

Friendships that Count

Sharing your faith made easy

Small Group Study / Course



The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory

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Developed by Alastair Kendrew, 2012, based on selected material from:

- ❑ Saddleback CLASS studies (Rick Warren) - adapted for use in New Zealand by Major Malcolm Herring and Justin Boswell
- ❑ Living Proof (Jim Peterson, CBMC)
- ❑ Harvest Impact Series (Greg Laurie)
- ❑ Alpha Course (Nicky Gumbel)

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Introduction

In 2010, The Salvation Army in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga launched an extension to the Territorial Strategic Mission Plan (TSMP) referred to as TSMP: The Next Chapter. The plan contains four updated goals.

The first goal is to make dynamic disciples of Jesus. To achieve this, we obviously need to help people decide to follow Him. Yet, many of us are hesitant to share our faith with friends, perhaps because we don't know where to start or feel ill-equipped. This booklet is designed as a practical guide to help.

In their book *Contagious Christianity*, Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg identify six different styles of evangelism. Some people enjoy walking up to strangers and starting conversations about faith, or thrive on debating with people about faith issues. This workbook won't help you with that. Instead, it is designed around the concept of friendship evangelism – building deep relationships with a few friends, loving them, serving them and introducing them to Jesus over time.

Starting with why friendships are critical to people coming to faith, you'll gain a better understanding of your non-Christian friends, receive a practical model for deepening these relationships and prepare yourself so that you are ready to make the most of opportunities that present for you to share your love for Jesus with your friends.

May you experience the joy of seeing your friends come to faith in Jesus.

Style

While it is possible to use this booklet for individual study, it is designed for use in a small group setting (e.g. 5-10 people) or course, relying heavily on discussion and the sharing of ideas.

The studies are designed to be thought-provoking and practical, with questions to which there will hopefully be a variety of responses. Often there are no 'right' answers as many of the answers will be about you deciding how you will apply the Bible's teaching in your life.

Each session follows the same format – an introductory idea or story followed by a time of discussion and study, concluding with time to reflect, apply what you have learned and pray. They are planned to take between 60 and 75 minutes, depending on the discussion. We encourage your group to spend time together socially and to pray for each other, so at least one and a half hours should be allowed.

Preparation

All you need is a Bible, a pen and an open heart. Make sure your Bible is a modern translation. References in this booklet are typically from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible, but the New Living Translation (NLT), Contemporary English Version (CEV), New International Readers Version (NIrV) and Good News Bible are also recommended.

The leader is encouraged to pre-read the study so that they know what is coming. There are also tips in Appendix 3 for leading an effective study.

Guidelines

It is important that people feel comfortable sharing within the group knowing that everything discussed is done so in confidence.

If your group is new, you should start by agreeing to some guidelines, such as those below.

We wish you the best as you study God's word together.

GROUP GUIDELINES

We agree to:

1. Keep everything discussed in the group within the group (unless specific permission is given otherwise).
2. Provide equal opportunity for everyone to talk. No one is to dominate the discussion and no one will be forced to share if they are not comfortable doing so.
3. Only talk about our self and our situation, avoiding conversation about others.
4. Show respect for each other at all times.
5. Leave as friends. We want to allow rigorous debate, but we will not make conversations personal. Should we disagree, we will do so with grace.
6. Pray for each other.

SESSION 1

1. Friendships that Count

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19

Getting started

1. Spend a few minutes having everyone introduce themselves and briefly explain how they came to follow Jesus.
2. What have you observed people do (or have done yourself) to share their faith that has been completely ineffective (or worse)?

Explore

The last recorded words of Jesus in Matthew are a direct command to go and make disciples:

‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’ (Matthew 28:19-20)

If we unpack this a little more, we see that it is a circular command. Jesus starts by telling us to go and make disciples. ‘Go’ might be more accurately translated ‘while you go’ so making disciples should be a natural part of our lives.

Next, we are commanded to baptise them – help them become immersed in God – and to teach them.

What are we to teach them? ‘To obey everything I have commanded you’, which includes to go and make disciples. Therefore, the true mark of a dynamic disciple is whether they are helping make more disciples of Jesus.

Yet, according to international evangelist Greg Laurie (www.harvest.org), a recent survey amongst Christians revealed that 95% of those surveyed had never led another person to Jesus Christ. Further, only 10 percent of those who claimed to be born again felt it was important to share the gospel with others!

3. What do you think are the main reasons people find it difficult (or don’t bother) sharing their faith with others?

A well quoted statistics is that 85% of people come to faith in Jesus before the age of 18. It is used to highlight the importance of ministry to children and youth, but if it's true, does this mean we're wasting our time trying to tell adults about Jesus?

4. Do you believe the statistic? How does this compare to your personal experiences?

5. If an unchurched person came to faith, who or what do you think would have been the biggest influences in that decision?

Mark Fleischmann was dubious about the statistic, so he conducted his own research with 3000 believers across multiple congregations. Here's some of his findings.

- The '85/18 Rule' was partially confirmed in his research – 84.5 percent of Christians did accept Christ before that age – if they were raised in a Christian home. But for those not raised in a Christian home, two-thirds came to faith as an adult.
- What made the real difference with the unchurched were personal relationships. The majority who find Christ look back and say that it was a friend who influenced them toward faith.
- When you ask someone raised Christian, "How did you come to Christ?" they typically answer by telling about an event. People from unchurched backgrounds, however, typically tell about an extended process, life circumstances, key relationships, and significant issues they were working through.
- Of those Christians with an unchurched background, most (56 percent) report coming to faith in the midst of a significant transition or crisis. Most often it's family-related—either transitioning into parenthood or coping with a marriage crisis. But other times the crisis may relate to addiction, illness, death, finances, even world catastrophes. The transition may be into a new relationship, community, or a new career.
- You might expect pastors and youth leaders (the professionals) to have the greatest impact on unchurched people. Not so. Statistically, they are more likely to nudge someone from a Christian home toward a decision than to help an unchurched person find faith.

6. What strikes you most about these findings?

How do people come to church?

The Institute of American Church Growth asked over 10,000 people about how they first came to church? The answers were:

<input type="checkbox"/> Special need	2%
<input type="checkbox"/> Walk-in	3%
<input type="checkbox"/> Pastor	6%
<input type="checkbox"/> Visitation	1%
<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday school	5%
<input type="checkbox"/> Evangelistic crusade	5%
<input type="checkbox"/> Church programme	3%
<input type="checkbox"/> Friend/relative	79%

[Wayne Zunkel, Leadership, Vol. 5, no.3]

If this statistic holds true here, it's pretty obvious that the best and most likely way our friends will encounter Jesus is through us!

7. Do you think it is appropriate to build a relationship with someone just to tell them about Jesus? Why or why not?

8. What part does each of the following play in helping people decide to become a disciple of Jesus?
 - a) You
 - b) The other person
 - c) The Holy Spirit
 - d) Prayer

If we are serious about reaching our friends for Christ, we need to be intentional and genuine about this.

Authentic friendships have a price tag – time!

Summary

It's pretty obvious that Jesus expects us to share our faith with others – to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Yet most Christians don't do this. Perhaps they have in their mind a picture of leading a friend to pray the sinner's prayer by the dishwasher, or that their friends aren't interested, or they just simply don't know how and so don't try.

While the Holy Spirit is clearly what draws people to Jesus, the statistics show that the vast majority of people will have also been influenced by a friend or relative. This course is about being one of those friends (or relatives).

Over the coming sessions, we will learn that evangelism is a process, not an event. It is not helpful to explain the sinner's prayer to someone completely uninterested in Jesus. But it *is* helpful to be an authentic friend, and hopefully, by being such a friend, there'll come a day when you get the chance to see the friendship count for eternity.

In the next session, we'll look at the different world views held by our unchurched friends. Then we'll move on to look at a simple process that we each can follow for building friendships that count. In our final session, we'll then look at how to have faith conversations with our friends and be prepared to share our personal faith stories as the opportunities arise.

Reflect

What difference does Jesus make to your life?

How important is it to you to share the gospel with others?

Apply

Think about your friends, acquaintances and family members who are not Christians. How much time do you spend with them?

Who would you like to spend more time with? Pray for those people.

Pray

- That Jesus would create a hunger within each of us to see our friendships become friendships that count for eternity.

Going Deeper

Read Luke 10: 1-12. How did Jesus instruct his followers?

The Status of Christianity in the World

“Look at the nations and be amazed! Watch and be astounded at what I will do! For I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn’t believe even if someone told you about it.” Habakkuk. 1:5 (NLT)

The good news – the Church is far bigger than you think.

According to a comprehensive 2010 study by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, there are approximately 2.18 billion Christians of all ages around the world, representing nearly a third of the population.

The top five religions are:

<input type="checkbox"/> Christian	32%	2.18 billion
<input type="checkbox"/> Muslim	22%	1.5 billion
<input type="checkbox"/> Hindu	13%	900 million
<input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist	7%	450 million
<input type="checkbox"/> Sikh	0.5%	50 million

Atheists amount to a mere 2.3%.

The Church is growing explosively *outside* of Western countries.

- In 1900 – 81% of believers were Caucasian.
- In 1981 – 51% of believers were Caucasian.
- In 2008 – 44% of believers were Caucasian.

For example, some people have the church growing in Brazil at around 20,000 new believers a week, and in China, as much as 20,000 new believers a day! It is estimated that there are now more than 100 million Christians in China, up from around 4 million when religious freedom was reintroduced in 1980.

The availability of the Bible in other Languages has increased dramatically.

- 1800 – 81 Languages
- 1900 – 537 Languages
- 2007 – 2,454 languages (according to United Bible Society)

According to www.jesusfilm.org, the Jesus Film has been seen by over 2 billion people and through it, more than 200 million have indicated decisions to accept Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord!

SESSION 2

2. Understanding our Unchurched Friends (1)

“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews ... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” 1 Corinthians 9:20,23

Follow-up

Last session, we learned that four out of five people who come to faith in Jesus are helped by a friend. This course is about you being such a friend.

1. Does anyone have a story to share of how they made a specific effort to build a friendship that lasts since our last session? How did it go?

