



Faith Values

EIGHT COMPLETE SESSIONS ON THE BIBLE, US AND OTHER FAITHS



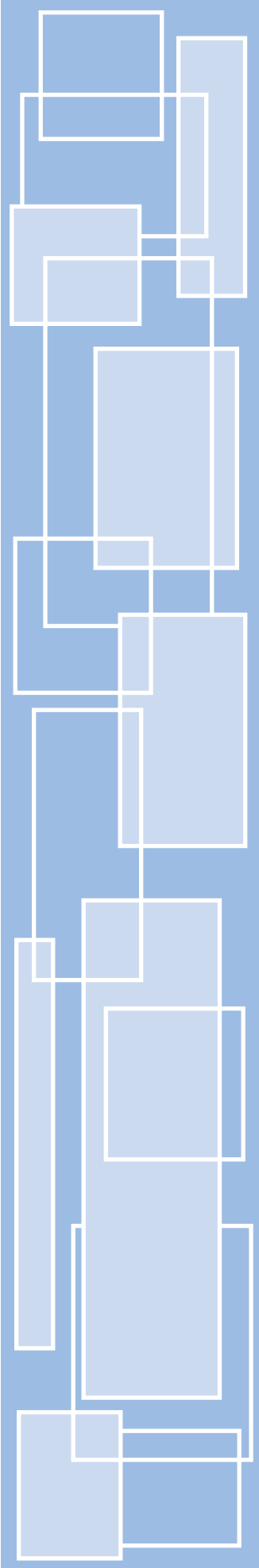
BIBLE-BASED RESOURCES FOR YOUTH GROUPS

Faith Values

EIGHT COMPLETE SESSIONS ON THE BIBLE, US AND OTHER FAITHS



Bible-based resources for youth groups
Written by Richard Sudworth
with Andrew Smith and Gill Marchant



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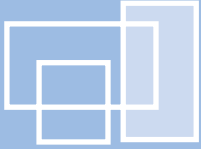
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Faith Values

– the background

Not so long ago, Christians who studied other religions tended to be overseas missionaries, or the few with a special interest in the subject.

Small world

These days, we realize that we live in a global village where the influence of other cultures and religions is plain to see. What is more, here in the British Isles, we are increasingly recognizing that we live in a 'plural' society. There is a huge range of religions and cultures on our doorstep.

I imagine that you, like me, have friends, colleagues and neighbours who are not only 'non-Christian', but who hold to specific faiths, different from ours.

Some of our young people may have friends of other faiths, others may not. But it's certain that some of them will go on to college or university where the vast array of clubs, pastimes and social activities includes a range of religions and allegiances that may be alien to them. Similarly, many of those moving on to the workplace will find themselves with managers and co-workers from varied faith backgrounds.

What does it mean to live and witness as a Christian in a multi-faith society?

Asking the right questions

The purpose of these sessions is to help young people to be confident and engaged Christians, able to relate to a wide range of people, speaking to them and serving them as followers of Christ.

Some people ask: 'How do we get God and religion on to the agenda for our "other faith" friends?' That is NOT the key question! In fact, it can be an obstacle for many Christians, young and old alike.

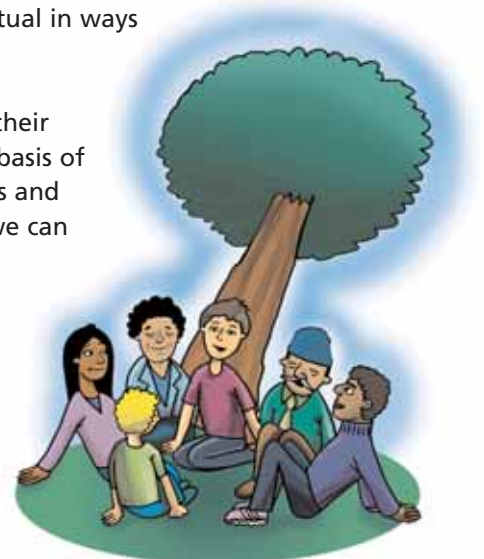
Rather, we should be asking: 'How can we show them Jesus in a way that makes sense to them?'

Sincere Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs are people who pray. They believe that they follow God and foster a sense of the spiritual in ways that are alien to many of our secular compatriots.

For Christians to follow Christ's example and enter their world, we need to be able to communicate from a basis of understanding. We need to know about their hopes and aspirations, their beliefs and practices. In this way we can make the connections that may make Jesus real to them.

