

6

An explanation that makes sense Can the human race fix its own problems?



Discussion Guide #6

DISCUSSION OPENERS

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

1. Have you ever incorrectly diagnosed a solution to a problem – and ended up making it worse?
2. Have you ever justified doing something that resulted in such a mess that you had to backtrack and admit you were actually wrong?

(Encourage people to share amusing examples. The point is to illustrate the inescapable reality that there is truth and error in life. It is possible to sincerely believe something, and to be sincerely wrong).



PRAYER



WATCH VIDEO #6

DISCUSSION PART 1 – WHY CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

Purpose: For participants to understand why Christians – amongst many, conclude that humanity is instinctively sinful by nature, and therefore in need of God's love, guidance and help.

1. Are humans naturally good?
2. Where did the idea that humans are naturally good, come from (in history)?
(Optional: See downloadable Booklet #6, Pg 5-6)

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3. What behaviours/thinking has this idea led to (in history), and why?

(Optional: See Booklet #6, Pg 6-8, and the many examples in the following pages. If we believe people to be naturally good we give more trust than we should, and without the protections against selfishness that are needed. This invariably results in disaster.)

4. The Bible suggests that humans are naturally evil. Does this make sense when you look at the world or at history (or even selfishness in your own life)?

5. From where did God get his moral laws or standards, to define what will be defined as morally right or wrong for us?

*(God defined our moral laws on the basis of his own character and nature – as a good and loving God, aware of everything past, present and future. See more in end notes *)*

6. Fyodor Dostoevsky said, 'Can man be good without God?' What was he saying? (Was he saying that atheists cannot do good things?)

(The illustration of the children and teacher in the video is useful)

7. Logically, if there is no God, would the world run on love or power?

8. Based on what you know of history, would it be logical to assume that we (humans) can save ourselves and our planet from evil and pain by ourselves – or might we actually need God?

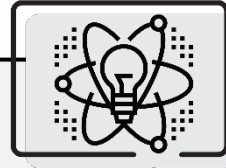
9. If using the (downloadable) booklet, read the three illustrations found on Pg 29, 30 and 31. After each story consider – in your own words, what is the main idea? How does the Christian view of life provide an explanation that makes unique sense of the everyday realities of our lives?

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.

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Learning Point: (2 minutes)

To maintain a respectful tone, one key is to disagree with people's ideas – rather than disagreeing with them as a person. For example, instead of saying, “*You are wrong*”, we say, “*Those ideas are wrong*”.

It is also helpful to a conversation if we state our views as personal opinions. For example, instead of saying “*Those ideas are wrong*”, we say, “*I'm not personally convinced about those ideas*” or “*For me, I've often wondered if...*”

This isn't about compromising our message. This is instead about being gentle and friendly in our approach. It is about adopting a posture that allows conversations to open up – while avoiding misunderstandings. Remember that our goal is to win people, not just arguments – and sometimes doing this requires tact (wisdom/sensitivity).

People won't always be kind or polite too. Some will directly disagree with, accuse, mock and demean you for having a view that are different to their own. In truth, they are being intolerant. However, if we reply in a like manner, it does not gain or prove anything. Like Christ, we are asked to ‘turn the other cheek’ – forgive their wrong, and show all grace. If we do this our conversations will last longer and go further. Years later, a person we talked with might remember nothing of what we said – but they will remember how we behaved toward them!

So, we should feel free to hold our own opinions – and to state them. It is not intolerant to disagree with someone. Tolerance is about how we treat people, irrespective of how much we disagree. However, as the Apostle Paul said, “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...*” (1 Peter 3:15).



An Exercise

List possible objections arising from today's topic.**

1. What **possible points** could you make in your response to these objections?
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 next week's topic, which is the last in the series – and which has been kept until last for a reason!
- As an option to go deeper, encourage members to read the next downloadable booklet, in preparation for the next video and discussion.



CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Notes for the discussion facilitator

** Regarding the basis for God establishing a moral law, his moral laws are an extension of his person (character/nature). What is 'right' and 'wrong' are objectively defined, on the basis of what is objectively most loving and beneficial for people with all of history in view, past, present and future. The connection between law and love is just like a parent who sets rules for a young child on the basis of what is best for them – because they love them. Rules from a loving God are therefore about love and protection – not the limiting of freedom. As the Indian philosopher Vishal Mangalwadi – who praises the influence of Christianity for good in history – put it, 'Only under the rule of law is there true freedom'.*

**** Consider:**

- *Christianity is for weaklings.*
- *People are instinctively good. We don't need a God to help us!*
- *Morality does exist without God – everyone knows it's wrong to murder.*
- *You don't need to be a Christian to be good! (Consider: 'Can man be good without God?')*
- *Our children don't need rules and boundaries. Set them free and you'll discover that they're naturally good!*

******* *There is value in skimming through the (downloadable) booklet to highlight/notice some of the many amazing stories and illustrations within it – each of which could be turned into a short story told in a conversation.*