Getting Started

According to the 2006 Census, only 53% of New Zealanders now classify themselves as Christian – a decrease of 10% over the 10 years prior – while the number of people claiming ‘no religion’ has climbed to 41.6%. Where 40 years ago, it was common for children to attend Sunday School, an increasing number of people now have no knowledge of basic Christian beliefs. (With 2008 research by the Bible Society of New Zealand indicating that less than 20% of New Zealanders attend church at least once a month, this is likely to keep growing).

It is hard to speak to people who have a different language. We live in the same neighbourhood, watch the same TV shows, follow the same sports and eat the same types of meals as our neighbours. Yet, we Christians are often oblivious to the gap between ourselves and them. We need to learn to communicate the life-changing message of Christ in a relevant way.

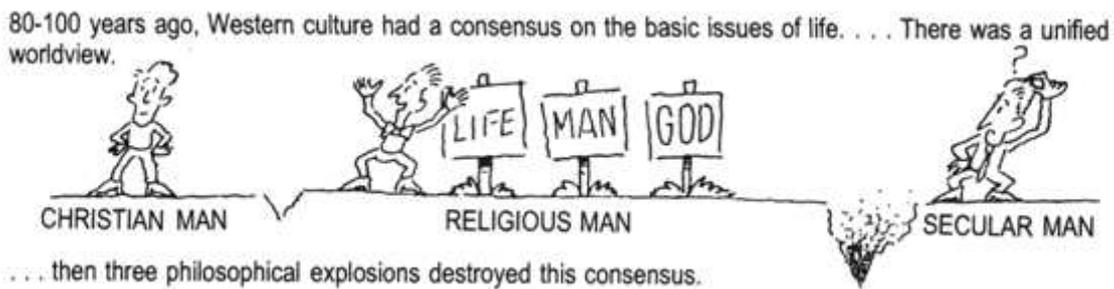
The purpose of this session is to examine the differences between the Christian and non-Christian cultures in our society that are barriers to communicating the Gospel, and to look at how we might get past those barriers.

2. What are some of the ways that Christians are different to non-Christians (for example, our values, morals, world view, language, routines, view of the Bible)?
3. Why do you think the percentage of New Zealanders classifying themselves as Christian is dropping?

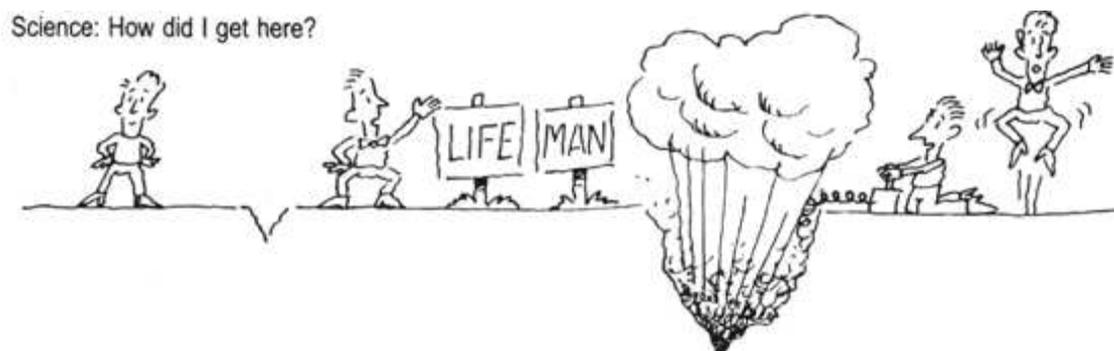
Explore

The gap between Christians and non-Christians is growing. How has this come about?

CBMC¹ explain that ‘one hundred years ago believers and unbelievers in Western culture agreed about most of the basic issues of life. Almost everybody believed God existed, was a person, had created the world, and had established certain moral standards reflected in the Bible. But about a century ago a cultural gap began to crack that consensus, and it has been widening ever since.



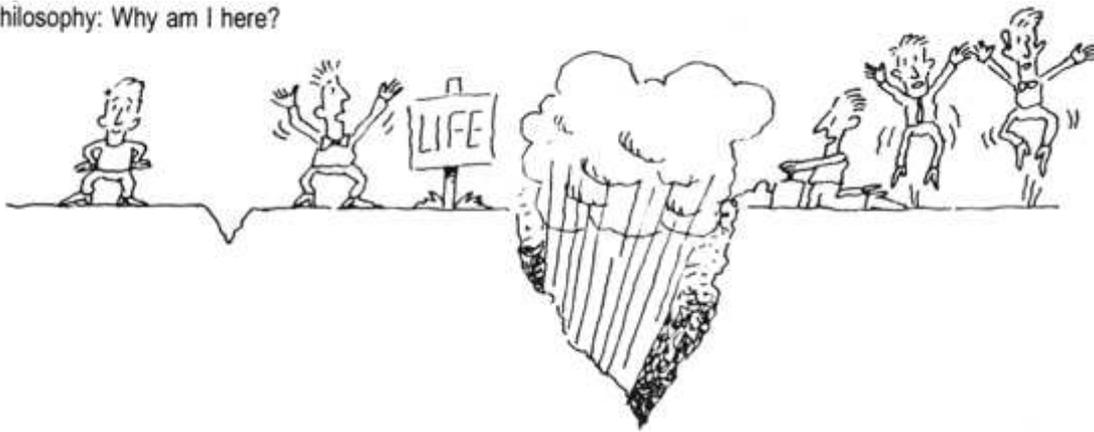
First, Darwin and other scientists challenged the idea that God created the world. Believers and unbelievers began to differ over a basic question of life – **how did I get here?** People began to apply the scientific method to just about everything, and a new idea took hold: we can know only what we can scientifically test and verify. Since God couldn’t be scientifically tested, they convinced themselves that He was imaginary.



Secondly, scientists declared that people were simply the product of chance and natural selection. If that’s true, then the purpose for our existence is up for grabs. We aren’t here because a loving God created us with a plan, so philosophers opened up a second question – **why are we here?**

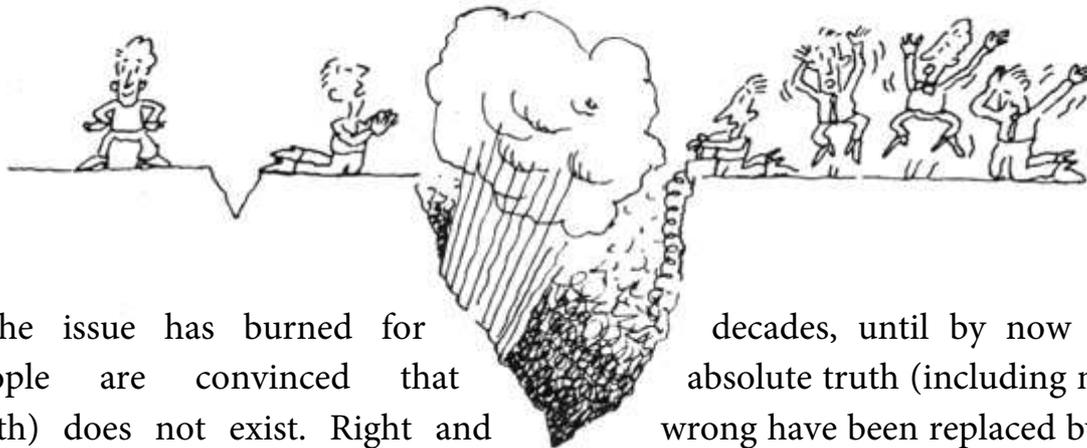
¹ www.cbmc.com/livingproof

Philosophy: Why am I here?



As people questioned their origin and purpose, a third explosion widened the cultural gap even further. If the God of the Bible no longer gave us existence and purpose, then the Bible's moral standards should be scrapped too. This question was also up for grabs – **how then should I live?**

Moral Behavior: How then should I live?



The issue has burned for people are convinced that truth) does not exist. Right and your own thing.” Self has become god.’

decades, until by now most absolute truth (including moral wrong have been replaced by “do

4. What is your response to this CBMC analysis?

Whether we are taking the Gospel to the Japanese or the secularised guy next door, we have to communicate in a language they can understand. We have to take his basic assumptions into account – things like “Truth is relative,” “I exist by chance,” and “God is the Universal All.” Just like Paul did .

“For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.” Acts 17:23

UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUALITY OF PEOPLE WHO DON'T GO TO CHURCH

Surprisingly, while two thirds of New Zealanders are not practicing Christians, according to The International Social Survey Programme, the vast majority do believe in God in some form. While not necessarily the God of Christianity, most people believe 'there is something out there.' The results indicated that 72% of the population believe in God or a higher power, 15% are agnostic, and 13% are atheist (with a 3% margin of error)². This should give us great grounds for optimism.

5. Why do you think so many people still believe there is 'something out there'?

In 2000, David Hay and Kate Hunt from the University of Nottingham published a report from their research into the spirituality of people who don't go to church³. In it, they use case studies to suggest that people who don't go to church typically fall into one of three groups:

- a) **Believing/not belonging:** Nicola had a strong Christian upbringing, still considers herself Christian, but religion plays little part in her adult life.
- b) **Not believing/not belonging:** Matthew has had some exposure to Christian faith (he attended Sunday School when he was nine), but would not consider himself Christian. He has issues with God and Christians in general, yet is looking for spiritual answers.
- c) **Untouched by the church:** Tom has had no significant contact with the church, yet he has a vivid spirituality. Neither Christianity nor the Church figures in his reflections on life or faith.

This session, we will focus on the first group – those who say they believe but for whom their faith has little impact on their daily lives. We'll look at those who don't believe in the next session.

There is of course a fourth group; people of other religions, which we will not focus on during these sessions.

² <http://publicaddress.net/assets/files/ISSPReligioninNZ09.pdf>

³ http://spiritualjourneys.org.uk/pdf/look_understanding_the_spirituality_of_people.pdf

A) Believing/not belonging – Nicola

Nicola had a strong Christian upbringing and still considers herself Christian, but religion plays little part in her adult life. She acknowledges the importance of her Catholic heritage, but prefers to keep busy rather than give herself permission to face the big questions of existence.