The Bible key

We need to rediscover the ways in which the Bible speaks into a multi-faith context. This can be a key tool – and this approach forms the basis of each session.





Many of the Bible texts were written when the followers of God were hemmed in by other faiths and belief systems. Throughout the scriptures, we hear God challenging his people to be faithful in the midst of the competing claims of other religions and other claims to peace and happiness.

God called the Jewish people and then the church both to understand, love and serve the world and also to challenge it and offer a better alternative. This thread runs through scripture, and is a theme of this series.

This calling has an inbuilt tension. We look for commonality and shared beliefs; at the same time we recognize the distinct differences between us and the challenges that the Christian faith brings.

Pattern and purpose

The series begins with two introductory sessions providing a way in to biblical principles of relating to the stranger and the person of another faith.

The next five sessions explore:

- Islam
- Hinduism
- Sikhism
- Buddhism
- New Age Spiritualities.

None of these sessions offers the 'final word'! Instead, they present some of the core beliefs and principles within those faith systems. Importantly, though, each session is rooted in a biblical reflection aimed at helping a fully Christian response to that faith.

The series culminates in a session on the Trinity. As we spend time studying other faiths and attempting to make sense of them through our own beliefs and scriptures, we often find that we discover deeper truths about Jesus and our faith in him.

The final session 'closes the circle' of the unique heart of the Christian faith: the amazing God of love whose Spirit of life is made available to us through a self-emptying death on a cross.

Our hope is that this series is more than just a guide to other religions, or an alternative to school RE lessons. Rather, it is an opportunity for a deeper discovery of our own faith that equips us to be energized to faithful witness in a multi-faith world.





How to use this material

Getting ready

Before you begin preparing each session it's important that you give yourself time and space with God. Read through each Bible passage before you begin and use the Bible Background to put you in the picture.

Equipment

There's a list of equipment needed near the start of each session. You will not need all the equipment listed for each session – check 'Star system' below.

Star system

So you can work out what to put in and what to leave out, we've tried to make a short route through each section involving one starter, one main point and one response. This would involve doing just the *** activities each session. Add the ** or * to give you variety, depth and even humour.

*** Essential – Enough material for roughly half-an-hour's teaching.

** Desirable – Supplementary material to take your session to about an hour.

* Additional – Extra stuff for longer meetings or to provide variety for groups of different ages or abilities.

Contents

Each session will have:

- ◆ **Teaching point**
- 📌 **Group aim**
- 📎 **Equipment**
- 🔦 **LEADER'S GUIDE including Bible background**
- **STARTING IT:** ideas to get into it
- **TEACHING IT:** the main teaching content
- **DOING IT:** application ideas
- **WORK-OUT:** copyright-free photocopiable pages.

Books

Books we have found helpful in preparation:

Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World, Richard Bauckham, Paternoster Press

The Spirit of Buddhism, David Burnett, Monarch

Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam, Colin Chapman, IVP

The Bible and Other Faiths, Ida Glaser, IVP

The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, Lesslie Newbigin, Eerdmans

Faiths in Conflict? Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World, Vinoth Ramachandra, IVP

The New Testament and the People of God, N.T. Wright, SPCK

The Challenge of Jesus, N.T. Wright, SPCK

Available from www.faithtofaith.org.uk

The Cross and the Khalsa: a five session study course for Christians about Sikhism, Patricia M Hooker

The Cross and the Lotus: a study course for Christians about Buddhism, David Burnett

The Cross and New Age Spirituality: a study course for Christians on Contemporary Alternative Spiritualities, Christopher Partridge



Faith Values is a CYFA resource published electronically by the Church Pastoral Aid Society.

The CYFA series of Bible-based Resources for Youth Groups helps local church leaders teach the Bible faithfully to young people in a way that is creative, relevant and that will help them to grow into mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

Some of the fifteen CYFA resources are available in print and others for download. Full details can be found at www.cpas.org.uk/cyfa.

CYFA supports the youth work of local churches by providing training for leaders, consultation and an exciting programme of residential holidays – CYFA Ventures. Find them at www.ventures.org.uk

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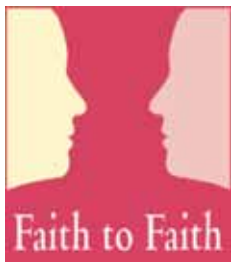
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Faith to Faith is a national Christian organization which supports Christians and Christian mission in the context of our multi-faith society. It sustains a network of churches, organizations and individuals who are building relationships of trust and friendship with people of other faiths and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ through words and action.

