

Godspell Discussion Guide

Bethany Christian High School
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The following questions are especially designed with youth groups in mind, but can help guide anyone through processing *Godspell*. You may want to read some of these questions before seeing the production so that your group can be watching for specific things as they view it. The responses by the directors and cast members are not meant to be the end-all answers; you or your group may come up with other thoughts, which can be “correct,” as well. Rather, these responses are meant as a guide, and as a way for you to know the thoughts and processes behind the musical. I purposefully did not edit the responses, and my hope is that the many voices in this guide will be helpful as individuals meet this show at their own places in life. —Talashia Keim Yoder, director

Concept of <i>Godspell</i> : A Transformative Community	2
Color	2-3
The Set.....	4
The Character of Jesus	4-6
The Character of John the Baptist/Judas.....	6-7
The Disciples	7-8
Audience-Actor Interaction.....	9
The Beginning of the Show.....	9-10
Playing and Learning	10-11
Betrayal and Crucifixion.....	12-13
The Ending of the Show.....	13-14
Discipleship.....	14-15
Salvation	15

Concept of *Godspell*: A Transformative Community

What was your feeling in watching *Godspell*? What thoughts/reactions stuck with you when you left the theater? What do you think *Godspell* is “about?”

Talashia (director): There are many, many levels and lessons to *Godspell*, and I often found myself struggling for words when someone asked me what it was “about.” It’s not just about Jesus, it’s not just about what he taught, it’s not just about salvation in the way we typically think of it. No, to find a vision I needed to look at the entire show and the entire experience. *Godspell*, at its best, is about transformative community. Jesus, to fulfill and make whole the work already begun, calls together a strange hodgepodge of people—ones you would not normally put together. Each of these individuals bring their own eccentricities, their own faults, their own gifts to the group. They arrive as people in search of something, and ready for a new thing. Jesus takes them where they are and teaches them to be a community. They learn how to live in right relationship, and as they learn that, they are transformed. These broken people learn to live in community, and as Jesus gives them leadership and involves them in the teaching, they are equipped for what is to come. I say *Godspell* is about transformative community, and I mean that on a few levels. It’s a community that is transformed, but it’s also the idea that through community, transformation can happen. And that community becomes equipped to transform the world.

Color

1. Why did Jesus give each person a color at the beginning of the community?

Jay (Jesus): Jesus recognizes the uniqueness of each person in the community and what they have to offer. He also has in mind how both the colors of the cloth and the people complement each other and balance each other out.

See Talashia’s response to #3 for more details.

2. Why did each member hang their large piece of cloth at different points during Act I? Did any of these moments particularly stand out to you? Did you even notice it was happening?

Emily B (mallard green): Each member hanging their piece of cloth signifies the point at which they decide to join the community. It is an outward sign of their contribution and faith. They hang them at different times because every character makes the decision at their own speed. By the end of Act 1, Jesus has helped create the wall of color representing the cohesive community.

3. What was the symbolism of the cast taking off their colors and braiding them together in Act II?

Elyse (turquoise): Before this point in the show, the colors have shown that each member of the cast is taking their separate parts in the community. When they take this off, it shows that they’re engaging themselves more in the family of Jesus and supporting each other through that. It shows their commitment and that they no longer need a visual to help them see the way that they are a part of each other and what role they play.

Talashia (director): Traditionally in *Godspell*, face painting is used instead of cloth. When Jesus handed out the cloth in our show, the script calls for him to paint the faces of the cast members. In the “Day By Day” reprise, when we took off and braided our strips of cloth, they traditionally wipe off that make-up. This is to symbolize outward signs of belonging to a community, as Elyse described in her response. However, I had never understood that to be the symbolism of face painting when I watched *Godspell*. As the whole idea surrounding the cloth and colors was formed, this replacement also emerged—hopefully, a way to still get across the same concept, but in a way that translates more readily to our audience.

4. Why were these braids of the community used to crucify Jesus?

Lewis (JB/Judas): Our cloths were braided and then used to crucify Jesus to symbolize that the crucifixion came from all the people, not just Judas. Judas was the one who betrayed him, but then Pilate asked the crowd how they wanted to deal with Jesus.

5. Why do you think the members of the community tore down their cloth during the crucifixion? Were they pulling out of the community, or was it an emotional reaction?