During the conversation Nicola discovers her beliefs through reflecting on her life, but this only happens because an environment had been specifically created for her to do this. The research conversations show that this is indeed a rare event in life today – there seems a taboo on speaking about spirituality.

In Nicola's mind, she still belongs to the institutional Church; she is an insider, even though she does not attend. This is a recurrent theme. This group talk of 'the seed having been sown' and of a sense that they cannot escape either God or religious belief; it is part of their inheritance. Nicola ponders whether she believes simply because she has been indoctrinated, but seems to decide that it is more than that. Her experience shows that her belief is genuine.

Nicola talks about her belief in God and her identity as a Catholic as being 'like having some money in the bank, if you ever need it ... in times of crisis, or if something goes wrong, you've got something there.'

6. What do you perceive to be Nicola's:
 - a) View of God?
 - b) View of the Church and its relevance to her life?
 - c) View of the Bible and its relevance to her life?
 - d) View of Christians?

It's interesting that Nicola considers herself Christian, yet the term *Christian* is only mentioned three times in the Bible. Instead, the Bible uses the term *Disciple*.

7. Is there a difference?

8. What do you wish you could talk to Nicola about over coffee?

SPIRITUAL STICKING POINTS

There is a range of spiritual sticking points encountered commonly with unchurched or were-churched people that need to be overcome before they can choose to follow Jesus. These are:

1. “I Can’t Believe”: these people have a specific intellectual or emotional issue that has halted their headway towards God. [Appendix 2 contains four common objections to Christianity].

For example: “I can’t believe in a God who permits my son to suffer when so many evil people seem to be successful.”

9a. What would help a *can’t believer* turn towards God?

2. “I Don’t Want to Believe”: these people don’t want to believe that the claims of the Good News are true. Why? Usually because they know that it will mean an area of their life will have to change. They don’t want that, so they choose not to believe.

9b. What would help a *reluctant believer* turn towards God?

3. “I Don’t Know What to Believe”: these people hear all kinds of interpretation of the Bible. One person says this and another person says that. So they throw up their hands and say “I don’t know what to believe. It seems like the meaning of the Bible changes according to who interprets it. So what’s right?”

9c. What would help a *confused believer* turn towards God?

4. “I Do Believe, Isn’t That Enough?”: it is possible to know all the answers, to have been immersed in the church culture for years and yet to have never personally received Christ’s forgiveness and leadership.

9d. What would help a *passive believer* turn towards God?

5. “I Don’t Want to Believe what THEY Believe”: unfortunately many unchurched people have inaccurate stereotypes about Christians that deter them from wanting to consider the faith for themselves. They see Christians as being boring, out of touch and living a “plain vanilla” lifestyle that’s devoid of excitement, challenge, and fun.

9e. What would help a *bad stereotype believer* turn towards God?

It’s easy to see the impact of science and philosophy on our culture (not to mention the attitudes and behaviours of many Christians), leading to the point where two thirds of New Zealanders are not practicing Christians. The good news is that our God is bigger than that, and wants to use us to draw people to Himself. Next session, we’ll look to further understand our unchurched friends and the supernatural resources at our disposal.

Reflect

What was your key insight from this session?

Apply

Think about your non-Christian friends. Do you have friends like Nicola? What’s one thing you can do this week to deepen your relationship with them?

Pray

- That Jesus would create a hunger within each of us to see our friendships become friendships that count for eternity.
- For the Holy Spirit’s power to prepare the hearts of your friends for your witness.

Going Deeper

- Read Appendix 2 – Common Objections to Christianity
- Read some further insights from the research into *The Spirituality of People who don’t go to Church* on page 25 (or read the full report)
- Read *Living proof* by Jim Peterson.

SESSION 3

3. Understanding our Unchurched Friends (2)

“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews ... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” 1 Corinthians 9:20,23

Getting Started

In his book, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, Lee Strobel outlines the following characteristics of “Unchurched Harry”, the results of his research into a typical unchurched person’s view of church:

1. Harry has rejected the church, but that doesn’t necessarily mean he has rejected God.
2. Harry is morally adrift, but he secretly wants an anchor.
3. Harry resists rules but responds to reasons.
4. Harry doesn’t understand Christianity, but he’s also ignorant about what he claims to believe in.
5. Harry has legitimate questions about spiritual matters but he doesn’t expect answers from Christians.
6. Harry doesn’t just ask, “Is Christianity true?” Often, he’s asking, “Does Christianity work?”
7. Harry doesn’t just want to know something: he wants to experience it.
8. Harry doesn’t want to be somebody’s project but he would like to be somebody’s friend.
9. Harry may distrust authority but he’s receptive to authentic biblical leadership.
10. Harry is no longer loyal to denominations, but he is attracted to places where his needs will be met.
11. Harry isn’t much of a joiner, but he’s hungry for a cause he can connect with.
12. Even if Harry’s not spiritually sensitive, he wants his children to get quality moral training.
13. Harry and Mary are confused about sex roles, but they don’t know that the Bible can clarify for them what it means to be a man and woman.
14. Harry is proud that he’s tolerant of different faiths, but he thinks Christians are narrow-minded.
15. There’s a good chance Harry would try church if a friend invited him.

1. What strikes you most about these 15 characteristics?

Explore

Last session, we started looking at some research that suggested people who don't go to church typically fall into one of three groups:

- a) Believing/not belonging (Nicola)
- b) Not believing/not belonging (Matthew)
- c) Untouched by the church (Tom)

Having looked at the first group, we turn our attention to the non-believers.

B) Not believing/not belonging – Matthew

Matthew has had some exposure to Christianity but would not consider himself Christian. His conversation illustrates very clearly the attitude many of the people we spoke with have towards religion. It also shows a man struggling with faith issues without the assistance of a religious meta-narrative.

Matthew begins the conversation with a declaration that there is no point in trying to search for meaning and purpose in this life, and then spends the rest of the conversation articulating his own search for meaning and belief. This contradiction underlies Matthew's spirituality – the desire for belief and yet the inability to believe. 'Whilst all the material evidence is telling me this is ludicrous ... there's this other bit of me which is going, 'hang on – what if pal?'. It is the 'what if' that keeps Matthew on his spiritual search.

For him, the God portrayed by the Church is still the old man in the sky, an idea that to him is 'self-indulgent', 'awfully sentimental', and 'just wildly wrong'. God does not intervene in his life, or anyone-else's; he is at best an 'absentee landlord'. This is not the kind of God Matthew can believe in.

Matthew feels very strongly that religious people in general are arrogant in their assumption that they are the bearers of the truth. 'It seems that you believers have got it, so if you don't, you're stupid. It's the arrogance. You're not with us, therefore you're against us. No I'm with you, but I'm not sure. I just want to know, if you know, how do you know? Do you really know all the time?' (abr)

For Matthew, belonging to the Church means that you have to believe with certainty, with no room for doubt. But this is just not possible for him, yet he gives the impression of longing to be able to belong to a faith community; a place where he can explore his beliefs and develop his spirituality. He wishes the Church was less dogmatic, but also more serious about its role instead of being bogged down in empty ritualism and fine words.

2. What do you perceive to be Matthew's:
 - a) View of God?
 - b) View of the Church and its relevance to his life?
 - c) View of the Bible and its relevance to his life?
 - d) View of Christians?

3. What do you wish you could talk to Matthew about over coffee?

C) Untouched by the church – Tom

Compared with Nicola and Matthew, **Tom** has had virtually no contact with institutional religion, only attending church for his own wedding. His conversation illustrates the way that spirituality is often expressed by people who are completely outside the Christian tradition.

Tom's spiritual life is highly materialistic. His talk is peppered with references to tangible phenomena such as ghosts, apparitions, premonitions, 'atmospheres' and the like. For Tom, the spirit world is all around us if we care to look.

The desire for tangible proof is a theme running throughout Tom's conversation. He states that he only believes scientists if they have facts and proof, and that he would even believe in a religion such as Christianity if they could show him some proof.

Tom did talk of a very different kind of experience that he'd had. His father became seriously ill and Tom had to take him to hospital in the middle of the night. Tom was sitting in the hospital corridor waiting for news of his father's condition, when he experienced a sudden rush of warmth and a sense that someone was telling him not to worry, that everything was going to be all right.

Significantly, Tom kept the experience to himself. He is happy to talk about certain beliefs and experiences because in his mind he is able to provide proof that they 'really happened', but it is not so easy with his experience of sitting in an empty hospital corridor; he can provide no proof for what happened.

Unlike Matthew, Tom does not focus on his view of the institutional Church or Christian doctrine. It is as if these are so far removed from his life that they do not figure in his reflections on spirituality at all.

There is never any sense that Tom wishes to belong to a community of faith. This is simply not an option for him. Religion is forever linked with Songs of Praise, and the rush to see which member of the household can switch the television off first. It has nothing to do with Tom's personal belief system.

4. What do you perceive to be Tom's:
- a) View of God?
 - b) View of the Church and its relevance to his life?
 - c) View of the Bible and its relevance to his life?
 - d) View of Christians?

5. What do you wish you could talk to Tom about over coffee?

The research provides excellent insights into the thinking of people who don't attend Church. We have highlighted some of these below. A more comprehensive list is included on page 25.

Some of the good news:

- ❑ At least 70% of New Zealanders believe in God or a higher power
 - ❑ Religion and God are typically a taboo subject, yet the people spoken to were typically on a spiritual quest, with no real forum to find out more. The researchers found that people were happy to talk with someone, in private, once they were comfortable the person was not out to either criticise them or evangelise them.
 - ❑ People in their search wanted a forum where they could be accepted and where doubts were welcome.
 - ❑ Those considering church wanted help so they would know what to do.
 - ❑ People have little knowledge of the Bible, so do not see it as authoritative.
6. What opportunities does this list provide for an authentic Christian friend?

THE BUILT-IN RECEPTOR'S TO THE GOOD NEWS

So far we have looked at various reasons why we are different to our non-Christian friends. But we also have a lot in common.

