

5

A seemingly arrogant claim

Could Jesus be the only way?



Discussion Guide #5

Note to Discussion Facilitator:

- Due to the scope of the topic, you will need to maintain a good pace through today's discussion questions – or to shorten the discussion.
- If you feel to shorten the discussion, we suggest skipping
 - Section (E) (It could potentially be included in next week's discussion)
 - All of Part 2
- Regarding the significance of this discussion, it is possible that most participants will learn more about the differences between the world's religions from this one discussion than from all prior learning in their lives. This could still be profoundly significant to their future thinking and decision-making – and this remains true even if ideas are merely 'seeded' here, to be 'digested' and then understood in the next few years.

OPENING DISCUSSION

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

1. Have you ever been given incorrect directions when you were travelling? What happened?
2. (Deeper discussion question.) Have you ever made a decision to do something you didn't want to do – just to keep the peace? What happened?

Today we're looking at Jesus' very serious claim to be not only **THE ONE** through whom God has revealed what he is like to us – *but also the ONLY ONE through whom we can become truly connected to God!*



PRAYER



WATCH VIDEO #5

DISCUSSION PART 1 – WHY CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

Purpose: For participants to understand how and why Christianity stands out.

(A) Regarding Boundaries, and the Claim that all Religions are the Same

To set the scene: People have different views on many things.

1. When you and someone else disagree – you could approach the conversation in a way that disagrees with them as a person, or that only disagrees with their beliefs and ideas. What's the difference, and why is it important?
 - 1b. So, is it intolerant to disagree with a person's viewpoint?
 - 1c. What then is intolerance? *(Optional: See Booklet #5, Pg 5)*
2. Is it logical to say all the religions are the same? Why or why not?
(Optional: See downloadable Booklet #5, Pg 6)
3. Can those who say all religions are the same rightly claim to have avoided the awkwardness of making a truth-claim about religion, and why?
(Optional: See Booklet #5, Pg 6)

(B) Regarding Jesus' Uniqueness

3. How is Jesus unique in his claims regarding who he is?
(He claimed to be God. Optional: See Booklet #5, Pg 7)
4. How might Jesus be unique in his teachings?
(While referenced in Booklet #5, p8-10 please see specific examples in the footnote in this study guide).*
5. How is Jesus unique in his claims about how people can be 'saved'? (What is the 'do vs done' distinction about?)
(Optional: See Booklet #5, Pg 7-8)
6. Are you aware of any ways in which Jesus was unique in his impact upon world history and our values?
*(While briefly illustrated in Booklet #5, Pg 11-12, please see more examples in the footnote in this study guide**)*

(C) An exercise that highlights the overarching difference between the religions

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For the discussion facilitator

- For this exercise you need a screen or whiteboard or large piece of paper.
- To know what to draw, please see the 'discussion facilitators guide' on the next page.
- If using the Booklet, refer participants to Booklet #5, Pg 15-18.
- Then ask each question, and step by step draw / fill in the diagram.

Origins
Morality
Meaning
Hope

7a. What are the four great questions of life?

Instruction: Down the margin write 'Origins, Morality, Meaning, Hope'
– noting the below diagram.

Notes for leader:

Origins: How did we get here?

Morality: Where do definitions of right and wrong come from?

Meaning: Why are we here?

Hope: Is there any greater hope?
(What is our destiny?)

	Accident (Atheism)	Mystery (Pantheism)	Planned (Theism)
Origins			
Morality			
Meaning			
Hope			

7b. What do the following three types of belief mean? Atheism, Pantheism, Theism

Instruction:

Across the top write Accident (Atheism),
Mystery (Pantheism), Planned (Theism).

	Accident (Atheism)	Mystery (Pantheism)	Planned (Theism)
Origins	Accident		
Morality	Doesn't exist/made up		
Meaning	Not greatly meaningful		
Hope	No great hope (We die)	/	

7c. Noting booklet #5, Pages 15-18, ask group members to summarise in their own words what each of these three types of belief (accident/atheism, mystery/pantheism, planned/theism) might say about the four great questions of life.