Sara (dark yellow): The pulling down of cloth was an emotional reaction to what was happening. The members of a newly formed community were watching their friend, brother, father, teacher, and leader die and they were realizing that they all had a part in his death. The pulling down of cloth was each person saying they didn’t want to be a part of something that kills someone they love. Some were sad, others angry, others were not understanding, but everyone expressed these emotions of loss by pulling down their cloth.

6. How did it feel to you at the end of the show when the colors came down from the stage and the actors with their colors came into the audience? What do you think this was meant to symbolize?

Kelly (orange): The colors initially represent our individual commitments to following Jesus. Taking them down in the crucifixion is not letting our devotion reside in his death, but rather taking it and using it for the development of Christians after Jesus’ resurrection. Taking our colored cloths out into the audience symbolizes how the disciples take what they learn and spread it to the world. My cloth somehow helps me as Eva to transition between the mourning of his death (using it to wipe my tears) to the joy I have in his resurrection (waving my color to create pictures of praise).

7. Why do you think the directors chose to keep all of the set and costuming besides those pieces of cloth and individual accents on a gray scale?

Talashia (director): On one level, this decision was a practical theatrical one. If we had used the splashy, colorful costumes often associated with *Godspell*, the symbolism of color would not have stood out. But the costuming and set also helped to illustrate the idea of transformation. The colors, representative of both individual personalities and of belonging to a group, had the ability to take a drab, incomplete base and transform it into something that drew the eye. This transformation would have been much more difficult to illustrate had we used color more liberally.

The Set

1. What did the set “look like” to you? Could you identify it?

John Mast (technical director): This question is one I have heard a number of times. In general, my desire is that each individual identifies components of the set from any number of “places” in their personal experiences. Throughout the construction process I found myself remembering a warehouse, an old shed, and a barn in need of renovation. These various images hopefully came together to create a space filled with potential yet void of some critical elements. This is a place in need of transformation.

2. Why do you think the directors chose this design?

John Mast (technical director): As suggested in #1 the theme of transformation was also included in the set design. The absence of color and the incomplete walls give the message that work needs to be done. The use of drop cloths also supports the idea of a work in progress.

Talashia (director): Many conversations and experiments were involved in creating this design. I felt pretty strongly going into this experience that our set needed to remain untied to a specific time or place. I have seen Godspell performed in “settings,” and it hasn’t quite worked. We wanted the set to be unidentifiable enough that anyone could feel comfortable in the space, and no one could remove themselves from it. Godspell is traditionally performed on a raked stage, and we wanted to pay tribute to that with use of rakes while also making it our own new thing.

3. How did the set serve the show at different moments in the story?

Sierra (pink): This set is very adaptable to different moments in the story. There are a couple times where it is representative of a hill or mountain, such as “city on a hill” in “Light of the World,” and during the Sermon on the Mount. Also, it adds interest to the stage because of the different shapes and levels of the platforms and ramps. The stage effects Ellie (my character) most during “By My Side.” In this song, Ellie and Julia express their desire to follow Jesus even when it’s really difficult. During the song, Jesus leads Ellie and Julia around this set, which is actually pretty hard to walk on. In that case, the set helps represent the fact that following Jesus isn’t always easy and fun.

The Character of Jesus

1. Was the character of Jesus at all as you’ve imagined? What specific things stood out to you about his personality? Did he seem fully human, fully God, or both?

Jay (Jesus): This was one of the most difficult characters I have had to play. In theater you are told to be someone else for a while. The character of Jesus was different. Jesus was a pure person. That is partly what made him so divine. In order for me to not freak out about playing a character that was so divine as Jesus, I had to focus solely to be a pure, honest person. There are very many aspects of the character of Jesus in Godspell that I had to take from my own personal life/character in order to develop him fully. The divine part slowly became a part of it.

At the beginning of the production process I wanted aspects of Jesus to be things that maybe the audience had never thought of Jesus in that way before. I’m not sure as to how successful I was,

but I definitely found some things to make clearer: Jesus laughs, Jesus cares for his community in an entirely indescribable manner, Jesus is and was steadfast.

2. What do you think Jesus was trying to accomplish? Did he succeed?

Jay (Jesus): Jesus wanted to form a community. After he succeeded with that, he worked at developing them and preparing them to head up their own communities after he leaves. He wanted to strengthen them and equip them for whatever comes next.

