



Leader's notes

why on earth... would I believe the Christian message?

For centuries people have seen the Christian faith as a source of hope, and a guide on the journey of life. This session asks if we can still believe the Christian message, in a society where people question everything.

Needed: Drinks, name/picture badges (if desired), Session Sheets, some pens. If doing the Creative Prayer option, a bowl of green/red/yellow Skittles sweets - or other sweets in these three colours (enough of each colour that each group member can pick up to three).

General Intro: *why on earth...?* takes a look at some of life's hardest questions. Each session offers simple first steps in exploring a difficult subject. These are not final answers, just starting-points. Group members are invited to talk about their own thoughts and experiences with honesty. Then we explore Christian angles on the subject, and begin to think how these might apply in our own lives.

Session Intro: The Bible is the best selling book in history. Down the centuries the Christian faith has been a source of inspiration and hope, and a guide for how people live their lives. But things have changed. In today's world people tend to be suspicious if anybody claims to have found the truth or the meaning of life. People say, 'That might be true for you - doesn't mean it's true for me!' This session asks people to think what has shaped their own view of the Christian faith, and invites group members to take a fresh look for themselves.

Starters (approx 30 mins)

- Drinks, welcome, notices, write name badge (if desired).
- One short passage later in the session needs to be read aloud. Identify somebody who is happy to do this (alternatively, the leader can plan to read it).
- ICEBREAKER:
Ask group members what one question they would most like to ask God, and why. Invite each person to share their answer with the whole group. Ensure everybody who wants to speak has the chance, but respect the privacy of anybody who would rather not.

BACKGROUND NOISE (in pairs):

Ask group members to get into pairs. Hand out Session Sheets and invite everybody to look at the *Background Noise* picture.

Explain that we all carry thoughts and ideas in our head on a range of issues. These ideas may come from lots of places. In pairs, we are going to explore the 'background noise' already in our heads on the topic. Explain that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers here: it's all about examining our own starting-points.



Explain that the thought-bubbles represent:

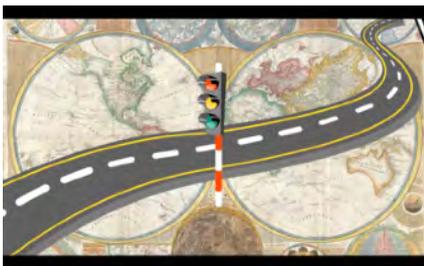
- > (School) School and upbringing
- > (People) Friends and family
- > (TV) TV and film
- > (Smartphone) Social media
- > (Question-Mark) Anything else

In their pairs, invite group members to discuss their own thoughts and experiences to do with the Christian faith. Did they grow up going to church? Where have they come across people's views on Christianity: friends and neighbours? Other places? Use the thought-bubbles as a prompt if helpful.

After a few minutes, invite people to rejoin the whole group. Invite them to share anything they discussed if they would like to.

Main Course (approx 45 mins)

- VIDEO
- ON SHEET:
Ask group members to look at Video Recap, a summary of key points in the video:



The Bible: guide for life



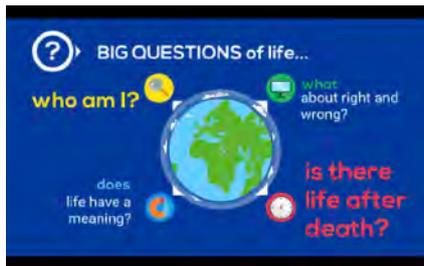
The Bible: image problem



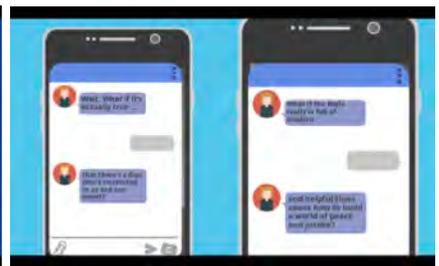
'True for you, not for me!'



Religion that controls



The big questions of life



What if... it really is true?

- DISCUSS (*whole group*): Allow a few minutes to discuss the following question:
 - What part of the video stood out for you?
 - What has changed in our society, in the way people view the Christian faith?
- ON SHEET:
Ask group members to look at the 'True for you, not for me' picture from the video.



- DISCUSS (*whole group*): Allow a few minutes to discuss the following question:
 - Why do so many people today say things like, 'That might be true for you; doesn't mean it's true for me!'?