	Accident (Atheism)	Mystery (Pantheism)	Planned (Theism)
Origins	Accident	Unknown	
Morality	Doesn't exist/made up	Doesn't exist/made up	
Meaning	Not greatly meaningful	Not greatly meaningful	
Hope	No great hope (We die)	No great hope (We cease to exist as an autonomous individual)	/

Instruction: Note the example shown– but please freely write whatever words you think are best to summarise.

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7d. With the options and implications of these three ways of interpreting our lives now in front of you, discuss:

- Which option(s) are strong from a rational point of view?
- Which option(s) bring a sense of meaning to life?
- Which bring hope to life?

	Accident (Atheism)	Mystery (Pantheism)	Planned (Theism)
Origins	Accident	Unknown	Designed
Morality	Doesn't exist/made up	Doesn't exist/made up	Exists/is real
Meaning	Not greatly meaningful	Not greatly meaningful	Meaningful
Hope	No great hope <i>(We die)</i>	No great hope <i>(We cease to exist as an autonomous individual)</i>	A truly great hope <i>(The new creation)</i>

Learning Point:

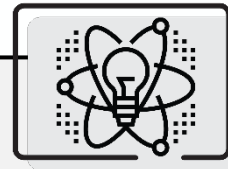
The differences are in the big things – and easy to understand

(45 seconds to read)

From this diagram we can quickly understand that the major religions are majorly different in major areas. They cannot all be true.

If we can accept the rationality of there being a God, the religions that claim to be about a single God existing who has revealed himself to us are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. To distinguish between these, the easiest question to ask is, Who is Jesus? Religious Jews believe him to have been merely a man – and therefore something of a deceiver, while to Christians is the Messiah, and to Muslims merely a prophet.

We therefore consider the options that exist regard who Jesus was.



Notes for Discussion Facilitator

Three ways of interpreting this life

An exercise

The diagram you are to draw is below. This summarises three overarching types of belief from a rational viewpoint, to aid understanding.

While there is some complexity to this due to variances in belief that exist within each category of religion, the logic of the 'overarching picture' is very simple, and this is diagram an easy way to reveal that. All will soon see how our starting assumption (God – higher power – no God) defines our beliefs in all other areas.

For your own understanding, please consider these very brief notes on the three overarching categories of belief.

Theism – the belief that there is a God

Implication: We are **planned**

Examples: Judaism, Christianity, Islam

Pantheism – the belief in an impersonal higher power or spiritual force

Implication: Our existence is a **mystery**

Examples: Most Eastern religions

Atheism – the belief that there is no God

Implication: We are an **accident**

Examples: Atheism, some types of Buddhism

If you conclude our existence was planned (Theism), the main religions this leaves us with are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. To distinguish between these the key is to answer the question, Who is Jesus?

- To Jews, he was a normal man and a deceiver
- To Christians, he is the Messiah
- To Muslims, he is a prophet

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THE STARTING DIAGRAM (Q7a and 7b)

Question 7a and 7b give titles to your 4 rows and 3 columns

	Accident (Atheism)	Mystery (Pantheism)	Planned (Theism)
Origins			
Morality			
Meaning			
Hope			

THE COMPLETED DIAGRAM (Q7c)

Question 7c discusses and fills in each column, one column at a time

	Accident (Atheism)	Mystery (Pantheism)	Planned (Theism)
Origins	Accident	Unknown	Designed
Morality	Doesn't exist/made up	Doesn't exist/made up	Exists/is real
Meaning	Not greatly meaningful	Not greatly meaningful	Meaningful
Hope	No great hope <i>(We die)</i>	No great hope <i>(We cease to exist as an autonomous individual)</i>	A truly great hope <i>(The new creation)</i>

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(D) Regarding who Jesus might be

If we can accept that the existence of a God is the most logical conclusion for our existence, a distinction between Judaism, Christianity and Islam can be made by answering the question, 'Who is Jesus?'