Talashia (director): I mentioned above transformation and right relationship, and that was something Jay and I talked quite a bit about in the hours of discussion involved in his portrayal of this character. Jesus came to show us the way to live out the Kingdom of God on earth, and it is through forming this community that he is able to accomplish that.

3. Jesus uses many methods to teach his disciples. What are some of these that you noticed?

Jay (Jesus): Leading by example; lecturing; stories-examples of lessons; asking questions.

Talashia (director): I read through the book of Matthew in one sitting a few times through the course of this show, and in doing so, was able to notice some things about Jesus in Godspell. He teaches his disciples to find answers themselves. He loves them and trusts them, and they prove themselves worthy of that, ready to think for themselves. Jesus in Matthew very rarely answers a question; instead, he asks questions or tells stories that help people to arrive at the lessons.

4. Why do you think the disciples so readily followed Jesus? If you were faced with this Jesus, would you want to follow?

Elizabeth (blue): The disciples all came from very different situations and backgrounds, and each one was seeking something to fill the void in their lives. Each disciple was seeking something different, and they found what they were looking for in the community of followers of Jesus. Some disciples did have some hesitations perhaps about jumping right in and following, but all could tell that this was something special and they needed to be a part of the community.

If I were faced with this Jesus, knowing what I know about Him now, I would most certainly want to follow him. It might not be a quick, bold decision to jump right in, but I believe that I would follow him. However, if I knew almost nothing about this Jesus, as the disciples did, I wouldn't be so sure about following. I think that I would feel called to follow, though, and hopefully I would be brave enough to drop everything and follow by faith.

Kelly (orange): I would follow this Jesus in a heartbeat. What he offers sounds (and is) so much more appealing than the false promises I have in my current, or previous life. Eva (my character) desires the freedom, joy, and attention Jesus offers, which draws her to leave the world (the audience) and join this new community. Each of us is willing and desires to have a strong leader, which explains why we all follow so easily.

5. What did you think of what Jesus wore? What was the symbolism in it?

Talashia (director): I love that the painter's overalls give Jesus a working, serving look. He has been at work in the lives of all the people before they ever encountered him.

Jay (Jesus): Jesus' costume implies that he was in this setting before—a painter in an abandoned room. He has colors of all the cloth that the disciples on his clothes, meaning that he gave out a part of himself to the community, or that they make up his appearance.

The Character of John the Baptist/Judas

1. What did you think of John the Baptist and Judas being played by the same person? Why do you think the script is written this way?

Talashia (director): When I was getting ready for auditioning this show, I sent an email to a mentor and former professor who had directed *Godspell*, asking this very question. I knew it was usually done this way, but I didn't want to just double the role for the sake of tradition. Judy, my mentor, sparked a lively debate in the Tabor College Bible department when she took my question to them, and many pros and cons of the casting choice came out in the discussion she reported to me. When it came down to it, a few things made the decision for me. First, there's something about comparing the two in context of this show that I like. Both are charismatic leaders, revolutionaries, people who care passionately about the coming of the Messiah. Both are Jesus' right-hand man. John the Baptist prepares the way, Judas helps Jesus to organize and lead the group. Both also have a passion that can turn angry: "You viper's brood!" (John) and "Hypocrites!" (Judas). I also liked that this casting choice emphasizes Judas as a good person who makes a bad decision, rather than a villain. Having the same actor both baptize and the crucify Jesus keeps us from painting a black-and-white picture of any player in the story of Jesus.

Lewis (JB/Judas): Though one comes before Jesus and one comes with, they are both revolutionaries of their time. They were both men who wanted to push their idea of the Messiah, and who weren't afraid of being radical with their ways of getting the idea across.

2. How did you feel about Judas? Did you like him? Feel sorry for him? Feel angry with him?

Suzanne (assistant director): I like the character of Judas. We often think of him as "the bad guy," the one who turned Jesus in for selfish reasons. *Godspell* helps us remember that Judas was a loved, important part of the group prior to the betrayal; on a larger scale it helps us remember that most "villains" have a story that is more complex than their worst deed.

Additionally, I like that Judas brings some messiness to this story. Even before the final betrayal of Jesus, Judas has a few moments when he makes everyone pause and think about struggle. Were this musical only composed of upbeat songs and funny parables, it would feel incomplete. In order for it to ring true, we need a character like Judas to remind us that life also involves pain.