7. What do we have in common that makes it possible for us to reach unbelievers with the good news of Jesus Christ?

All people have two *built-in receptors* to the gospel:

- ❑ **We are created in God's image:** God has made man unique, significant, and godlike in certain ways. We are able to relate to God as a person to Person. We are able to make moral choices. There is something within us that keeps us struggling with the riddle of our own consciousness – until we acknowledge God. That struggle is a built-in receptor for spiritual truth.

- ❑ **We are fallen:** When mankind fell, three calamities occurred:
- We came to know good and evil (Genesis 3:5,22) and with this knowledge comes guilt. Guilt prods people to find a resolution.
 - Our life became futile (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). We work hard to just turn back to dust. This drives us to ask “Why am I doing this?” and urges us to seek reconciliation with a God who gives meaning to life.
 - We died (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Man resists death with everything he has and is obsessed with fear of it. We cannot make peace with the idea of mortality. Why? Because God has set immortality in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and another receptor for the gospel.

THE SUPERNATURAL RESOURCES FOR OUR MISSION

To reach non-believers, it will take something supernatural.

8. What spiritual resources has God given us to reach them?

God draws unbelievers to Himself through three supernatural resources: the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and us.

The Holy Spirit

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” John 16:7-8

The basic difficulty to the believer is not ignorance, but **rebellion**. If it were ignorance only, we could simply tell everybody the Gospel. Everyone would know, but not everyone would believe. Therefore we come back to rebellion. So God sends His persuader, the Holy Spirit, to convict man of his sin.

Living among unbelievers requires that we trust the Holy Spirit to deal with the unbeliever’s behaviour. This means “don’t allow your values to judge a person who, as yet, does not understand that their ‘habit’ might be offensive to God.”

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment. What a relief to discover that this responsibility has been given to Him and not us.

9. In your experience, how does the Holy Spirit go about convicting someone, as John 16:8 describes?

The Bible

The Bible is authoritative and brings light to bear on the issues it addresses as people are exposed to it. Even if people don't believe the Bible, we still use it, so that we can make use of its supernatural power.

Michael Green says: "The fact of the matter is that there is power in scriptural Christianity. It has power to build up believers, and enable them to face the temptations, problem, and crises of life. It also has a unique power to convert. God's Word is alive and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword, and time and again the evangelist who makes good use of it will find that it has pierced to the hearts of his hearers in a way that his own words could never do."

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

We use the Bible to answer two questions in the mind of the seeker – who is Jesus; and what does He want of me?

10. What use is quoting the Bible to someone who does not believe in its authority?

The Believer

God uses the believer on two levels:

a) *Through the witness of your life.*

Reading books, discussing approaches with other Christians, and planning events for 'non-Christians' is important. But these things can't replace personal interaction with others; interaction that allows God to work through us and for Him to be seen in us in the natural course of a relationship.

We need to be sensitive to God's leading as we relate to people and to be truly open to how He wants to use us in a given situation. If we model Christ, He will do the rest. If we are available to God, He will give us opportunities where our life will be our witness.

There are many people who hunger for Christian individuals who will love them sincerely, respect their beliefs, and model lives of integrity.

b) Through your verbal witness

What people see must then be interpreted verbally.

“How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” Acts 8:31

The next two sessions provide a model for deepening our friendships and equipping us for our verbal witness. Our job is to help a person understand. The burden of proof is not on us, but on the Scriptures and the responsibility to convince lies with the Holy Spirit.

Reflect

What was your key insight from this session?

Jesus said: *‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’* (John 13:35). The research suggests non-believers use terms like arrogant, hypocritical, judgemental and bigoted to describe Christians. What words might they use to describe you?

Apply

Are there people you need to apologise to for your attitude?

Think about your non-Christian friends. Which of the three case study groups would they fall into? What’s one thing you can do this week to deepen your relationship with them?

Pray

- That Jesus would create a hunger within each of us to see our friendships become friendships that count for eternity.
- For the Holy Spirit’s power to make you bold in your contact with them this week.
- For the Holy Spirit’s power to prepare the hearts of your friends for your witness.

Going Deeper

- Read some further insights from the research into *The Spirituality of People who don’t go to Church* on page 25 (or read the full report)
- Read *Living proof* by Jim Peterson.

UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUALITY OF PEOPLE WHO DON'T ATTEND CHURCH – SUMMARY

Research by David Hay and Kate Hunt from the University of Nottingham provides excellent insights into the spirituality of people who don't go to church. Here is a summary of some of their findings. The full report is available from:

http://spiritualjourneys.org.uk/pdf/look_understanding_the_spirituality_of_people.pdf.

i. Spirituality

The research suggests that most people's spirituality is in 'Quest Mode', on a journey following a route that is not clear. As part of this quest, people tend to construct a theology of their own, often using fragments of Christianity and mixing it with Eastern religions, spiritualism, New Age, etc.

The word 'spiritual' is clearly not well understood. The most common confusion was the assumption that 'spirituality' refers to 'spiritualism'. The connection of spiritualism with the weird or uncanny aspect of life meant that these people often felt uncomfortable about identifying themselves as spiritual.

There seemed widespread embarrassment about speaking about religion in public. Many feared being laughed at by friends and colleagues if they knew they were talking about spirituality. However, often, as the person sensed the conversation was coming to a close, they would ask about our own beliefs and experience, but only once they were clear we were researchers, not evangelists.

ii. View of God

It is often thought that science is the major stumbling block to religious faith, but the number of people concerned about why a perfectly good, almighty and all-knowing God permits evil (theodicy) was double those who felt their loss of belief was because 'science has explained the mysteries of life'.

There are two fundamental problems to people outside the Christian faith. Firstly, why is there so much suffering in the world? If God really was all loving and all powerful, he would do more.

Secondly, the image of God is one of being punitive and jealous. The idea of a loving God is incompatible with him sending people to eternal doom.

Traditional monotheism is still the natural religious assumption for the ordinary person in the street, but as a practical belief the idea has been watered down to mean not much more than a 'household god', looking after an individual's family, but not able to intervene in a wider context. In some cases there seems to be a suggestion that there is more than one god, and this loving household god is different from the remote and frightening creator God.

iii. View of the Church

References to hypocrisy, bigotry, arrogance, being out of touch and other critical clichés were boring in their repetitiveness when describing the Church.

In 2007, Robert Dixon⁴ led an Australian research project into why people stopped attending church. The number one reason was its irrelevance to life today, and subsequent lack of authority to guide them in living an authentic life.

‘I guess we don’t take what the priest and the Church says as absolute anymore. We question everything, but it’s the same as all professional people. You don’t even take what the doctor says as the truth anymore...’

The ‘deprivation’ theory (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997) suggests that people are religious because they are lacking in some way (i.e. because of loneliness, social repression, poverty, ill-health, etc.). The implication is that most normal people don’t need that kind of crutch. That in itself destroys any image of the Church as challenging or heroic and it must be said that the notion that religion could be demanding did not appear very often in our conversations.

In some cases, the Church is tolerated as a necessary inconvenience. It represents something still considered important: morality, groundedness, even of belonging or identity. This does not mean that the individuals either need or want to be a regular part of the Church community themselves. It is enough to have the children christened (‘given the right start’) and perhaps attend a service at Christmas. Anything more tends to be viewed as excessive.

A number of people mentioned their embarrassment when venturing into a church, asking for a ‘church for beginners’ to explain the customs and practices.

Equally as serious was no apparent place for the honest searcher. ‘Colin’ spoke of his longing for a plausible basis for belief. Another man explained sadly that he had been unable to find a church open enough to accept him as a searcher.

iv. View of the Bible

Not one of the participants mentioned reading the Bible. On the whole, knowledge of Bible stories was limited to vague memories of Sunday School or Religious Education classes. There seemed to be no connection between most people’s personal beliefs and the Bible. Where people did care to respond to questions about it, at best it seemed that the Bible was full of ‘nice stories’. At worst it was impossible to understand. For many it was viewed in the same light as Shakespeare; part of our cultural heritage, but hardly relevant to daily life.

⁴ <http://www.ppo.catholic.org.au/pdf/DCReport.pdf>

SESSION 4

4. Building Friendships that Count

*“My work was to **plant the seed** in your hearts, and Apollos’ work was to **water it**, but it was **God, not we, who made the garden grow in your hearts.**” 1 Corinthians 3:6 (LB)*

Follow-up

Last session, we looked at a lot of research into the thoughts and beliefs of our unchurched friends.

1. What struck you most about the research?

Getting started

Many people think evangelism is telling others about Christ, and success is convincing them to pray a sinner’s prayer. But drawing someone to accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord is much more a process than an event.

Evangelism is a process of guiding someone, in the power of God, to make mini-decisions on the way to choosing for, or against Jesus Christ.

In this session we will:

1. Learn to view evangelism as a process rather than an event or action
2. Explore the parts of this process
3. Find that coming to Christ is really a series of *mini-decisions* on the way to conversion.

Our function is to accompany our friends on the road to Christ, showing them the way. We walk the road with them, one step, or one mini-decision at a time.

When we see things from this perspective, our questions change. Rather than asking how to present the Gospel so that this person who is a long way out will respond, we ask what needs to happen to draw this person one step closer to Christ. God calls us to play a part in the process, but remember, this is His work:

*“my work was to **plant the seed** in your hearts, and Apollos’ work was to **water it**, but it was **God, not we, who made the garden grow in your hearts.**” 1 Corinthians 3:6 (LB)*

And we have an impressive arsenal at our disposal – we have the Holy Spirit, the Bible and prayer.

Explore

A MODEL FOR FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

Read Luke 10:1-12 (Jesus sending out 72 people in pairs to ‘make disciples’). In this passage, Jesus provides a five-step model for friendship evangelism.

Step 1: Pray (Verse 2)

‘Ask the Lord of the harvest’ – pray to God for opportunities to journey with people and to help you identify people or families that you would like to see come to faith.

Step 2: Go (Verse 3A)

‘Go!’ implies being proactive – identifying people and being intentional about the relationship.