(See free downloadable Booklet 5, Pg 18)

- 8a. What are the three options for Jesus, as suggested by the author C. S. Lewis?
- 8b. What is there to suggest he was or wasn't a liar?
(See Pg 19-20)
- 8c. What is there to suggest he was or wasn't a lunatic?
(See Pg 20-21)
- 8d. What is there to suggest he was or wasn't whom he claimed to be – our Lord?
(See Pg 22-24. Consider reading C. S. Lewis' conclusion on the matter – as on Pg 24)

Note to discussion facilitator

If your time is up, the above discussion has included some profoundly meaningful content. We suggest you skip the rest of this discussion to consider the concluding question.

We note Part (E) is about the 'evils committed in the name of religion'. This is meaningful. If you do not cover this now it would fit thematically into the next discussion.

(E) Addressing the evils committed in the name of religion

9. Sceptics of Christianity often disregard our faith because of the evils done by people in positions of church leadership in history. On this basis they conclude that the world would logically be better off with no religion. No one can deny that these evils happened. What did you think of the comments about this topic in the video and booklet? What is the answer to this objection?

(See downloadable Booklet #5, Pg 13-14)

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Optional guiding questions to cover some important points

- *Were these evils actually evils of Christianity – or instead of individuals who failed to follow Christian teachings?*
- *Is Christianity the only faith to have evils in its history, or might all religions and beliefs? Has atheism and secularism also been at the root of many evils in history. (Our understanding is that atheistic Governments killed more people in the 20th Century than all religions combined in the prior 2000 years).*
- *So, was the problem actually Christianity – or that the people doing these evils weren't Christian enough?*
- *For the evils of atheism/secularism, can the same be said – that being more atheistic would be the solution? For example, Is the solution for the evils of Communism that the perpetrators become more strongly convinced that there is no God? Or might their actions instead be tragically consistent with their atheistic beliefs?*
- *Could it, therefore, be that “the opposite of bad religion isn't no religion, but good religion”? What do you think of this statement?*

DISCUSSION PART 2 – ENGAGING THE CONVERSATION

Purpose: For participants to use discernment when considering how they might best engage with a person, to contribute meaningfully to the conversation.



An Exercise

List possible objections to the idea that Jesus might be the only path to know God.

1. What **possible points** could you make in your response to this objection?
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?

An 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.

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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

* Due to the need for brevity, (downloadable) booklet #5 quoted sceptics and opponents of Christianity as a concise way of evidencing how remarkable Jesus' teachings are. For some actual examples,

No one else ever suggested 'turning your cheek', or 'loving your enemies', or 'blessing those who curse you', or that 'the one who serves is the greatest of all', or gave value to women like Jesus did – for example with the woman with the issue of bleeding, or valued the sick and marginalised – like the way he noticed and touched lepers or noticed children to value them. No one else took the idea of holiness and a pure heart as far as Jesus – like in suggesting that to hate is the same sin as to murder, or to lust the same as adultery, because these 'sins of the heart' are the cause of the later enacted 'sins of the flesh'. Jesus is widely recognised as the greatest moral teacher of all time, and his ideas literally changed history!

** Due to the need for brevity, the (downloadable) booklet quoted the admissions of scholars, that affirm Jesus' unique impact on history. Some specific examples are mentioned below – while noting that a study of history is required for every point, to show why and how the Christian influence was indeed the origin of this value within our culture.

- The equality of genders,
- The equality of races,
- The end of slavery,
- Our cultural concepts of charity,
- The idea of education for all – even the poor,
- The idea of health care for all - even the poor,
- Democratic forms of Government (in particular the idea of the 'limitation of powers', which combined with Christian-influenced concepts of justice, law, charity and compassion to shape the thinking from which our systems of Government were formed),
- Our cultural ideas on human rights
- The right to private ownership of property which is foundational to 'capitalistic' and personal freedoms which enable culture-wide prosperity if combined with Christian morality and charity.
- The thinking that undergirds our entire system of law and justice in which a person is presumed innocent before proven guilty, with a law that is to be applied equally to the rich and poor, powerful and marginalised

For more consider the video series, "Jesus the game changer," by Karl Faase, or books like, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born*, by D James Kennedy; *The Rise of Christianity*, by Rodney Stark; *Who Is This Man*, by John Ortberg; *How Christianity Changed the World*, by Alvin J Schmidt; *Dominion*, by Tom Holland; *Compassionate Capitalism*, by Harold R. Eberle.