3. What did you notice about Judas's relationship with Jesus?

Jay (Jesus): Judas and Jesus were very good friends. They have all the necessary mannerisms of friends, they are honest with each other, and they read the other well. All the while, however, Jesus knows how it will end. This does not deter his relationship with Judas before Judas betrays him.

Lewis (JB/Judas): Judas wants a leader for the church, and finds that potential in Jesus. Because of this, he is willing to do whatever Jesus asks of him, and becomes, in a way, his right-hand man.

4. Do you think Judas wanted to betray Jesus? Did he regret his decision?

Lewis (JB/Judas): I think he did want to betray Jesus, but he didn't want the outcome that occurred. All along, he wanted Jesus to lead the church, to take charge. But, Jesus never wanted that. He wanted to lead the people, not to become a political figurehead. I think that Judas, by betraying him, thought that Jesus would have to prove himself the Son of God in order to get out of dying. Thus, he would've been forced into a position of power. But, as the scripture shows, that didn't happen. And I think that yes, he did regret his decision, because he first tried to give back the money he got from the church, and then, when Jesus did die, he took his own life.

The Disciples

1. How did this group function as a community? Did you notice relationships and interactions within the group?

Elizabeth (blue): As disciples throughout the show, we learned each other's personalities; our strengths and weaknesses. We grew as a community, helping each other learn about Jesus. All of the disciples truly wanted to be there, and truly cared about all of the other disciples. We all loved each other, which is portrayed through our interactions, how we kid around with each other, remind each other when it's time to be serious, and always lend a helping hand. By the end of the show, we are extremely tight-knit, and as we deal with Jesus' death, the relationships that come out are really beautiful.

The relationships on stage wouldn't be possible if the cast itself was not as close as we are. I can tell that each person genuinely wants to be in this production and cares about it very much. Every person brings so much to the group, and the dynamics are great. We always have such a great time together, on and off stage, which just makes the chemistry on stage so much more real and fun. I really have come to appreciate everyone in the cast (including the understudies). As in the end of the show, by the end of this whole production, I believe we will all be very close and I'm sure that we will never forget the relationships that we have formed during this experience.

JD (green): There was a good sense of community throughout the show. It's mostly because of how Godspell was written, but I also think it's because of the way all of us got along great and had fun adding in friendly stuff to make the connections even stronger.

It's hard to see the specific relationships and interactions of others when I'm on stage, but I have noticed how everyone has their other characters who are their friends and they get along great with. Because of the connections that were formed, the acting has become a lot easier over time in practice.

2. What did you notice about individual personalities? How did Jesus respond to each member differently?

Emily B (mallard green): Every individual disciple in the cast is created differently, just as we are all different and the real disciples of Jesus were all different. Jesus understands this and is able to meet every person in their own level, in their own time, while remaining the center of the whole group. For example, Jesus finds ways of bringing out the playfulness in Lois (who is usually a more serious character) and calming the hyperness in Lucy (who normally bounces everywhere). He

recognizes their gifts and needs of individuals and brings them all together, recognizing each are vital pieces of the whole.

Kelly (orange): Eva represents the childlikeness of faith. She is uninhibited and believes without question (the faith of a child). She's one of those people who sees only the good in everyone. Eva spreads encouragement and smiles through her energy, and she is inspired by the attention Jesus and others give her. Specifically, Jesus makes me (Eva) feel really special. He gives me love and attention and freedom. He trusts me. We definitely have a father-daughter relationship; "Jesus loves me this I know..." :).

Andrew (light yellow): Characters in Godspell are often denied any real individuality. They're treated mostly as faceless members of Jesus' backup group. For our production, every person on the cast worked carefully on developing a distinct and layered character. So, instead of a group of random chorus singers, the production features a diverse mish-mash of actual people. This allows more detailed interactions between Jesus' followers, and also hints at many deeper relationships with Jesus. He sees the individuality of each and every disciple, and the show is about how he brings these individuals and their best qualities together into a community.

3. Did you notice any transformation in characters during the course of the story?

Emily B (mallard green): All of the characters are transformed throughout the story. They all join the community in the first place because something is missing in their lives and they find it with Jesus. Some of them, like Judas and his transformation from friendship to betrayal, are more apparent; others are more subtle. For Lois, throughout the musical she learns to love Vivienne, to take off her mothering mask, and to relax and let some of the messiness of following Jesus stay messy.