Step 3: Stay awhile (Verses 5 and 7)

‘Don’t move around from house to house’ – in other words, don’t spread yourself too thin. Decide to build deep relationships with a few people, and then be intentional about this by hanging out with them.

Step 4: Meet their needs (Verse 9A)

‘Heal the sick’ – we might interpret this as meeting their needs. This is the time to show that you care and the key to this is to notice.

What can you do as a friend for them? What can the corps family offer?

Remember, the motive for relating to their point of need is our authentic relationship. **We need to love people for who they are, and not treat them like projects!**

Step 5: Tell (Verse 9B)

Meeting their needs will open up opportunities to talk about your faith. If so, don't hesitate to seize these. If they know you truly care about them, it will be natural to talk about the things that are important to each of you. A good place to start is your story and the difference Jesus makes to you. If you don't feel confident answering questions, can your corps help?

People are most open to God at special events and times of significant change in their lives. Keep an eye out for the right occasion for your friend.

What if they're not interested? (Verses 10-12)

Some people just won't be interested. That's OK. If you have spent time with them, meeting their needs and have told them about your faith in Jesus, that's all God asks of you. At the end of the day, they need to make up their own minds.

HOW PEOPLE COME TO CHRIST AND THEN GROW

In the 1970s, James Engel proposed that there is a way in which most people who become followers of Jesus progress, as they become increasingly aware of the gospel and its implication for their lives. This *Engel Scale* has been simplified by Rick Warren (author of *Purpose Driven Church*) as follows.

Stage	Description
-6 <i>Resistant</i>	Self-satisfied, sceptical, resistant, or spiritually apathetic.
-5 <i>Receptive</i>	Becomes aware of an unmet need or spiritual void in life.
-4 <i>Seeker</i>	Looking for answers to questions or solutions to problems.
-3 <i>Consideration</i>	Considers the differences between themselves & believers.
-2 <i>Understanding</i>	Learns why and how to become a Christian.
-1 <i>Ready</i>	Ready to believe and receive Christ.
0	New life in Christ!
+1 <i>Membership</i>	Enrolled and connected to church family.
+2 <i>Maturity</i>	Practicing the habits necessary for spiritual growth.
+3 <i>Ministry</i>	Using God-given talents (<i>'SHAPE'</i>) to serve others.
+4 <i>Mission</i>	Sharing the good news with non-believers.
+5 <i>Magnification</i>	Living out one's life purpose to the glory of God.

2. Based on this model, at what stage would a person say:
- 'I think religion is a crutch for weak people.'
 - 'Please show me how I can become a Christian.'
 - 'I'm really fed up with the stress I'm under.'
 - 'I think everyone will go to heaven.'
 - 'I've been reading a New Age book on spirituality.'
 - 'Why do Christians seem so happy?'

Evangelism is a process of moving people through the stages. People move through at different speeds and often require multiple exposures at each stage before moving on. They can get stuck at any stage and each stage requires a different response by you.

WHAT TO DO WITH PEOPLE AT EACH STAGE

Note: this section is designed to start with discussion, followed by looking at the provided answers to expand your own ideas. Please resist the temptation to read ahead to keep the discussion lively and relevant.

‘Evangelism is helping people discover how God is already at work in their lives.’ Sam Williams.

3. What do you do when someone is at the RESISTANT stage (-6 sceptical, self-satisfied, resistant or spiritually apathetic)?

1. Pray for them to become receptive.
2. Build a relationship through love and service.
3. Invite them to a fun bridge event (social event, Christmas event, etc.).
4. What NOT to do with resistant people – don’t argue!

*“Don’t get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. The Lord’s servants must not quarrel but **must be kind to everyone**. They must be able to teach effectively and **be patient with difficult people**. They should **gently** teach those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will believe the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the Devil’s trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.” 2 Timothy 2:23-26 (NLT)*

Note: Some people we might think are “resistant” are actually just *unaware* of the gospel or they’ve never heard it in terms they can understand!

4. What do you do when someone is at the RECEPTIVE stage (-5 aware of an unmet need or spiritual void in their life?)

1. Offer to help them in a practical way. Tell them that you are praying for them.
2. Share a faith story about the same need.
3. Ask open-ended questions. ‘tell me about the spiritual side of your life.’
4. Assess if they are ready to skip to stage -2 or -1.

What makes people receptive? Usually it is some form of life change (positive or negative). For example, new parents may consider what they want to teach their children about spirituality. The Holmes Stress Scale contains a summary of common life events and the perceived stress associated with each one.

Holmes Stress Scale

LIFE EVENT	STRESS LEVEL (points)
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marriage/Separation	65
Jail term	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or major illness	53
Getting married	50
Fired from work	47
Marriage reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Major change in health of a family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sex difficulties	39
Gaining a new family member	39
Major change at work	39
Major change in financial status	38
Death of a close friend	37
Son or daughter Leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Wife begins or stops work	26
Trouble with boss	23
Change in residence	20

5. What do you do when someone is at the SEEKER stage (-4 looking for answers to questions or solutions to problems)?
 1. Invite them to a seeker service or seeker group (e.g. Alpha)
 2. Give them DVDs or reading materials.
 3. Open a dialog on spiritual issues with questions like:
 - “Have you ever considered what Jesus said?”
 - “What do you need to know to take the next step?”
 - “How can I help you?”

6. What do you do when someone is at the CONSIDERATION stage (-3 begin to notice the real differences between themselves and believers)?
 1. Introduce them to other Christians
 2. Discuss the different ways believers respond to life.

7. What do you do when someone is at the UNDERSTANDING stage (-2 need to understand why and how to become a Christian)?
 1. Explain God’s plan of salvation (see page 34).
 2. Explain how you made your decision for Christ.
 3. Help them see the benefits, implications and costs.

8. What do you do when someone is ready to RECEIVE CHRIST (-1)?

Offer to lead them in a prayer of commitment (see page 34).

9. What do you do after they have received Christ (+1)?
 1. Take them to a new believers class or small group
 2. Encourage them to consider becoming a soldier
 3. Teach them to sow faith seeds with their friends.

Apply

It's time to develop your Friends Prayer List (next page).

1. **Pray:** Ask God to help you identify up to five people or families that you would like to see come to faith (e.g. friends, family members, neighbours, work colleagues, etc.). Write these names in your *Friends Prayer List*. The most important point is to perceive who God wants us to share Him with. The next most important is they should be people who you enjoy being with!
2. **Go:** How well do you know the people on your list? Are you prepared to invest in the relationship? If not, cross them off your list!
3. **Stay awhile:** what are their interests? What do you have in common? Remember - don't spread yourself too thin.
4. **Meet their needs:** is there anything you can do that might help them (e.g. meals, baby-sitting, a role model for their kids, sharing what you have, listening, etc.)? Can the church family help (e.g. social events, parenting and marriage courses, dedication service, spiritual values training for kids, etc.)?
5. **Tell:** where on the revised Engel Scale do you believe them to be?
6. **Actions:** based on their interests, needs and stage, what specific actions will you commit to for each person over the coming week(s).
7. **Commit to pray:**
 - For opportunities to build your relationship with them
 - For them to become open to Jesus
 - For courage and the right words to speak when the opportunity comes to share the reason for your faith

As you pray for your friends, pray over them specific Bible verses, such as that:

1. God draws them to Himself (John 6:44).
2. They seek to know God (Deuteronomy 4:29 Acts 17:27).
3. They believe the Scriptures (Romans 10:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:13).
4. Satan can't blind them to the truth (Matthew 13:19, 2 Corinthians 4:4).
5. The Holy Spirit works in them (John 16:8-13).
6. They believe in Christ as the Saviour (John 1:12, 5:24).
7. They turn from sin (Acts 3:19, 17:30-31).
8. They confess Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9-10).
9. They yield all to follow Christ (2 Corinthians 5:15, Philippians 3:7-8).
10. They take root and grow in Christ (Colossians 2:6-7).

Pray

- ❑ For the people on your *Friends Prayer List* and for the actions you are committing to for each friend.

Going Deeper

- ❑ Do your actions!
- ❑ Memorise these five basic truths.

What is the Good News – Explaining How to Accept Christ

The universal part of your life message is the Gospel – the Good News of how we can be saved, forgiven, and begin a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Will you aim to memorise these five basic truths?

1. God became a man — so I could relate to him

‘The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David’s family line, and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.’ Romans 1:3-4 (NLB)

2. Jesus died for my sins — so I don’t have to

“It is this Good News that saves you if you firmly believe it... that Christ died for our sins. He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said.” 1 Corinthians 15: 2-4 (NLT)

“For God was in Christ, restoring the world to himself, no longer counting men’s sins against them but blotting them out This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.” 2 Corinthians 5:19 (LB)

3. Jesus destroyed death — so that I could experience eternal life

“Jesus destroyed death, and through the Good News he showed us the way to have life that cannot be destroyed.” 2 Timothy 1:10 (NCV)

4. Salvation is a free gift — so I don’t have to earn it

“People are made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They are made right with God by being made free from sin through Jesus Christ. God gave Jesus as a way to forgive sin through faith. Romans 3:24-25 (ICB)

5. It is based on faith — so all I have to do is repent and believe

Jesus said, *“Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15 (NIV)*

An excellent summary is the bridge illustration:

“God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, himself man, is between them to bring them together.” 1 Timothy 2:5 (LB)

“But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (NLT)

Friends Prayer List

Luke 10:1-12

1. PRAY > 2. GO > 3. STAY AWHILE > 4. MEET THEIR NEEDS > 5. TELL

Friend/ Relative	Interests	Potential Needs	Stage	My Actions

Incorporating into the Church Family

In his book titled *Living Proof*, Jim Petterson says that the third world missionary experience was one of great success in building relationships with people and leading them through to a commitment to Christ – but of difficulty incorporating them into the existing congregations.

The same incorporation difficulties exist in our culture. The culture of the church – the Army – is so foreign to that of society, that incorporating an unchurched person into a church congregation can be difficult.

What does an ‘incorporated member’ look like?

