

Tales From 2 A.M.

Discussion Questions for Small Groups

“Me and Josh and Gideon”

1. Evil wears many faces in this story. Discuss the ways in which evil—both supernatural and natural—appears in this short story.
2. There is only one defense against evil in this story, and that is the word of God. How does the Word of God help us in practical ways combat evil?
3. In this story, the modern vampires seem more dangerous than the older ones. Do you think evil is getting worse in the world or is the conflict between good and evil cyclical?

“Of Ghosts and Bluffs”

4. Discuss how characters are “haunted” by past expectations—from themselves and from others. Do we sometimes let expectations guide our behavior—rather than seeking God’s will? Have you ever been felt pressured by someone else’s expectations?
5. Bluffs along the Mississippi are described in the beginning. What other sort of bluff appears in the story?
6. Has anyone ever betrayed you? If you’re willing, share that experience. Was any reconciliation possible?

“to-ate”

7. To-ate is a product of genetic engineering, possibly cloning as well. Discuss your views on genetic engineering: are there times that it’s justified? Times when it is not? What about cloning? When does a human being become human? When should the law protect a person?
8. The style of this story is more challenging because it forces the reader to follow to-ate’s thinking. Did you find this style effective or distracting?

“Justice”

9. Did the doctor destroy himself or did the husband destroy the doctor? If the doctor contributed to his own demise, what emotion destroyed him? Have you ever struggled with this?
10. If the husband was indeed sincere at the end of the story, can forgiveness become a weapon against someone else?

Stories 1 – 4:

11. Each of the first four stories takes you into the narrator’s mind in different ways: “Me and Josh” and “Justice” use first person narrators; “Ghost” employs direct thoughts interspersed in an otherwise third-person narrative style; and “to-ate” uses a present-tense,

first person narrator. Is one style more effective than another? Or is each choice of style effective for each story?

“Monsters in Paradise”

12. This tale is part adventure and part “coming of age” story. Which of the four characters do you identify with the most? Obviously the “monster” in the title refers to the big fish—or does it? How does the narrator recognize the monster in himself? The good in others?

“Three Blind Mice”

13. All action and dialogue takes place within the mind of Alexander Praxis as he relives the past. Describe how this story made you feel? What it made you think about? Praxis destroyed Teora’s castle because he felt that Teora’s methods (slavery), his thinking (the end justifies the means), and his desire to recreate the past were wrong. To what extent—if at all—do you agree with Praxis?

14. Although Praxis believes he did the right thing, he also seems to be suffering from guilt. Do we sometimes feel guilty about doing the right thing?

15. In the author’s notes, Schreiber says that the three characters represent three parts of the human psyche. Do you agree with Schreiber’s comments?

“Hallowed Be Thy Name”

16. There are two dominant motifs in this story: “father” and “water.” Discuss the various ways these images are used.

17. Discuss the three main characters. With whom do you most identify? With whom do you most sympathize?

“By Bread Alone”

18. This is the first of three stories about Methuselah Brown. Discuss the meaning of the title.

19. Have you ever wondered if there are other life forms in the universe? What do you think of Schreiber’s view that if there is other life, that they may be waiting for (or believe in) the Messiah?

20. What do you think will happen next with Zack and Meth Brown?

Stories 5 through 8:

21. You’ve now read four more stories, each in a different narrative style. Discuss the strengths of the narrative approaches.

22. How would each story have been different if it had been written from a different perspective? For example, what would happen if “Three Blind Mice” had been told with a traditional third person narrator? Or if “Hallowed Be Thy Name” had only followed on perspective: Henry, for example? Debbie’s?

“Maiden Rock”

23. Share some of your best vacation stories. Have you ever known a couple like the Tharps?

24. The happily single Eliza Welman is a counterpoint to the unhappily married Tharps. Is it God’s will that every Christian should marry? Discuss.

“Unless a Seed Die”

25. Discuss the meaning of the title. Did the ending surprise you? When did you guess it? What do you think will happen next with Meth Brown? He has been “born again”—but to what extent?

“On the Banks of Babylon”

26. Discuss your views of war with the group. Is it ever justified? If so, how do we reconcile war with the teachings of Jesus?

“Full Circle”

27. What elements in this story come “full circle”?

28. Many themes are touched upon in this story: addiction, materialism, self-sacrifice, selflessness, bitterness and forgiveness. What intrigued you most about this story? Did any plot elements surprise you? What do you envision next for Methuselah Brown? What about the Tolks?

Stories 9 through 12:

29. Three of the last four stories use an objective, third-person narrator. Discuss how each would have been different with a first person narrator. Now consider the types of third-person narrator Schreiber uses in these last stories: “Babylon” employs descriptions that are more poetic, “Maiden Rock” employs simpler prose, and “Full Circle” uses clipped, dramatic prose. Why did Schreiber use different techniques for these different stories?

“I AM: The Jesus Incident”

30. If you haven’t read a play in a long time, share with the group how you enjoyed (or didn’t) the script form. Does reading a play require more imagination—or a different kind of imagination—than reading standard narrative prose?

31. Normally a story about the crucifixion will be extremely reverent, yet this script starts out with scattered bits of humor. Gradually the story’s tone becomes more serious as the characters are pulled into the events. Did you find the early humor effective or inappropriate? Did you learn anything about events surrounding Jesus crucifixion? Share your thoughts about Schreiber’s Afterword.

32. Looking back on the Tales, which ones were your favorites? Discuss your reasons. Do our favorites say more about us than about the stories?