Colin (dark green): For the most part everyone changes. At the beginning, the characters are all separated by their own beliefs that they think are right. Through the course of the show they join together to form a community where they love and care for each other. Specific characters also go through changes. For instance, my character, Todd - in the beginning I am kind of to myself and not exactly the most open and expressive person in the group. By the time the show is over, I have transformed. I'm very open and show my emotions more. Other characters also undergo individual changes, and most are good, except maybe Judas's.

4. Were there any members of the group with whom you identified?

Taylor Ann (understudy): In Godspell, most of the characters are all examples of new Christians, trying to follow Jesus. In that respect I could identify with all of them. But, on a more personal level, I could identify most with Zoe (yellow), the tomboy who struggles so much for attention and for a place in this new community. As a teenager, not quite sure how to fit into my school, church and family, I am able to sympathize with her desire to find her place in this new group.

Audience-Actor Interaction

The actors broke barriers with the audience and the band at various points (beginning the show seated in the audience, talking directly to the audience, dancing in the audience, talking with the band, playing instruments...). What effect did it have on you when they did this? Why did they break those barriers?

Emily S (dark red): Breaking the “barrier” is one of my favorite parts in the show. It shows that this community of people on stage is also aware of the others around them. We recognize how the people around us affect what we’re doing and give us opportunities to shine for Jesus. *Godspell* is such a fun, lively musical it would seem to dissatisfy the point of it if we didn’t mingle with the audience.

Elyse (turquoise): I hope dearly that it has a major impact on the audience when we break these barriers. The effect that I would want it to have is to make them feel a part of the story, for we are all a part of the story of Jesus. We break those barriers because we want the audience to be a part of us and our feelings, and we want to include them. There are so many emotions in the show, and it’s hard to feel those deeply without feeling a part of everything. We want them to be able to play with us, laugh with us, dance with us, and even cry with us, so that they too can see Jesus’ impact for themselves.

The Beginning of the Show

1. This musical opens with Jesus speaking, proclaiming who he is. He describes himself as God and King, as most in majesty, as creator - powerful language. Did watching him say these things while dressed as he was seem strange to you? In what ways did Jesus reveal himself as God and King in the course of the musical?

Jay (Jesus): I first was a little negative to the fact that Jesus proclaims himself so huge, so important with pride. But as it went on, I realized that, in order to realize the vastness of Jesus, that beginning speech is crucial and an underlying current for the whole show. It also puts me into more of a divine mood right away (which is somewhat crucial for the character of Jesus).

Talashia (director): I love the dichotomy of this speech. Jesus proclaims power, but it is while working, in a servant’s clothing - a true servant king.

2. The philosophers who expound at the beginning of the musical are Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, Galileo, DaVinci, Jonathan Edwards, L. Ron Hubbard, Jean Paul Sartre, and Marianne Williamson. Some of these are ancient, some are contemporary. Have you heard of any of them? Why do you think this prologue was placed in *Godspell*? What contrasts did you notice between their methods and Jesus’ methods?

Taylor Ann (understudy): I had heard of a couple of the philosophers before coming into *Godspell*, but most of them were totally new to me. Some of them I still have no idea what they stood for, except by what is sung in the prologue. But, in *Godspell*, I really don’t think that what they stood for matters as much as what they symbolize. They symbolize all the confusion and spiritual darkness that the world was living in before Jesus came. I believe that the prologue was placed in *Godspell* because it contrasts what the world was like before and after Jesus. It also shows

just how different the philosophers were from Jesus. They tried to hammer their own philosophy into others, while Jesus simply asked thought-provoking questions that made others discover for themselves what he wanted them to understand. In *Godspell*, he makes learning a joyful experience, which also contrasts to the doom and gloom that most of the philosophers were preaching.

John (understudy): I have heard of only the really, really famous ones such as Socrates, Galileo and DaVinci. I think this prologue was incorporated to show what some highly looked-up-to people's opinions of God are, as opposed to the thoughts of everyone else in the musical.

3. What role does baptism play in *Godspell*? Why do the characters choose to be baptized? Does anything happen to them when they're baptized? What does baptism mean in this context?

Lewis (JB/Judas): In this show, and in reality also, baptism is used to show the characters' commitment to Jesus. These characters choose to become baptized because they realize, in "Prepare Ye," that religion is the answer they've been seeking. When the characters get baptized, it changes something about them, sets them apart from the world, symbolized by the throwing off of an article of clothing or prop.