Faith to Faith seeks to:

- educate Christians about other faiths
- facilitate mission and ministry
- stimulate creative biblical thinking about Christ and the faiths.

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EQUIPMENT

- Photocopies of the Work-out sheet
- Bibles
- Pens
- Flashcards labelled: 'Name', 'Family', 'Likes', 'Dislikes', 'Clothes', 'Important events', 'Heroes/ heroines', 'Hopes'. Questions associated with each label
- Collection of current newspaper headlines
- Sheets of A4 plain paper for activities: 'A big thank you' and 'Good news/bad news'



TEACHING POINT

The Bible tells the story of God's intention to bring healing and restoration to the world. God has revealed himself in history and his people are to be agents of blessing and healing today.



GROUP AIM

To understand that being blessed by God and knowing his love brings a responsibility: God wants us to be a blessing and good news to people of all cultures and religions.

The Bible and other faiths: Are you sitting comfortably?



LEADER'S GUIDE

Before you begin, make sure that you've read the introductory pages about the background to the series. Fill your group in on the details using the timeline pictures. For additional reading, we recommend Ida Glaser's *The Bible and Other Faiths* (IVP, 2005).

The BBC website on religions is an additional and very helpful resource: www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions. Information on a range of faiths can be found here with printable guides and useful stories from adherents to the respective faiths. This series can only point to some key aspects of other religions so should you want any more specific information, the BBC site is a good place to start.

People from many different religions live side by side in our society. Modern communications have opened us up to the breadth of beliefs and experiences across our world. Many of the Bible's writers lived in times when God's people experienced diversity and faced challenges similar to those facing us now. There may not have been Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in Bible times, but the scriptures have important lessons on how God's people are to relate to those of other faiths.

This series will take key Bible passages and encourage us to reflect on how we are to relate to those of different faiths. There will be specific opportunities in various sessions to learn about some of the core beliefs and practices of the religions of our neighbours.

- The overall aim of the series is to equip young people with the biblical resources they need in a context of religious diversity.
- What does it mean to be a faithful Christian in a multi-faith country and can we love our neighbours without losing our own Christian identity in the process?

The first session traces God's plans for healing the world, all the way back to his promise to Abraham and his descendents (**Genesis 12:1-5**).

The promise has two clauses: being blessed *in* the world and being a blessing to the world. God chooses to work with particular people but wishes to bring his goodness to everyone. We, as the Church, are the continuation of the story that God began when he chose Abraham.

The Bible shows us both the plus and the minus sides of the outworking of the story: God's people have obeyed him, and been a blessing to the world, welcoming the stranger and bringing justice; but they have also focused on themselves, forgotten their role and have ignored those who are different, living selfishly.

God calls us to worship him, to be distinct. But he also calls us to bless, love, be good neighbours, and reach out to the stranger.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

At the time of God's call (**Genesis 12:1-9**), Abram was living in a place where people worshipped many different gods. In fact, Abram and his family seemed to have been part of one of the many religions in the region. The God who created the earth called him out of that and made promises to him. It's worth looking at the wording of the promise (**12:2-3**). There are two sides to the promises. In each verse, Abraham, or Abram as he was known then, is told he will be great or blessed but also that 'you will be a blessing' (**12:2**) and 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (**12:3**).



The timeline that presents the grand sweep of the Bible story will help us see that those promises become our promises when we follow Jesus (**Romans 4:16**). Those same promises mean that we are to be a blessing to the whole world and to bless 'all peoples'.