- Has developed friendships in the church.
- Has a meaningful role or responsibility in the church.
- Is actively involved in a small group or class.
- Is contributing financially to the church.
- Can identify with the goals of the church.
- Is regular in worship attendance.
- Is realising spiritual growth.
- Has ‘officially’ joined the church.
- Has internalised a value system consistent with the church.
- Is a reproducing Christian.

The friendship ratio for the successful incorporation of new people is 1:7. This means that within six months, a new person needs to have at least seven people from within the church family as identifiable friends.

Think about some ways that you can help incorporate your friends, or other new people, into our church family.

5. Faith Conversations and Testimonies

*“You are the ones chosen by God... to **do his work and speak out for him, to tell others** of the night-and-day difference he made for you.” 1 Peter 2:9(Msg)*

Follow-up

1. Last time, we identified five people that we want to ‘stay awhile’ with. How did you get on with the actions you committed to?

Getting started

A personal testimony is the most persuasive form of communication. People love to hear personal stories and they remember them. They can relate to them and it helps build a relational bridge. Besides, it’s difficult to argue with your own story and in our postmodern world, it may be your most effective witness.

The Bible is full of testimonies. For example:

- ❑ David – *“Come and listen, and I will tell you what God **has done for me.**” Psalms 66:16 (NCV)*
- ❑ The woman at the well – *“Many of the Samaritans from that town **believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.**” John 4:39 (NW)*
- ❑ The man born blind – *“I don’t know whether he is good or bad, **but I know this: I was blind, and now I see!**” John 9:25 (LB)*
- ❑ Peter and John – *“We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we **have seen and heard.**” Acts 4:20 (NLT)*
- ❑ Paul – On six different occasions (Acts 22-26) Paul used his personal testimony to share the Good News with unbelievers.
- ❑ Jesus – *“Listen care fully. I’m speaking sober truth to you. **I speak only of what I know by experience.** I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes.” John 3:11 (Msg)*

The Bible also instructs us to share our own testimony.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” 1 Peter 3:15 (NW)

“Let the whole world know what he has done for you.” Psalms 105:1b (LB)

So today, we will spend time developing and practicing sharing our testimony.

Explore

Read John 4:1-42.

2. Jesus made a point to build a brief friendship with the woman at the well, but He wasn't content just to engage in small talk. How did he turn the conversation from the routine to the spiritual?
3. What Jesus did not do is just as important as what He did. What are some things you have seen others do that He didn't (e.g. present a prepared talk, quote scriptures, condemn the woman, etc.)?

Jesus took advantage of the circumstances that they found themselves in – they were talking about water, so He used “living water” as an analogy for God. This is the turning point where most of us get tripped up, isn't it? We're not sure how to turn an everyday conversation to spiritual matters in a natural way. *The key is listening*, because when we really listen and get to know another person, we'll come across natural opportunities to manoeuvre the conversation into spiritual topics.

In our previous study, step 5 of our process was to tell. As we hang out with people and meet their needs, opportunities will open up to talk about your faith. There are three different parts to this:

- a) Raising the flag (establishing your identity)
- b) Faith conversations (creating hunger)
- c) Your testimony (clarifying the final steps to take).

A. RAISING THE FLAG

'Raising the flag' is letting a person know you base your life on the Bible (and that you still have fun!). It should happen as a natural part of a conversation and take no more than 30 seconds.

As Christians, we should be known by what we do, not for what we don't.

4. Why is raising the flag important?

5. What are some ways that you might raise the flag with:
 - a) A new neighbour
 - b) Starting a new job or getting a new work mate
 - c) The parents of your kid's friends
 - d) Facebook™ friends

B. FAITH CONVERSATIONS

Faith conversations create hunger. It's possible to turn many normal conversations into faith conversations. For example, when discussing a conscience vote issue coming before Parliament, you might ask what kind of standard or authority do politicians use to make moral judgements? How about you?

6. How might you start a faith conversation from conversations about each of the following?
 - a) Something on the news
 - b) Parenting / children / relationships
 - c) Success / money
 - d) Self-identity or self-worth.
7. What mistakes can we make when looking to start faith conversations?

Write a Faith Story

Sometimes, faith conversations lead naturally to faith stories – a chance for you to share a relevant short story of how God or a biblical truth made an impact on you. It might be as recently as today or some years ago.

You're not writing a testimony of how you came to follow Jesus (that's next). Instead, you're expanding the conversation to share how your faith has really helped you in a similar situation.

For example, if talking about issues with kids, you could share how you've been having a particular struggle with one of your kids, so you went to your Bible and read something that really changed your perspective on the situation and has made a big difference. You would clearly want to be more specific.

You'll want to use language an unbeliever will understand. No 'King James' English or Christian jargon (sin, righteous, salvation, works, grace, Holy Spirit, etc.). The whole story should take less than two minutes.

Many people find it very hard to think of something God has done or taught them. But planning a faith story is a great chance to remember that you really have made some progress down the road with God, even if you're a beginner in faith.

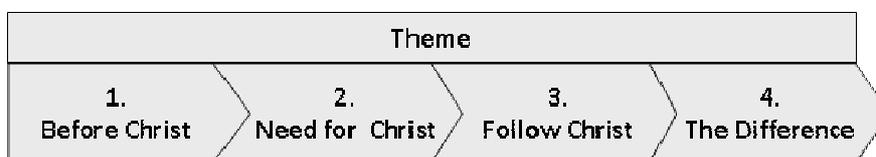
8. Think of a recent time when God has impacted your life, and write this in the form of a faith story to tell a friend.

Developing your Testimony

TESTIMONY MODEL

As you develop your relationship with your friends, there will come a time when it is appropriate to share your testimony. It may come as part of a faith conversation, you might decide you just have to tell them, or they may even ask you directly! So you need to be prepared.

To keep it simple and adaptable, our basic approach is to think of your testimony in four parts, held together by a theme relevant to the situation. If you became a Christian as an adult, use the four steps as presented. Variations are presented below for people who became a Christian as a child.



1. What my life was like before I met Christ

- What common circumstances or attitudes would an unbeliever identify with? What was most important to you?
- What substitute for God did you use to find meaning in your life (sports/fitness, success at work, marriage, sex, making money, drugs/alcohol, having fun, entertainment popularity, and hobbies)?

2. How I realised I needed Christ

- What significant steps led up to your conversion?
- What needs, hurts, or problems made you dissatisfied with the way you were living without God?
- How did God get your attention? What motivated you?

3. How I committed my life to Christ

- What specifically did you do? Where did it happen?
- What did you say in your prayer? Be specific.

4. The difference He has made in my life

- What benefits have you experienced or felt?
- What problems have been resolved?
- How has Jesus helped you change for the better?
- How has it helped your relationships?
- Provide a current example.

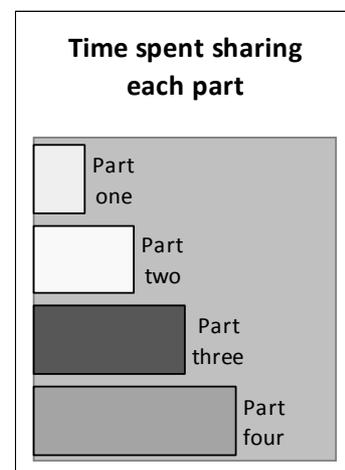
9. Why are all four steps important?

You should **spend the least amount of time on part one – the most on part four.**

If you **became a Christian as a child but walked away or never grew until a deeper recommitment as an adult**, use the same four steps, but start with the time just prior to your *recommitment*. Give some examples of how you were trying to meet your own needs without Christ but it wasn't working. Describe what caused you to realise you needed Christ directing your life and how you made a full commitment to him.

Then explain how Jesus is currently meeting the deepest needs in your Life.

If you **became a Christian at an early age and never strayed**, use the same four steps with this modification: Point out some deep need or common problem that you see *other people* trying to resolve. Point out how unsuccessful their attempts are to meet their own need. Then explain why you never experienced that problem by trusting Christ early in life. Don't say the exact age. Continue with steps 3 and 4.



FIVE TIPS TO AN EFFECTIVE TESTIMONY

10. Read the following list. Which tip stands out to you the most and why?

1. Prepare

- Write your testimony out on paper and practice until it feels and sounds natural. Read it aloud and edit it to make it conversational. Let a friend read it and make suggestions.
- Use humour - it reduces tension and relaxes people. Smile!

2. Keep it simple

- Keep it short (less than three minutes).
- Don't quote a lot of Scripture (maximum of one verse).
- Avoid using dates, names, ages, denominations. It doesn't matter to them.

3. Keep it relevant

- Use '*I, me and my*' not '*you*'. It's about you – not them.
- Don't talk down to people. Don't sound "preachy."
- Don't make negative remarks about other religions or people.
- Spend the most time on part four – the *concrete* difference Christ has made. The more specific you are, the more dynamic it will be.
- Don't answer questions they haven't asked.

4. Keep it realistic

- Don't exaggerate or brag about pre-conversion sins.
- Don't share mystical experiences. Share on their level, not *yours*.
- Don't imply that all of your problems ended at conversion. Be honest about your continuing struggles. Your life is not perfect.

5. Don't use Christian Jargon

As Christians, we tend to use a lot of in house jargon. The table below lists a few of these and some potential alternative phrases to use with seekers.

Christian term	When walking with seekers
"Blessed"	"Happy"
"I was born again"	"I was given afresh, new start"
"I was saved"	"My life changed at that moment"
"Jesus is my Lord"	"He's the leader of my life" "I put Jesus in the driver's seat"

Christian term	When walking with seekers
“I repented”	“I changed my mind” (a mental U-turn)
“I had sinned”	“I knew I’d blown it”
“All are sinners”	“Nobody’s perfect.
“I felt convicted”	“I realised that...”
“The Holy Ghost”	“God’s Spirit”

Phrases to avoid: ‘I just praise the Lord for ...’; ‘Now I am so blessed’; ‘Amen’; ‘Hallelujah!’; ‘It was glorious’; ‘I was convicted’; ‘The Lord laid on my heart’...

11. What other phrases can you think of that Christians often use?

TESTIMONY THEME IDEAS

The first thing to realise is that you have more than one testimony. You will choose the testimony that best matches your listener. While a personal story will have the most impact, feel free to talk about how other people’s lives have been changed as well.