Emily S (dark red): Baptism in *Godspell* is simply a binding agreement of these characters to coexist. Anything that these characters have had before has not satisfied but then here comes this prayer that is so simple and it seems foolish not to follow. The removal of a piece of clothing represents leaving behind any previous worldly possession we have, to come and follow God.

Playing and Learning

1. Were you able to follow the life lessons Jesus and the cast were teaching? Did you experience any of these familiar stories and teachings in a new way? Which stood out to you?

Jay (Jesus): It was hard balancing out the stories. I found myself liking some and just being fine with others. It would not be good if I portrayed that, however, so I found little things about each story in order to keep the lessons interesting and to draw the actors and audience in.

It was also difficult memorizing the lines. Since I know most of the stories, getting out of the scripture story and into the believable life of Jesus was challenging.

Talashia (director): I found it interesting that while immersed in this show, I became hyper-aware of these same stories, parables, and teachings being used or referenced in sermons and other settings. I listened to those in a whole new way! I think that many times we get numb to things we hear over and over, and I hope that seeing the lessons and stories in a new way will startle us out of some of that complacency.

2. The disciples took on different characters as they helped to tell stories - was this ever confusing?

Elizabeth (blue): This was not too confusing for me as an actor, because when we began to play different roles to tell stories, we took them on so completely that we could all tell the difference

between the disciples and the character they were portraying. It was sometimes difficult to figure out how our characters would be actors themselves; there were a lot of layers of acting (I took on a character who had to take on another character). However, usually when our characters took on different roles, we portrayed that through the eyes of our disciple, so it was not too difficult.

Andrew (light yellow): The skits set up to tell Jesus' parables are meant to show the contribution of each follower to the community and to Jesus' word. Every member of the group takes their roles seriously, participating actively in the learning and development of their leader's teachings. Part of every character's personality comes out during these skits, as they're simply normal people trying to experience God's word.

3. The teachings of Jesus were so counter-cultural that a musical has been written around them. What is it that's so different about the way of Jesus?

Sara (dark yellow): The way of Jesus is a way of peace rather than conflict, a way of accepting instead of ridiculing, a way of forgiveness rather than grudges, a way of, a way of truth rather than lies, a way of patience instead of anxiety, a way of love instead of hate, a way of community instead of brokenness. This way is full of love, of new things, of friendships to be made, but it is also a difficult journey. Each person must face temptation, enemies who hate, and the pain of bearing the load of your sin and carrying the weight for others; each follower must place a pebble in their shoe to remind them that the road is long and it will be painful. The way of Jesus is contradictory to the way the world tells us to live.

4. Why does Jesus say, "Stop. This is the beginning," right after "Turn Back, O Man" and before the questioning of the Pharisees?

Jay (Jesus): Jesus wants the community to realize that this life is not all about fun and games. There is a serious side where the genuine people shine. It is difficult for him to do and he starts thinking about it already at the top of Act 2. He sees the disciples' joy and love spurting forth and catching into the audience and doesn't want to prohibit that, but he knows what's best.

5. "By My Side" is a turning point in the story. What is different about this song? What does Julia (purple cloth) realize that the others haven't yet seen?

Mary (purple): I think that the significant piece to "By My Side" is Julia's realization that following Jesus is not all fun and games. Prior to this song, the disciples haven't been pushed to face difficult questions. Julia is the first to comprehend that this commitment to Jesus also includes an aspect of complexity.

Sierra (pink): "By My Side" is different because it's the first solemn song in Godspell, and one of the two songs of discipleship. This song is the first time a character realizes that everything's not easy and fun. In it, Julia expresses her realization that being one of Jesus' disciples is much more than just dancing and learning and having fun. She has realized that following Jesus can be really difficult at times, but she wants to follow him anyway, no matter what.

Betrayal and Crucifixion

1. The crucifixion is slowly and subtly foreshadowed throughout the show. What are some ways you noticed this happening?

Talashia (director): This foreshadowing kind of kept creeping in unintentionally, and in most cases we chose to leave it in. Most likely, most of these times were felt rather than actually noticed by the audience. To name just a few: Gretchen sings “and ransoms thee from death” in “Bless the Lord” on the platform on which Jesus will be crucified; that platform serves as the altar in one of the first parables; it also serves as Heaven in the Lazarus parable; at a few intense moments through the course of the show, Jesus holds his arms out to his sides; Jesus glances toward what will be the cross at the beginning of “By My Side.” Judas also seems to have some idea of what is to come, and at a few moments in the show there is scripted foreshadowing from him.