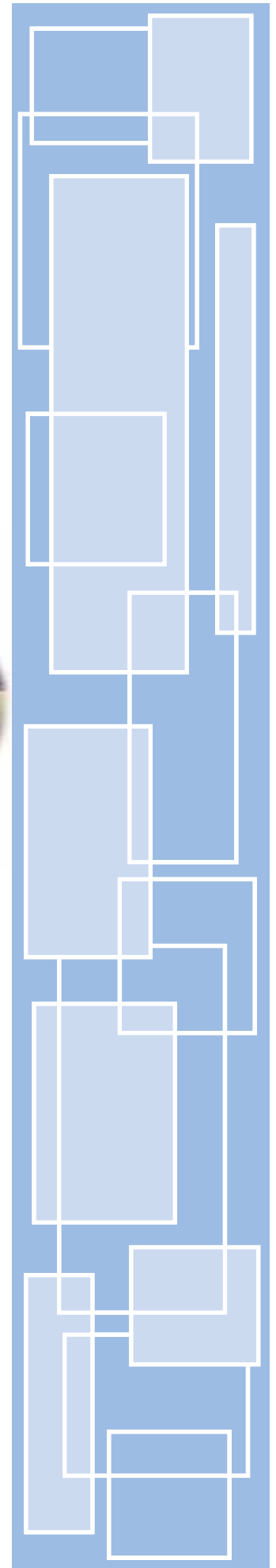
STARTING IT

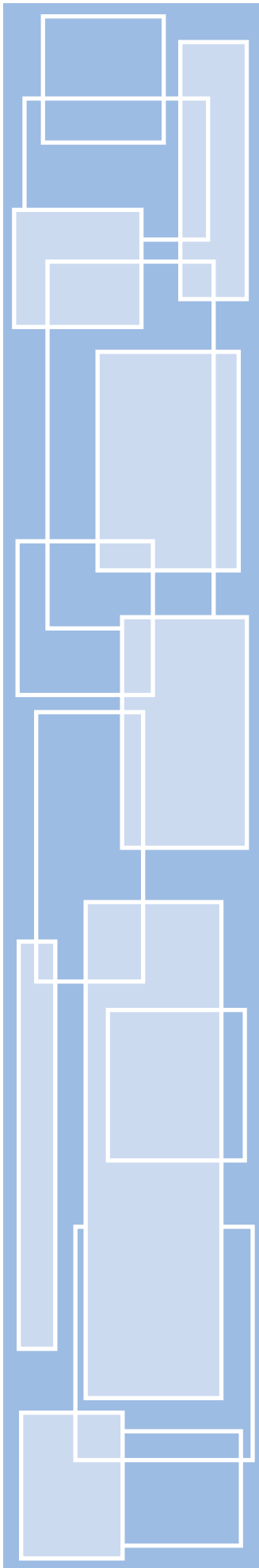
☆☆☆ Getting into our story

We all have a story to tell. Even if you are young, you have a history, a series of events, a tale that is going somewhere. Give out a series of flashcards with the following labels and questions. Make sure everyone has a card. When the questions have been answered in pairs, swap them and then exchange them with other cards, staying in the pairs to answer the questions. These are prompts for each person to tell something of their story in different ways:

Name What's your name? Tell us what you know of your forename, why you were given the name. Tell us what you know of your surname. Is it from a certain region, for example? Do you know of any famous people with this surname. How far back can you trace the surname?

Family Who are your relatives? What are their names and ages, and where do





they live? Where were you born? How well do you know your family? Do you know many distant cousins, or hardly any?

Likes What do you enjoy? What kind of foods, music, TV, school subjects, films do you like? Who are your friends and why?

Dislikes What do you dislike? Foods, music, TV, school subjects, films? What kind of characteristics in other people do you struggle with?

Clothes Where do you shop? What labels do you prefer? What do you like to wear in winter/summer? What wouldn't you be seen dead wearing?

Important events What have been the most important events of your life so far?

Why? What regular events do you celebrate throughout the year as an individual or family?

Heroes/heroines Who would you like to copy? Who are your role models?

Hopes What do you wish for the future? What job would you like to do, where would you like to live? Do you imagine you would like to marry and have children? If so, when?

Telling our story includes sharing aspects of our history, our origins, important events, likes, dislikes and our hopes for the future. As Christians, we have a place in the big story of God's plans for the world. Many Bible characters become connected to us in a special way. We become part of a far bigger story that has a beginning, middle and an end.

☆☆☆ The big picture

Read **Genesis 12:1-9** together. Introduce the timeline, explaining Abraham's call as the crucial starting point of God's plan to put the world right.

Here is one way of looking at the Bible as a story:

Episode 1: Creation God makes the world and it is good. Men and women are made by God with a purpose and live in an intimate relationship with God. Humanity is 'very good'.

Episode 2: The Fall Men and women disobey God and the whole of creation is broken and decaying. Death begins and relationships between people and with God are broken.

Episode 3: Israel God chooses a group of people to be the means by which the world is put right. He gives his laws to his people and they are to be a blessing to the whole of creation.

Episode 4: Jesus God reveals what he is like by coming as a human, into the nation of Israel, to do what humanity cannot do for itself, acting to bring healing to the whole of creation.

Episode 5: Scene 1 – The Church Powered by the Holy Spirit, people from different cultures and nations begin to model the hope and healing that Jesus made possible through his death and resurrection, taking this good news to the whole of creation.

Episode 5: Last scene – Revelation The final healing of all relationships is complete, God lives with his people in a new, restored earth and heaven with no suffering and there are people worshipping God from every tribe and tongue.

