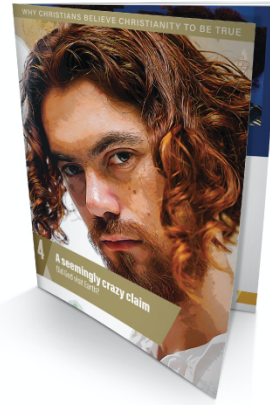


4

A seemingly crazy claim

Did God visit Earth?



Discussion Guide #4

OPENING DISCUSSION

Purpose: For participants to connect and engage in conversations about the wider topic.

1. Have you ever pretended to be something that you are not, and if you have, did you get away with it or not?
2. How easy do you think it would be for you to assume an entirely new identity, to present and live as a different person? (Who would you like to try to be?)
3. Can you see any benefits in pretending to be someone you are not – or would it probably create more problems than it fixes?

Today we're looking at Jesus and his claims - which are amongst the most radical claims ever made on this planet!



PRAYER



WATCH VIDEO #4

DISCUSSION PART 1 – WHY CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

Purpose: For participants to comprehend the significance of Jesus' claim and the strength of the evidence for his resurrection – as validated by Christian believers and non-believers alike.

Regarding Jesus' identity

1. In what way does Jesus' claim about himself stand out – warranting further investigation?

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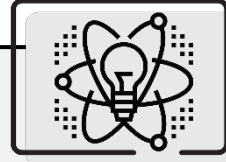
2. In what ways did Jesus claim to be God – other than by bluntly stating it? (Try to list at least 5) *(See the video ,or downloadable Booklet #4, Pg 9-12)*
3. In noting how crazy the idea of God visiting Earth in human form is, did the Old Testament of the Bible predict this? Read Isaiah 9:6-7. *(Daniel 7:13-15, discussed in Q5, also predicted this)*
4. Why did Jesus generally avoid stating who he believed himself to be?
(See three reasons in the video, or downloadable Booklet #4, Pg 6-8)
5. Read Mark 14:61-65
 - What is the significance of Jesus' words here? Why did his words get such a big reaction?
 - Read Daniel 7:13-15 – which Jesus quoted from.
 - How does this connect with Jesus' words at his trials?
 - What very strange thing did Daniel predict here? *(God himself coming to Earth as a human – just like the prophet Isaiah also did)*

Regarding Jesus' resurrection

6. Why is the resurrection so important to Christianity? Read 1 Corinthians 15:14
7. What are some of the strongest pieces of evidence for the resurrection?
(If you utilising the downloadable booklets, you could ask the participants to read 1 page each from Pg19-25, excluding p21, to summarise some of the reasons).
8. What is the significance of the repeated poetic 'Creed' found in 1 Corinthians 15:4-8 to the resurrection?
(See the video or Booklet #4, Pg 21. It's evidence that a belief in Jesus' resurrection was already firmly established within 3 to 8 years of Jesus)
9. If using the booklet – ask someone to read out
 - The first paragraph on Pg 20 – about John A. T. Robinson
 - The first sentence and then quote at the top of Pg 21 – about Gerd Ludemann
 - The last paragraph on Pg 25 – about Pinchas LapideWhat is particularly significant about the comments of these three scholars?*
10. If a God exists, then miracles are possible. So the question isn't so much whether or not Jesus could have risen from the dead; but instead, whether or not he did!
What does the evidence suggest?

DISCUSSION PART 2 – ENGAGING THE CONVERSATION

Purpose: For participants to develop discernment through considering how they might best engage with a person to arouse their curiosity.

**Learning Point #1:**

There is value in merely intriguing people (2mins to read)

It is possible to use questions and stories to respond to questions and objections – rather than statements. However, they have more uses than this. When engaging with people who seem disinterested, a story or question can be used to prompt a thought or question. As their interest is stirred, they might then become interested in discussing that idea.

To revise a point from last week's Learning Point, if we consider Jesus and the way he interacted with people...