2. Nothing from the outside is ever brought onto the set, and the cross and tools for crucifixion are a part of the set the entire show. Why did the directors choose to do this? Did it startle you when Judas ripped away his cloth to reveal the cross?

Talashia (director): This was a very conscious decision. Other than the instruments, which for safety reasons were not kept on stage, we wanted to keep the simplicity of few props—what is there is symbolic. Everything comes from what is already there and the people who occupy the space. When it came to elements of the crucifixion, we did not want to set aside a space and tool for that act. Things that are used for good earlier in the show—the platform, the framework on which cloth is hung which later becomes the cross, the strips of cloth—can easily be used to harm, as well. We didn’t want the cross to be apparent for the entire show, though—it is only when Judas rips off his cloth that focus begins to be directed at the crucifixion. Our hope is that this will not only provide a dramatic moment, but will help the audience to focus on the community that Judas betrays and breaks at his departure.

John Mast (technical director): Jesus’ death is something each of us must own in a personal way. The crucifixion occurred because of my sins and Jesus’ love for me. Using the woven cloths of Jesus’ followers as the tools of crucifixion supports this idea. Similarly, the cross, being present (and possibly unseen) throughout the life of the musical, is a reminder of God’s constant love and sacrifice for each of us. It is also a reminder personal action and decisions can either take life or be life giving.

3. Why do you think the writers chose to place the temptation of Jesus during the Gethsemane scene instead of earlier in the show (biblically, it takes place right after Jesus’ baptism)?

Elyse (turquoise): After talking about this yesterday in practice, I really got to thinking about this question. Perhaps my answer is a combination, or some form, of what was said yesterday. I think that the temptation is placed here because Jesus had temptations after his baptism and before his death, both at points of weakness. After his baptism, Jesus walked in the desert for 40 days and then was tempted by the devil to use his power, and before his death he was tempted again to use his power and save himself. Maybe to get the full impact of these temptations, the writers place them together to show the strength of Jesus in his time of weakness. And not only is it a temptation from

the devil, it is coming from the people also, so the combination of the two makes it a much more powerful temptation and more powerful resistance to that temptation.

Jay (Jesus): This is when Jesus is weak. It also shows the temptation Jesus had to turn the tables and to save his self from crucifixion. Another reason is that the mood right after his baptism is lighthearted and sticking the temptation scene right in the middle of it would be confusing and frustrating.

4. How did you experience the crucifixion? Did watching it in a new way cause you to think of it differently than you have before?

Colin (dark green): Well, before I had never thought of it so in depth. I never thought of how things actually probably happened—like when Jesus was being taken away how they all probably tried to do something to save Him but He said no. And how they all would've probably had a little time along to say goodbye to him and stuff. I had just thought of Judas betraying him and the guards taking him away and then he is crucified on the cross. I had never thought of the individual pieces before.

Suzanne (assistant director): I wouldn't say that watching the crucifixion causes me to think of it or see it a different way. However, it does allow me to purely experience it. Christian doctrine surrounding the crucifixion has always been difficult for me to comprehend; however, as I watch the crucifixion, doctrine is the furthest thing from my mind. I see our actors embodying pain and loss and life at its most unfair, and I'm repeatedly moved.

5. How big a part of the story told in *Godspell* did the crucifixion seem? Is it the “point” of the musical, or is it a part of the larger point? How is this similar to or different from the way you have thought of the crucifixion in the past?

Talashia (director): In working through this show, the crucifixion seemed to be just a piece of the story. It seems that if we focus all our attention on the death of Jesus, we miss the point of his time on earth. I don't believe that Jesus just came to die—if that had been the case, why all the teaching? The crucifixion is a consequence of the way Jesus took to bringing about restoration. He was crucified for who he was. Is it important? Oh yes. The story is not complete without it. But the story is also not complete without the life and teachings of Jesus, something that I think we sometimes forget about, especially in some of pop culture's portrayals of the story of Jesus. There are movies made of Jesus' birth and of Jesus' death, but very few of Jesus' life. While all portrayals have their places, I have found a big appreciation for the emphasis in *Godspell* on Jesus' restorative work in the lives of people - through his life, not just through his death and resurrection.