When choosing a theme, you might discover something that you have in common. For example, breaking a bad habit, or relationship issues. We’re calling these common ground circumstances.

Alternatively, you may look at themes that trusting in Jesus has helped you with.

12. Look through the Common Ground Circumstances and Testimony Theme Ideas below and identify any themes that you can relate to.

Common ground circumstances

- ❑ **Positive:** adoption, breaking a bad habit, financial gain, raising kids, marriage strengthened or restored, new baby, new business, new friends, new home, new marriage, new job, success, renewed love, restored relationships
- ❑ **Major crises:** abuse, accident addiction, abortion, bankruptcy, broken dream, eating disorder, death, depression, disease, discrimination, divorce, empty nest financial problems, infertility, incest jail, rape, surgery

Testimony Theme Ideas

How trusting Jesus has helped me deal with my ...	How trusting Jesus has given me ...
<input type="checkbox"/> Worries / anxiety	Inner Peace
<input type="checkbox"/> Guilt / shame / regrets	Forgiveness and a fresh start
<input type="checkbox"/> Anger / temper	Patience and love
<input type="checkbox"/> Emptiness / lack of purpose	Purpose in life and meaning
<input type="checkbox"/> Grief	Comfort and Joy
<input type="checkbox"/> Stress / Burnout	New energy and power for living
<input type="checkbox"/> Low self-esteem	Significance. I am valuable to God
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor health	Strength to go on
<input type="checkbox"/> Disappointment	Trust in his good plans
<input type="checkbox"/> Insecurity	Confidence and sense of security
<input type="checkbox"/> Discontent/ frantic activity	Contentment and peace
<input type="checkbox"/> Fears	Faith to face my fears
<input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness	Assurance He's always with me.
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of emotional support	A church family that supports me.
<input type="checkbox"/> Addictions/ habits	Power to change. Freedom
<input type="checkbox"/> Self-centeredness	Love for other people
<input type="checkbox"/> Despair/ depression	Hope
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheap thrills	Real, lasting happiness
<input type="checkbox"/> Boredom with my life	Adventure with God
<input type="checkbox"/> Fear of Death	Assurance of heaven
<input type="checkbox"/> Something was missing	A sense of fulfilment
<input type="checkbox"/> Bitterness & resentment	The ability to be free from my past
<input type="checkbox"/> Pain of rejection	God's unconditional Love
<input type="checkbox"/> Marriage problems	Positive changes in my marriage
<input type="checkbox"/> Financial problems	Positive changes in my finances
<input type="checkbox"/> Business problems	Positive changes in my business

God allows experiences in my life so I can relate to others who need Christ!

Apply

It's time to write our one of your testimonies.

- Step 1 – Pray and ask God to guide you in choosing your theme and providing insight as to how trusting Him is helping you
- Step 2 – Choose your theme
- Step 3 – Work through the four stages. Remember to spend most of the time on the stage 4, the difference God has made in your life.

Theme:

1. Before Christ:

2. Need for Christ:

3. Follow Christ:

4. The Difference:

- Step 4 – Review your testimony in light of the five tips introduced earlier
- Step 5 – Find a partner and share your testimony with them.

Remember, you are not trying to convince anyone on your own.

*“For when we brought you the Good News, it was **not only with words** but also with power, for **the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance** that what we said was true.” 1 Thessalonians I: 5a (NLT)*

Pray

- For the people on your Friends Prayer List, for opportunities to start faith conversations and for the Holy Spirit to use you to see people come to faith.

Going Deeper

- Read *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, *Out of the Saltshaker And Into the World*, by Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Living Proof* by Jim Peterson, *Searching Issues* and *Questions of Life* by Nicky Gumbel.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

A1. My Commitment to Mission

*“Jesus said: ‘Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all Creation.’
Mark 16:15*

Having committed myself to spiritual maturity and ministry and agreeing with the philosophy of ministry for my corps, I commit myself to:

1. Building authentic relationships with unchurched people.
2. Maintaining a *Friends Prayer List* with unchurched people.
3. Giving a verbal witness to those I feel are receptive.
4. Inviting them to events in the church.

Signed

Date

A2. Common Objections to Christianity

Introduction

This course is designed to help you talk to your friends about your faith in Jesus. When you talk to your friends, they may agree with a lot of what you say, but they may also raise objections about Christianity.

Nicky Gumbel, the author of the *Alpha* course, has written a book called *Searching Issues*, outlining what he believes to be the seven objections raised most often during the course. We have attempted to summarise the first four of these issues here in descending order of frequency (however, we recommend you read the original book!).

The issues of suffering and other religions are overwhelmingly the most common objections to the Christian faith. Sex before marriage is usually raised later and is often the main reason people delay becoming Christians. It is more a moral objection than an intellectual one.

These are searching issues both in the sense that those searching for the truth ask them and in the sense that they are demanding and difficult to answer.

A. Why does God allow suffering?

Suffering appears to be entirely random and therefore unfair. We see it on a global scale, a community scale, and most of all at an individual level.

Suffering is not a problem for all religions, but it is an acute problem for Judeo-Christian tradition because we believe that God is both good and all-powerful. C.S. Lewis stated the opposing argument as “If God was good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.”

Theologians have wrestled with this problem for centuries and no one has ever come up with a simple and complete solution. The Bible is primarily a practical book and it never addresses this issue systematically in a philosophical way. What we see are a number of approaches to the problem, all the way through from Genesis to Revelation.

There seems to be four main overlapping insights:

1. Human Freedom
2. God works through suffering
3. God more than compensates for our suffering
4. God is involved in our suffering

1. HUMAN FREEDOM

Love is not love if it is forced – it can only be love if there is a real choice. God gave human beings the choice and the freedom to love or not to love. Given this freedom, men and women from the beginning have chosen to break God's laws and the result has been suffering.

Some of the suffering we endure is as a result of our own sin. At times, suffering is the inevitable consequence of breaking God's law (e.g. physical law – fire burns, moral law – drug abuse, promiscuity, selfishness, greed, lust, arrogance, bad temper often lead to broken relationships).

It is important to stress that not all suffering is the direct result of our own sin (e.g. Job 42:7-8). Jesus expressly repudiates the automatic link between sin and suffering (John 9:1-3). He also points out that natural disasters are not necessarily a punishment from God (Luke 13:1-5) although they could be in the case of Noah and the Ark. Peter points out that many Christians suffer for doing good (1 Peter 2:20).

Much of the suffering in the world is the result of other people's sin, such as war, inequitable distribution of world's resources, murder, adultery, sexual abuse, unloving parents, slander, unkindness, etc. Some have estimated that perhaps 95% of suffering can be accounted for in this way.

This leaves a small proportion which can only be explained as a result of the fact that we live in a fallen world.

Human freedom does not always answer the question why a particular individual or nation is suffering so much, but it does help explain the origin of suffering. All suffering is the result of sin, either as a result of my own sin, someone else's sin, or indirectly, as a result of living in a fallen world.

2. GOD WORKS THROUGH SUFFERING

Suffering is never good in itself, but God is able to use it for good in a number of different ways.

First, suffering is used to draw us to Christ – suffering is His megaphone to a deaf world. Often, people only begin to think about God in times of pain and suffering.

Secondly, God uses suffering to bring us to Christian maturity. He uses suffering to build our characters and to make our lives more fruitful.

Thirdly, he uses suffering to bring about his good purposes (Romans 8:28). An excellent example is the story of Joseph, separated from his family and removed to Egypt, but eventually God used this situation to save the nation of Israel.

However, this may not be reassuring to someone in the middle of suffering!

3. GOD MORE THAN COMPENSATES FOR OUR SUFFERING

Often, this will be here on earth (e.g. Joseph, Job). However, this is not always the case. God does promise even better things in heaven. Paul says ‘I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us’ (Romans 8:18). God has all eternity to make it up to us.

4. GOD IS INVOLVED IN OUR SUFFERING

The fourth insight is perhaps the most important of all. John Stott said ‘I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross.’ God suffered in the same way we do. He knows what we are feeling when we suffer.

So how do we respond to suffering?

1. Is this suffering a result of my own sin? If yes, we need to repent and ask forgiveness.
2. What is God saying to me through this? Is there a lesson to be learned? What do you want me to do?
3. Hold on to our hope

When we see others suffering, we are called to show compassion. Jesus fought against suffering whenever he came across it. He healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the hungry and raised the dead. We are called to follow in his steps.

B. What about other religions?

Refer to *The Status of Christianity in the World* on page 10 for recent statistics on world religions.

IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD?

The answer of the New Testament is an emphatic “yes”. Jesus Himself said “I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6). Similarly, Peter and Paul were equally emphatic in that Jesus is the only name that can save.

What makes Jesus unique? First, He is unique in his qualification. He is the only one who was referred to, and called Himself “the Christ”. This sets him apart from the leaders of the other great world religions. Muslims do not like to be called Muhammadans because they do not worship Mohammad. It is not clear whether Buddha believed in the existence of God as such. Early or classical Buddhism had no God.

Secondly, Jesus is unique in his achievement. Jesus claims to be a saviour. Buddha is thought of as a teacher and Muhammad a prophet - neither a saviour.

Thirdly, Jesus is unique in his resurrection. The resurrection is a unique event in this history of the world. Jesus Christ is alive today. We can know Him. We cannot know Buddha or Muhammad. Jesus, the unique Son of God, the unique Saviour, the one uniquely raised from the dead, is the only way to God.

WHAT DO WE SAY ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS?

Although Jesus is the truth, we would expect to find considerable truth in other religions, because of creation, human beings made in the likeness of God (conscience) and our in-built hunger for God.

Nevertheless, it is illogical to assert that all religions are equally true or that all religions lead to God. It is absurd to suggest that a religion which asserts there is a God and one that asserts there is no God are both equally true. Since there are contradictions between the religions, there must be error somewhere, and as Christians, we would expect to find errors in other religions.