- He **engaged** with the **interested**
- But only **intrigued** the **disinterested**
- While he **deflected** the **hostile!**

*(For more on this topic see our 'Because We Care' series which is about conversational skills for outreach**)*

This is to say, Jesus didn't always engage directly or openly. He considered his audience – and then said what he believed was needed for their next step.

Sometimes the people we are around are not at all interested in a serious conversation about spiritual things. If we consider Jesus' example, the question is how we might intrigue them? How do we bring spiritual things into a conversation? This is where small personal stories told within our conversations can play a role. They can introduce an idea – which we then say nothing more about. This might provoke a thought in someone – causing them to then initiate a conversation. The use of a simple question after a short story can also open a conversation up, by seeking to better understanding a friend's thoughts or beliefs.

For example, when asked what did you do in the weekend – you could mention that you went to church, but even better – “We had this amazing discussion that looked at the possibility of real miracles. It was really interesting!”

- That is an intriguing statement because it gives very little information, while introducing a topic and therefore creating a possibility.
- If appropriate, a conversation could then be initiated by asking a question as simple as, ‘Do you think miracles are possible?’ or ‘Do you think you’ve ever seen a miracle?’ Because that’s an interesting topic!

Our conversations with people are sometimes just a small ‘stepping stone’ on their journey. We need to discern where people are at in their faith and understanding, to consider how we might best encourage or intrigue them to take a next step. In doing this we remember that, because every person matters, every conversation matters also. Even if our engagement is very small, it is still important that we engage.

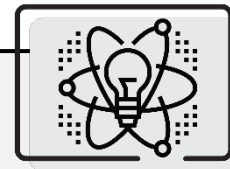
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An Exercise

List possible objections to Jesus' claim that he was God on Earth – or to the reality of his resurrection, then consider the below three questions.



A Learning Point #2:

Finding the question behind the question (90 seconds to read)

Sometimes the topic of a conversation can shift quite quickly.

For example, were you to tell a very short story about things Jesus did that caused people to think he might be from God, someone might then suggest that the Bible records can't be trusted.

Were this the case, the topic just changed – and you'd be wise to change also. The new topic would be the reliability of the Bible as a book of history – as covered in Episode and Booklet #2.

However, were they then disinterested in that evidence, it could be that their objection to the Bible was actually a smoke screen for a deeper question. Maybe they don't actually believe miracles are possible – so the evidence doesn't matter! If this were the case, the true question would therefore be whether or not a God and spiritual realm) exists, because that question determines whether or not miracles can happen.

The lesson here is that conversations can move quickly. A person's first comments or questions are sometimes something of a 'smoke screen' to their actual thoughts or beliefs. Their first comments are therefore a good starting point for a conversation, while more important conversation actually sits in the question behind their question. Being ready to adapt is therefore important, focusing our stories and question on their underlying thoughts or beliefs as they become apparent.

The exercise continued:

1. What **possible points** could you make in your response to the objections you have just listed regarding Jesus claim to be God or the resurrection?
2. What **stories or illustrations** could you briefly insert into your conversation (ideally with humour) to communicate in an interesting yet gentle way?
3. What **questions** could you ask that might help to make these points – or to open discussion around them?
4. **When a person changes the topic** – What is the new topic, possible points, stories and questions?

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Optional extension to the Exercise:

In pairs, raise possible objections relating to today's topic. Then take turns to engage each other in a conversation using cheerful comments, simple stories and questions.



TO TAKE HOME

What is the main thing you take away from today's discussion?

For next week

- Group facilitator – please promote to the group why each next topic will be particularly interesting and meaningful for them.
- As an option to go deeper, encourage members to read the next (downloadable) booklet, in preparation for next week's video and discussion.



CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Notes for the discussion facilitator

* Regarding the three quotes participants read out – the significance is that they are from non-Christians. The academic Pinchas Lapide is of special note. He concluded as a religious Jew – who did not therefore believe Jesus was the Messiah – that the Hebrew God of the Old Testament had indeed raised Jesus of Nazareth back to life in physical form.

** The 'Because We Care' conversational skills of Jesus series can be found at AllTogether.co.nz/equipping-videos-members or search 'Because We Care' under 'plans' on the YouVersion Bible app.