that in these books you see these men at their best. They wrote for you. They "laid themselves out," they did their ultimate best to entertain you, to make a favourable impression. You are necessary to them as an audience is to an actor; only instead of seeing them masked, you look into their inmost heart of heart.

How to Read a Book is not what one would call an “easy read”. Every attempt has been made, however, to break the material into manageable chunks for the student. In fact the entire text has been divided into lessons and given a numerical designation. *Each lesson should take only one day to complete, although you will find that Lesson 12, when you get to that level, will take an entire week.* While putting together this study guide, a decision was made to use a frequent number of assignments to help. Since this is a “how to book”, this approach should help the student master all of the effective skills for a lifelong pursuit of good reading. The benefits to the student in the area of other course work will become obvious as the book is read and studied.

The following schedule will guide you through a four year reading of the book spanning all levels of the Great Ideas Course. This will allow the student to gain maximum benefit from the excellent instruction in the book.

Year One (God and Man) - Chapters 1-5 (Lessons 1-6)
Also read Chapters 14 and 15

Year Two (Truth and Lies) - Chapters 6-12 (Lessons 7-11)
Review Chapters 14 and 15

Year Three (Good and Evil) - Chapters 13-19 (Lesson 12)

Year Four (Beauty and Ethics) - Chapters 20 and 21 (Lessons 13 and 14)

Refer to the Lesson Outline often to insure that all work is being completed. Send the completed study guide to us for evaluation. All assignments will be equally weighted in determining the final grade for this course.



ROBERT E. LEE

Lesson One

Take some time to inspect the text for this course. Read the cover - both front and back. Skim the table of contents. See how it is divided into headings and subheadings. Take note of the types of things that will be covered in the text. Read the preface. What does the author think is the reason a book like this is needed? Dip into the book. By this I mean that you should thumb through the text, reading short passages from time to time. Perhaps first and last paragraphs of chapters or other sections that catch your eye could be read. Do this in sequence to get an idea of how the authors write and what sort of style they use. You might also want to look at the index. You have now completed a crude sort of inspection of the book and should have more of an idea of what to expect from the course. You will learn more about Inspectional reading later. For now, put the book away. You've done enough for one day!

Lesson Two

First a word about marking in this book. It is a good idea to keep a pen, pencil, highlighter, and notebook handy as you work your way through this text. You need to forget everything your mother ever told you about marking in books! The authors recommend it and so do I. It is one of the keystones to active reading, particularly the reading of expository works.

Look again at the Table of Contents. Find the section on The Activity and Art of Reading. As you read through the chapter today, use the headings and subheadings to help you make notes and focus on the key ideas. Now turn to page 3 and read the chapter through once - quickly. Don't stop to make notes; however, you may want to star (*) passages that you think are important and will revisit later.

Read the passage more slowly a second time. Make notes, write in the margins, record your thoughts and reactions. Remember the outline in the Contents can be a useful guide to understanding the most important concepts.

When you think you are ready, do **assignment one**.

Lesson Three

Follow a similar procedure to the one outlined in *Lesson Two*. Check the Contents for the headings and subheadings outlined for *The Levels of Reading*. Skim through the chapter in one quick reading. Reread the chapter making notes, recording your thoughts and questions, and marking up your text as you go.

When you think you are ready, do **assignment two**.

Lesson Four

It should be noted here that the procedure you followed for the first two chapters of the text will be pretty much standard for the course. The sequence of checking the headings and subheadings in the contents, skimming through the chapter, rereading for better understanding, and recording notes, thoughts, and questions will actually help you practice the skills needed to tackle whole books. To gain maximum benefit from your study, it is highly recommended that these steps not be skipped. They will be referred to from now on as **THE METHOD**. These will be the first two words that you see at the beginning of each lesson. Please work through the steps! Read the material found in Chapter Three - The First Step of Reading: Elementary Reading.

When you think you are ready, do **assignment three**

Upon completion of assignment three, do **assignment four**.

Lesson Five

Employ **THE METHOD** for material found in Chapter Four - *The Second Level of Reading: Inspectional Reading*. During your second reading, use the form titled **assignment five** to help you glean essential information found in this chapter. Send the completed form to us for evaluation.

When you think you are ready, do **assignment six**.

Lesson Six

Employ THE METHOD for material found in Chapter Five - *A Demanding Reader*. When you think you have taken sufficient time to properly prepare, do **assignment seven**.

Send all seven completed assignments to us for evaluation!

Assignment One
The Activity and Art of Reading

1. Why is good reading necessarily active?

Three horizontal lines for writing the answer to question 1.

2. Explain how active reading is like being the catcher in baseball.

Four horizontal lines for writing the answer to question 2.

3. List and explain the three goals of reading.

Two horizontal lines for the first goal and its explanation.

Two horizontal lines for the second goal and its explanation.

Two horizontal lines for the third goal and its explanation.

G O D A N D M A N

		<i>Tree of Life School</i>	
		<i>God and Man</i>	
Assignment	Essay	Description	Mark
1		How to Read a Book Study Guide	
2		Call of the Wild	
3		Mythology Study Guide	
	1	Mythology Essay	
4		The Yearling	
5		The Last Days of Socrates Study Guide	
6		Short Stories	
7		The Bible Study Guide	
8		Animal Farm/Forbidden City	
9		Confessions Study Guide	
	2	Confessions Essay	
10		Robinson Crusoe	
11		Poetry	
12		Julius Caesar	
13		Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde	
14		Frankenstein	
15		Calvin's Institutes Study Guide	
	3	Final Essay on God and Man	
		Total for God and Man Assignments (75%)	
		Total for World History One (25%)	
		Final Mark	