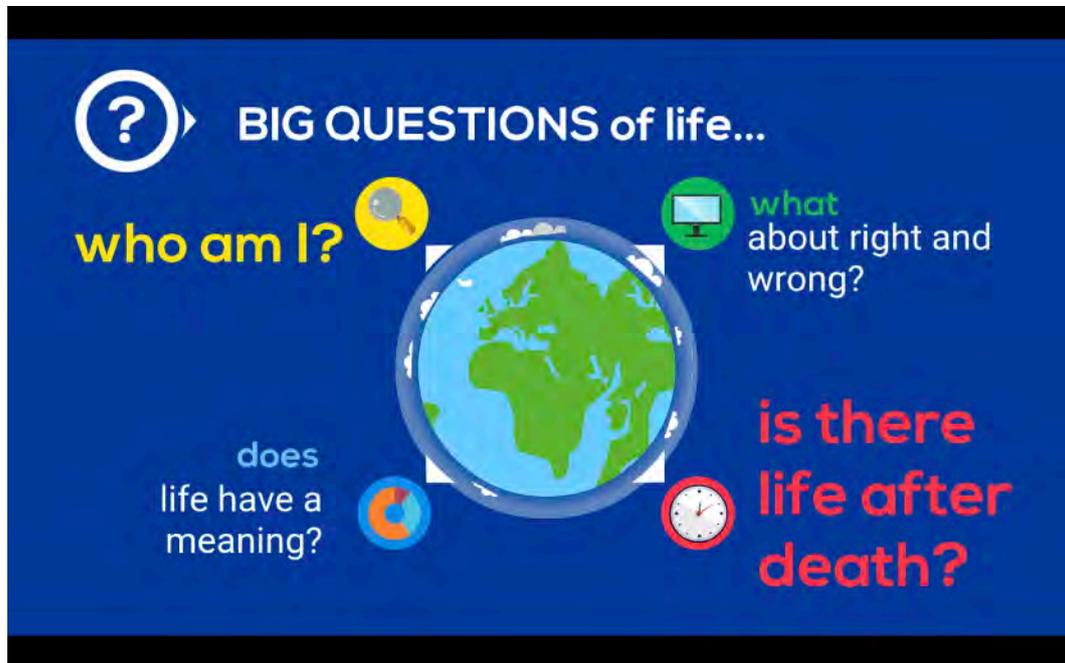
(Note to leaders: if group members struggle to answer, feel free to make suggestions.

Reasons might include: our society values individual freedom; people today value tolerance more than almost anything else; people are afraid of being seen as narrow-minded; people tend to see truth as relative; people are afraid of having others' ways of life imposed on them, TV dramas and films show nightmare scenarios of individuals or small groups imposing their views on others.)

- ON SHEET:

Ask group members to look at their *Big Questions of Life* sheet, based on the picture in the video.

Big Questions of Life



Who am I? *(What makes me me? Is it my personality, my background, my relationships, my values, my chosen style, the sort of things I buy...?)*

Does life have a meaning? *(What gives my life purpose and direction? Is there a bigger picture my life is a part of?)*

What about right and wrong? *(How do I know what values to live by? How do I treat other people? Does it matter if I sometimes bend the rules?)*

Is there life after death? *(When we die, is that the end? Will I see my loved ones again?)*

- **ACTIVITY** (*individually*):
 - Ask group members to look down the list of four questions, and ask them to think if each one is a question they ever think about.
 - Before each question is a box. In the box, ask people draw either a tick, a cross or a question-mark. A tick means they think about that question, a cross means they don't think about it, a question-mark means they're not sure (or don't understand the question).
- **DISCUSS** (*whole group*): Invite people to discuss where they placed their ticks, crosses and question-marks, and why. If any group members would rather not share this, respect their privacy.
- **ON SHEET:**

Ask somebody to read out Text: in a nutshell.

At the heart of the Christian faith are two big themes:

Loving God, loving people.

These are based on the words of Jesus in the Bible.

- **DISCUSS** (*whole group*): Take a few minutes to discuss each of the following questions:
 - What do you think of this short summary of the Christian message?
 - Look again at the *Big Questions of Life* sheet. If we take these words of Jesus seriously, how does it affect the answers we might give to each of the four big questions? Go through all four, one by one.

(Note to leaders: these are big questions! Don't be afraid gently to direct the discussion, especially if somebody is going off at a tangent or has a particular agenda. Asking 'Does anybody else have thoughts on this?' and reminding the group of the question can help get things back on track).

Dessert (*approx 15 mins*)

- Invite the group to join in either the Creative Prayer or Space to Think (as decided by the leader before the session). Then end by praying the Closing Prayer out loud.

1) Creative Prayer:

- Put out a bowl of red, yellow and green Skittles sweets (prepared before the session).
- Explain the colours are like traffic lights: green = go, red = stop, amber = wait or get ready.
- Explain that you are slowly going to list three themes at the heart of the Christian faith. For each one, they will choose a green, red or yellow sweet (reflecting whether they feel they are moving ahead in that area, going nowhere, or waiting).
- Say each of the following out loud. After each one, leave a minute or so for people to choose a coloured sweet:
 - > Communicating with God
 - > Forgiving somebody who has wronged me
 - > Working for peace and justice
- Give group members a few minutes to pray or think silently about their choice of colours, and which of these areas they would like to work on.
- Afterwards, they are welcome to eat the sweets!

2) Space to Think: time to reflect on words from the Bible, ending with the Lord's Prayer.

Tell the group you are going to read out a short passage from the Bible (below).

Say you are going to read the words twice, slowly.

Invite them to take a few minutes in silence to think what one word or idea stands out to them and why.

Read the passage (twice, slowly):

'One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realised that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these." ' (Mark 12:28-31)

(Modern Version)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

(Traditional Version)

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

- **Closing Prayer** (*read aloud*):

Lord God, we thank you for all the aspects of the Christian message that have made the world a better place. For faith and hope and love; for compassion and forgiveness; for great cathedrals and gospel music; for great works of charity and small acts of kindness. But we know that your Church hasn't always lived out the message of Jesus properly. And we admit that we don't always love you with all our heart, or love others as much as we love ourselves. Draw us closer to you and to each other, we pray. Amen.

Takeaway

- ON SHEET: Ask somebody to read out the *Takeaway* section:

Which one idea from today's session do I want to explore further? Who would be the best person I know to talk to, in order to find out more?