The Ending of the Show

1. Is there a “resurrection” in *Godspell*?

Jay (Jesus): Jesus' resurrection is implied. After Jesus dies on the cross, he starts to accompany the group for the closing number. He is the underlying current for proclaiming the word to the audience still. Some characters sense it, others don't. The resurrection also implies the second coming (see next question).

Talashia (director): This was the question I was constantly asked when people found out we were doing this show! “Are you going to have a resurrection?” *Godspell* is not written to have your typical resurrection. Actually, in the script it calls for the disciples to untie him, pick him up in the cross position, and carry him through the audience while singing “Prepare Ye.” Different productions handle this in different ways—some doing verbatim what is called for in the script, some developing a miraculous resurrection scene, others doing a combination—Jesus is carried around as described, but then at the last moment they put him down and he comes to life. Honestly, none of these have ever “worked” for me. I felt some kind of a resurrection was called for—the musical must end with hope, must end with “God with us.” But I didn’t want anything flashy or contrived. Suffice it to say that at the end of the show, Jesus is no longer on the cross, but is back at work, providing an undercurrent and guidance as the disciples continue the good work. And to me, this is a resurrection. Transformation has happened, the people are restored to the world and the world restored to Jesus, and this is resurrection.

2. Jesus accompanies “Prepare Ye the Way” both at the beginning and ending of the show. What do you think this symbolizes?

Jay (Jesus): Jesus is present at the beginning all the way to the end. At the beginning he is present but nobody notices him. It is as if he was there before all began. At the end, along with being the undercurrent of the proclamation, it is as if it is the beginning again.

Talashia (director): In both the beginning and the end, Jesus guides a change of course, the next step, with his playing. He provides the cue for John the Baptist to present himself when he senses the philosophers (the world) is ready, and he provides the transition and strength for the way he taught to be taken to the world at the end of the show.

3. What transformation has taken place between the first time “Prepare Ye the Way” is sung and the second time?

Talashia (director): The first “Prepare Ye” serves the purpose of baptism. This group of people is running up in excitement, having no clue what they’re in for. After being baptized, they dance individually—having fun, excited and free, but still separate from each other. The audience is included at the end of the song, but the majority of the cast is lining the stage rather than actually being among the audience. They’re bringing to it their individual stories at this point, rather than a shared, life-changing experience. The second time this song is sung, the individuals have become a community. They take leadership from each other and move as a unit. They end joined together by their individual colors, all lining the aisles instead of the stage, ready to venture back into the world. They begin the show ready to form community; they end it ready to bring community.

Discipleship

Where do you see discipleship enacted in *Godspell*? How does it take place on varying levels?

Emily B (mallard green): There are two specific moments of defined discipleship in *Godspell*. Lois leads the first in “Day By Day” and the second by Julia in “By My Side.” The first form of

discipleship is the calling to follow Jesus in the good times. Lois decides that she wants to pledge her loyalty to the community and in return, Jesus plays a little “follow the leader” game with her. She realizes that all she has to do is follow and Jesus will do the rest. This is the beginning of discipleship for when things are going well. It is all still fun and games for the disciples. Julia leads the movement of discipleship to include the difficult times as well. These are not the only moments of discipleship, however. All throughout, Jesus teaches the community how to live pure and faithful lives as disciples of him. He displays how to love and serve each other as a group and as equals striving for his wisdom and hope.

Mary (purple): The discipleship enacted in Godspell is depicted throughout the whole musical. The disciples are continuously trying to figure out what Jesus’ teachings mean for each of them as individuals. However, discipleship is also shown in their interactions with each other as a community. The part of discipleship that I touch on in “By My Side” takes it to another level. Julia lets Jesus know that she recognizes the hard parts of discipleship and is ready to walk with him when he needs support.

Salvation

In the context of this interpretation of scripture, what does “salvation” mean?

Talashia (director): Salvation. A somewhat tricky, loaded term, one that can be overused in situations where the meaning is not always understood. But it’s a biblical term - and a legitimate one. While the word is not actually used in Godspell, I think it does have a meaning within the context. Salvation is restoration. Restoring right relationship between God, self, others, and the world. Jesus brings salvation, showing others how to live with each other, how to live God’s ultimate will. The disciples accept Jesus as the one to show them the way, trust him, learn from him, and follow him, then continue his work in the world.