

What About Other Religions?

radiate

Settling In: *About 10-20 minutes*

- 1) Make a note to yourself who, if anyone, is missing from your home group this week.
- 2) Spend some time finding out how everyone is doing: make a note of prayer requests.
- 3) Introduce a time of conversational prayer. Make it clear that group members are not required to participate if they are not comfortable.
or
- 4) Ask a group member (ahead of time) to bring a recording of their favourite spiritual song. Ask them to explain what it is about the song that appeals to them.

This is only for your information...don't make a big deal of who is missing to the members who are present.

Conversational prayer means each member taking turns praying for various concerns with reasonably short and to-the-point prayers.

Opener: *About 10 minutes*

- 1) Name as many religions as you can think of.
- 2) Is there any way to roughly group certain religions together to make a few basic categories? How would you group them?
- 3) Can you think of any important differences between the basic groups?
or
- 4) Internet research: If you have a computer with web access handy, do a quick search on Wikipedia to answer a few of these questions:
 - a) What are the major world religions?
 - b) Which is the largest? Which is considered the oldest?
 - c) Look up and read the first few paragraphs of the articles on Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

You may not have time to ask every question in the study. Also, some of the discussion questions may not be appropriate depending on who is at the home group on a particular night. That's okay! We've intentionally given you more material than you can usually use.

Mini-teach: *About 10 minutes*

There are some similarities but also some important differences between all the major world religions.

- 1) It is popular to say that all religions teach basically the same thing.
 - a) This point of view was popularized by Carl Jung and more recently by the writings of Joseph Campbell and Huston Smith.
 - b) One of the major problems with the approach of Jung and his followers is that when they "boil down" the religions to what they believe is an essential core, what they come up with spookily resembles the belief system they started with...in other words, they find what they wanted to find and ignore what doesn't fit their theories.
 - c) These ideas are often attractive to people who are essentially secular in their outlook on religion. Rarely is such a person actively following any path toward God, especially a path that requires change or personal sacrifice.
- 2) While this sentiment at first seems open-minded and liberal, it is in reality one of the most arrogant and demeaning statements one can make about followers of other religions.
 - a) Only a person who has never bothered to seriously examine the truth-claims of the major religions could claim that they are essentially the

Carl Jung (pr. 'young' or 'yun') was a student of Sigmund Freud but differed from his teacher in many significant areas. He believed that all humanity was united by a "collective unconscious" that accounts for the similarities in religions.

Another way of putting it is, it's easy to be open-minded about things you don't really care about.

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- same.
- b) This position implies a privileged vantage point above all the believers of any of the religions: "In spite of what *you* say your religion is about, *I* can see the truth more clearly because *I* am smarter, more educated, and more enlightened than *you*."
 - c) Committed members of any of these religions would strongly disagree with this secular perspective that their faith can be boiled down to a few essential points that everyone could agree on.
- 3) World religions have immense differences in the most basic beliefs.
- a) For example, Buddhism is a non-theistic religion. How can a religion that is based on the belief in God and a religion that believes there is no God both be true? In the end you must choose.
 - b) To be respectful of believers of other religions, we must acknowledge that there are important differences and try to learn what *they* say their religion means.
 - c) In fact, the only points where all religions appear to agree is that something is wrong with humanity and that something needs to be done about it.
- 4) Based on the evidence, we cannot conclude that all the religions are equally right.
- a) Logically, the possibility exists that all of the religions *may* be wrong.
 - b) But we can investigate in hope that one *could* be right.

Discussion 1: About 15 minutes

What does the Bible say about other religions?

- 1) Exodus 20:3
- a) What does this verse say about other deities (gods)?
 - b) What does it imply about other religions?
 - c) Where does this statement occur within the Ten Commandments? Why do you think it is first? What could God's motive be?
 - d) What does this verse mean for us today, who live in a basically monotheistic culture?
- 2) John 14:6
- a) What does Jesus appear to be saying in this verse?
 - b) How do you react to this statement? (i.e. How do you feel about this?)
 - c) Could Jesus be innocently mistaken about this?

The Ten Commandments are foundational to both Judaism and Christianity.

No other gods "before" me means literally "in hostility toward" or "in competition with" me.

What you believe about God is the most important thing about you. It determines almost everything else in your life.

The OT was written in a polytheistic world. Most ancients believed there were a variety of gods who had differing characteristics and demands of their followers.

Most people in the western world today believe that there is one God, but differ on his nature and expectations.

To come to the Father through Jesus means to come through Jesus' sacrifice and his teachings into a relationship with

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- d) What does it mean to come to the Father “through me”?
- 3) Matthew 2:1-2.
- a) Who were the magi? Why did they come seeking the new king?
- b) What in their religion led them to seek the King of the Jews?
- c) Based on these verses, how might God use other religions?
- d) What should a Christian's attitude be toward followers of other religions?

God.

The magi were astrologers, possibly from Persia. They were clearly not Jews or Christians!

The story of Christian missions is full of testimonies of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. sincerely seeking truth through their faith and ultimately finding Jesus.

It is reasonable to assume that God has left “pointers” to himself in all areas of life.

Discussion 2: About 15 minutes

What is unique about Jesus?

- 1) John 3:16-21
- a) The “founders” of other religions pointed to their teachings (their philosophy or new religious ideas) as a source of enlightenment. Is this what Jesus is doing here?
- b) Did Jesus come to bring a new religion or even a new philosophy? What did he come to do?
- c) According to Jesus, did he come to make people feel condemned and guilty?
- d) Why do so many people feel condemned?
- 2) Matthew 7:28,29
- a) What made Jesus' teaching unique?
- b) What caused people to see that he spoke with authority?
- 3) Mark 2:5-12
- a) Why did the religious leaders (scribes) challenge Jesus?
- b) How would you summarize Jesus' answer to the religious leaders?
- c) How did Jesus prove that he had unique authority?

Jesus is unique in that he claims that he himself is the source of eternal life...not just his teachings.

Someone may say, “the church condemns people.” That may be true at times. But draw their attention to: “people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.”

“Scribes” were professional teachers, like lecturers. They appealed to other scribes for their authority.

It is one thing to make religious claims; it is quite another to back it up with a miracle!

Closer:

- Jesus is not like any other religious leader.
- Make a list of what makes Jesus unique.
- One of the most important differences is that Jesus invites people to come into a real relationship with himself.
- He makes himself available to anyone who seeks him with a sincere heart.
- If appropriate, offer to meet with any of your group members who would like to talk one-to-one about developing a relationship with Jesus.