We live 'between times', before the final scene, looking ahead to God restoring everything, taking away all suffering and making the earth new again. We have a picture of the beauty and the joy ahead. In the meantime, we are to be people who bring blessing and goodness to everyone.

☆☆☆ The I's have it!

Form pairs. Ask each partnership to decide who's A and who's B. When you call 'start', A has to speak without stopping for two minutes on any subject. There is just one rule: he or she must not use the word 'I'. They can say anything else but they just mustn't say 'I'. After you call time-out on the first two minutes, let the

B's have a try.

- How easy was this activity?
- Why is it so difficult to avoid using 'I' when we speak?
- What does it feel like when talking to (or listening to) someone who starts every sentence with 'I'?

☆☆ No way!

Invite a volunteer to be in the centre of the group and to attempt to answer questions from others without saying the word 'no'. Go round your group, giving people about a minute to pose quick-fire questions to the person in the centre so that they say 'no'. When the 'victim' has slipped and said 'no', the person who asked that question takes his or her place. Keep the game moving briskly.

Despite all the mistakes we make, and the selfishness in the world, God has never said 'no' to the world. His love is available to all who are open and willing to live his way.

TEACHING IT

☆☆☆ Moving from getting to giving

It's hard not to slip into 'I' mode. It's a mistake that God's people have made many times in history. God has blessed us, given us many things, but that blessing is not to be kept to ourselves.

So how are we to be good news to everyone? Not just good news to our friends and family, the people like us, the people who agree with us. 'All people' includes, er, all people!

How can we be good news to those of different cultures, countries and beliefs? These sessions will challenge us to realize that a key part of the Christian life is about bringing God's love to those who may be very different from us. It may not be simply a matter of words, but also of our attitudes and our actions. Remember, when Jesus died for us, we were his enemies, yet he loved us, even when we were far from him.

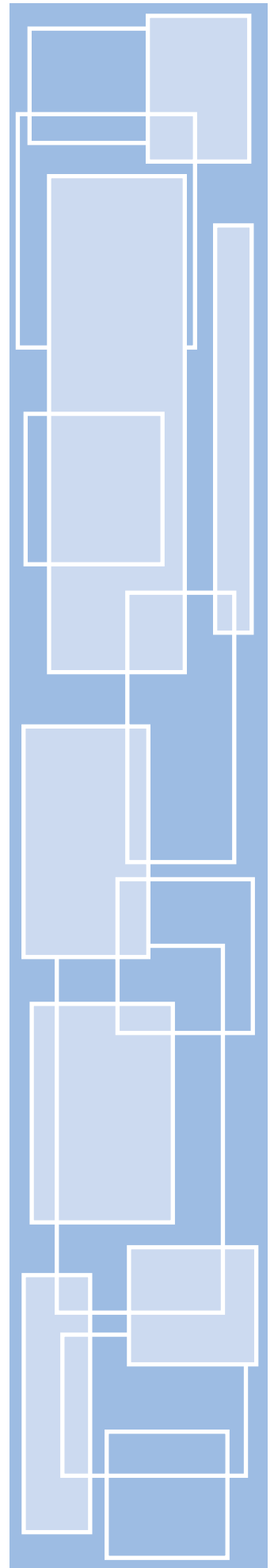
The prophets frequently challenged the people of Israel over their treatment of foreigners and refugees in their midst. Treating such people with respect and value was a radically different approach from what was commonplace at that time. Such an attitude was a way of showing something of what God himself is like.

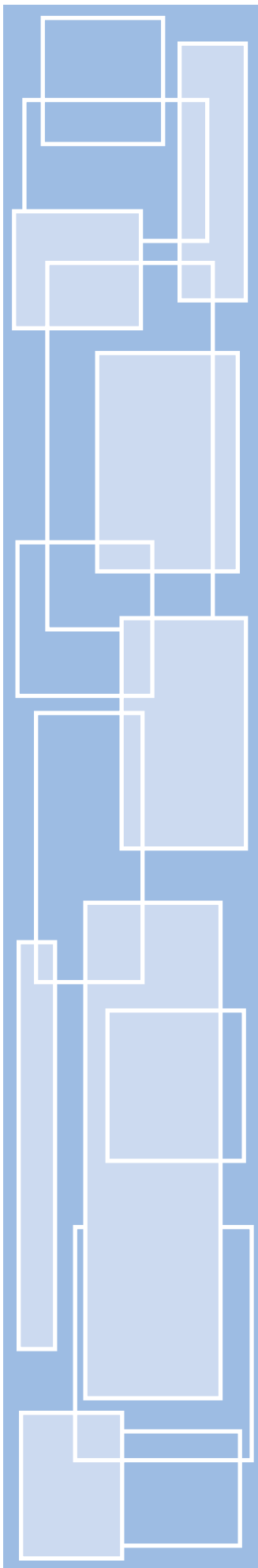
Read **John 3:16** slowly together. It's a very well-known verse and we often learn it to remind ourselves of God's saving work in our lives. Note the words: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son'. God sent his Son not just for 'me', not just for my family, my town, my city, people of my culture and race. God loved and loves the world.