If Jesus is explicit that he is the only way to the Father, we must believe that other religions that do not have this claim are wrong. As in arithmetic, there is only one right answer to the sum, and all other answers are wrong. Some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD ABOUT JESUS?

1. The Bible is a practical book, not a philosophical one. It does not answer hypothetical questions directly. This question can only ever be hypothetical, only being asked by someone who *has* heard of Jesus.
2. We can be sure that God will be just (e.g. Abraham asking the rhetorical question of God ‘Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18:25), he clearly expected the answer to be yes.
3. No-one will be saved by their religion. We are saved by God’s undeserved love through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8).
4. It is possible to be saved by grace, through faith, even if you have never heard of Jesus (e.g. Abraham, David).
5. There is great grounds for optimism. Abraham’s descendants will be ‘as numerous as the stars in the sky’ (Genesis 22:17).

If this is the case, why should we bother telling anyone about Jesus? Because he commanded us to and because we believe people are significantly better off with the assurance of forgiveness and abundant life Jesus offers.

C. Is there anything wrong with sex before marriage?

Over the last 50 years, society has seen a huge change in its attitude to marriage and sex. Our society has been saturated by sexual stimulation in films, television, advertising and glossy magazines. At the same time, marriage and family life is breaking down. The divorce rate is now nearly 50%. We see in society an increasing unwillingness to enter marriage in the first place. More and more couples live together without getting married.

These changed attitudes to marriage and sex involve hidden dangers. Sex outside of marriage can destroy self-esteem, expose people to sexually transmitted diseases, and ruin a person’s ability to form a lasting relationship.

On the other hand, the Church’s attitude to sex has been repressive (e.g. in the Middle Ages when sex was only permitted on Tuesdays and Wednesdays).

Both views are a long way from the biblical understanding of sex.

1. God designed us for sex (men and women, sexual organs, we started off naked, the sexual urge is God-given)
2. God likes sex – in the right context it is good (e.g. Song of Solomon)
3. There is great freedom within marriage and sex within marriage should never become mundane or boring

4. The biblical context of sexual intercourse is the life-time commitment in marriage between one man and one woman
5. God's ideal is that every child be born in love and that they should grow up with both a mother and a father in that loving atmosphere

GOD IN HIS LOVE WARNS AGAINST HUMAN DISTORTIONS

1. Adultery is specifically outlawed in the 7th Commandment and when you see the wreckage of families that results, it's easy to see why
2. Paul commands his readers to 'flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:18). The word he uses includes all sex outside marriage. It is the same word that Jesus used in Mark 7:21 and Paul used elsewhere (e.g. 1 Thess 4:3-8).
3. Jesus teaches that it is not just love and sex that must go together, but sex and long-term marriage to each other in marriage.

Most would agree that sex and love should go together. Promiscuity, although common practice today, has few serious defenders, but many people would defend the practice of sex before marriage in a more stable relationship. God's plan for sex is for it to be a life-uniting event.

What's wrong with sex before marriage?

1. A marriage is far more likely to break up if the couple had sex first (e.g. a survey showed that of a whole set of couples that got married for the first time, 60% were more likely to have divorced after eight years of marriage than similar couples who had not done so.
2. Pre-marital sex increases the chance of extra-marital sex, and adultery is a leading factor in marriage break-down.
3. Many people recognise that they have lost something by living together before marriage.
4. If a marriage or relationship breaks down, future relationships may fail because of jealousy or comparison to previous relationships.
5. Unwanted pregnancies.
6. Breakdown of the family has led to a soaring of crime.
7. Sexually transmitted diseases – they're not an issue in God's plan.
8. We're breaking God's law – this is sin.
9. Where sex is the basis of a relationship, it is not on solid ground, and is likely to end anyway. Sex before marriage clouds our ability to determine if this relationship should be life-long.

D. How does the New Age Movement relate to Christianity?

The New Age movement is based on an astrological theory that each star age lasts for 2000 years. We are moving from the age of Pisces to Aquarius.

Star Age	Pisces	Aquarius
Symbol	Fish (Christianity)	Rainbow
Age	Yang (masculine)	Yin (feminine)
Symptoms	Assertive and rational. Materialism. Science, technology and medicine	Intuitive and spiritual. Experience

The New Age movement is almost impossible to define because it is a term that covers various diverse and disparate movements with a seemingly limitless array of disconnected beliefs and lifestyles. It has no leader, no organisation, no structure and no headquarters.

It is a mixture of Eastern mysticism and occult practices with a Western materialistic flavour. It often comes in the guise of self-improvement programmes, holistic health, a concern for world peace, ecology and spiritual enlightenment. Although there is a lot of good in the New Age, underneath the sugar coating, there is a dangerous pill:

1. Many New Age teachings are derived from Eastern Mysticism (Hindu and Buddhist doctrine). There is a great deal of emphasis on transcendental meditation, reincarnation, karma, Zen, yoga and levitation.
2. It is influenced by nature religions (e.g. druids, witchcraft)
3. It is overtly occult. Astrology, horoscopes, fortune-telling, clairvoyance, consulting the dead, spiritism, mediums, channelling, spirit guides and tarot cards are all widely used in the movement and are all condemned in the bible (Deut 18:10, Lev 19:26, Gal 5:20, Rev 9:20-21).

BELIEFS OF THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

There are three main beliefs of the New Age movement:

- ❑ **'All is God' – pantheism:** God is in everything, a creative force. There is no God outside His creation, so God is within everyone. Therefore, you worship the God within you, which ultimately means you worship yourself. The whole movement is based around yourself (self-actualisation, self-realisation, self-fulfilment, self-help, etc.) To find one's self is to find God.

- ❑ **‘All is one’:** monism – removes moral absolutes and attempts to bring together opposites. Right and wrong are all relative. Our problem is not ‘sin’, but ignorance of our true self and true potential, which is solved by enlightenment. This leads to an underlying philosophy of since there is no ‘sin’, if it feels good, do it – spirituality without the cost of repentance. Christians believe that we will all face judgement after we die. New Agers believe in reincarnation, each life making further progress towards enlightenment.
- ❑ **‘All is well’:** we are building towards a new world, with one leader who will unite everyone.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT?

The New Age movement is right in a number of ways. For example, it is right to challenge materialism, to emphasise the importance of spirituality and to stress compassion, love and unity. Yet these emphases fall way short of the glorious truths of Christianity.

- ❑ **God the Father:** God is not an impersonal, abstract force, but the personal creator of the whole universe, who incredibly wants to be in a relationship with us as human beings. This relationship alone brings us peace.
- ❑ **Jesus:** Jesus is not simply one of the ‘masters’ like Buddha, Krishna and Mohammad. Jesus dies on the cross for us, so that through His great love, we can be free of guilt, addiction, fear and death. We can’t earn salvation – we must accept this free gift.
- ❑ **The Holy Spirit:** in the New Age, we see a search for spiritual power, spiritual experience and transformed lives. There is no greater spiritual power, no greater spiritual experience, and no more effective power to transform lives than the Holy Spirit.

WHAT SHOULD WE TO DO?

Firstly, if we have been involved in New Age practices, we need to repent.

Secondly, we need to soak ourselves in the truth. The best way to spot a counterfeit is to know the real thing really well.

Thirdly, we need to bring the good news of Jesus to those who are involved in the New Age. Those involved are typically people simply searching for the truth. They recognise that materialism does not satisfy. They recognise the limits of reason. They are seeking an experience of the spiritual. We need to demonstrate by our lives the supernatural power of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A3. Tips on How to Lead an Effective Study

Approach

These studies take into account some specific findings about how people learn, including that learners:

- ❑ are now-oriented – so we start with a few open questions to engage them
- ❑ learn best by saying and doing, not listening – so our studies are based around discussion, with only short comments or readings. We encourage the leader to facilitate more than teach
- ❑ bring experience – so we invite (expect?) most of the learning to come from discussions in the group, rather than new content in the study
- ❑ are self-directed – so we include a chance for them to apply their learning, individually.

The Need to Stimulate Interaction

One of the primary objectives of small groups is the application of the truth (James 1:22). Remember that people learn best by relating the learning to their own experiences and besides, our experiences also benefit each other.

For this reason, leaders should maximise interaction and use effective questioning techniques to draw out experiences and knowledge from the members, supplemented by short inputs of content. All content should then be discussed.

Of course, in preparing, you need to consider how much the members actually know about the topic as this determines how much content you suggest compared to how much you extract from the members.

HOW DO YOU ENCOURAGE INTERACTION?

1. Set up the room as a circle so that everyone including the leader is facing each other (or for larger courses, have people sit around tables).
2. Gather information by asking open questions which encourage people to expand and cannot be answered with yes or no.
3. Be careful with 'why' as it can sound aggressive and may make people feel defensive. Rather than 'Why did you do that?' try 'What were your reasons for doing that?'

4. Use 'rebound' and 'boomerang' questions to have other group members answer questions before you do (e.g. 'What do others think?'; 'Does anyone have a different idea we should consider?').
5. Use closed questions only to check information or to cut someone off when you need to regain control (e.g. 'So you had a good time then?').
6. Watch for those who would like to participate and ask for their contribution. Read faces and body language.
7. See that everyone is involved in the discussion and has a chance to share.
8. Guide the discussion by switching from one person to another. Interject your viewpoint and experience occasionally.

COMMON MISTAKES THAT PREVENT INTERACTION?

1. Set up the room so that the leader is clearly separated from the other group members, and have the group members sitting in rows so that they can't easily see each other.
2. Ask lots of questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
3. Ask complex questions that no-one knows the answer to.
4. Answer all questions asked of you – and a few you ask of others as well.
5. Be afraid of silence. Don't give people time to think.
6. Pick on people and keep asking them questions. Pressure people to pray, read or speak.
7. Ask rhetorical questions. Anticipate when people want to answer a question then move on quickly.
8. Try to maintain control. Prevent all tangents as soon as you notice the conversation taking off.
9. Make questions sound conversational.
10. Ensure the group knows that you know all the answers.
11. Criticise people and allow people in the group to criticise others as well.
12. Be more interested in getting through the material than in the people who are present.
13. Share your viewpoint first.