DOING IT

☆☆☆ Pray it

Distribute the world map Work-out sheets. Prepare in advance a selection of newspaper headlines focusing on international news stories. Choose an item of overseas concern to pray for as a group. It may be a situation of war or famine, it may be an ordinary individual or just a political leader who needs prayer. Choose a situation that involves people of another faith. Invite group members to mark the location of the story on their maps, and to write an appropriate prayer on the sheet as well.





Encourage members to pray for this situation in the coming week. Here is one very simple way in which we can be a blessing to others: by praying for them.

☞ A big thank you

Distribute the Work-out sheets carrying the 'timeline' cartoon summary of the Bible's 'big story'.

Invite members to draw a similar timeline for 'My life so far', with pictures or symbols, or perhaps by writing down key events. An important part of being able to bless others is remembering to be grateful for what God has done for us. Encourage members to use the timeline as a prayer of thanks. What do you want to see in the episodes not yet written? Pray about that, perhaps in pairs. Suggest members keep the timeline safe, maybe in a Bible, and use it as a reminder of what God has done.

☞ Good news / bad news

Distribute paper and pens. Invite members to try the following activity.

Make a list of 'good news' that you can remember receiving (for example, exam success, being picked for a team, a family birth).

On a separate sheet, make a matching list of 'bad news' (for example, dodgy exam results, hearing something terrible in the national news, a bereavement).

Suggest that people keep their lists private. Ask, how can Christians 'be' good news? What ways do you know of Christians being 'good news'? In what ways do you think Christians are sometimes 'bad news'?

Discuss and then use responses as a basis for prayer for people to be good news in the ways that have been discussed: for our group, for the local church and for the church nationally and internationally.

Secondly, pray to say sorry for the ways in which we are sometimes bad news: as a group, as local a church – and then from a national and international perspective.



The big picture

The Bible tells hundreds of stories. But it also tells one single amazing story, connecting past, present and future. This 'time line' links six key aspects of our 'salvation history'.

Episode 1: Creation



Episode 2: The Fall



Episode 4: Jesus



Episode 3: Israel

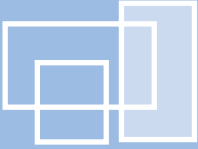


Episode 5: Scene 1 – The Church



Episode 5: Last scene – Revelation





The big picture



Pray it!



TEACHING POINT

All of the faiths that we shall be looking at in this resource contain a mixture of good and bad, truth and untruth. Within every religion, we can see pointers to God at work and evidence of the hopes and fears common to all humanity. We believe that Jesus is the answer to the problems of the world and to the human condition. Therefore these common hopes and fears can be an opportunity to relate good news to people of other faiths.



GROUP AIM

To be able to identify and welcome the truths contained in other religions so that opportunities for communication are possible.

To appreciate the value of building on the common good, and thus bringing people closer to the absolute truth and reality of Jesus.



EQUIPMENT

- Photocopies of the Work-out sheet
- Bibles
- Pens
- Marker pens
- Flashcards bearing the names of various famous people, for the 'True or false' game. You will need three names for every group of five or six
- A large sheet of lining paper for the graffiti wall – large enough to attach to a wall or floor space, measuring approximately 3x2m
- Selection of magazines (Sunday supplements, TV guides) as sources of inspiration for the graffiti wall
- Bin and small slips of paper for 'Confess it'

The Bible and other faiths: Glimmers of God



LEADER'S GUIDE

Before you begin, make sure that you've read the introductory pages about the background to the series. For additional reading, once again we recommend Ida Glaser's *The Bible and Other Faiths* (IVP, 2005).

This session provides a New Testament foundation for our understanding of other faiths. The early church developed in a world of competing religious claims. Paul's visit to Athens (**Acts 17**) offers a wonderful picture of the pick'n'mix religious outlook that seems remarkably similar to that of our own society.

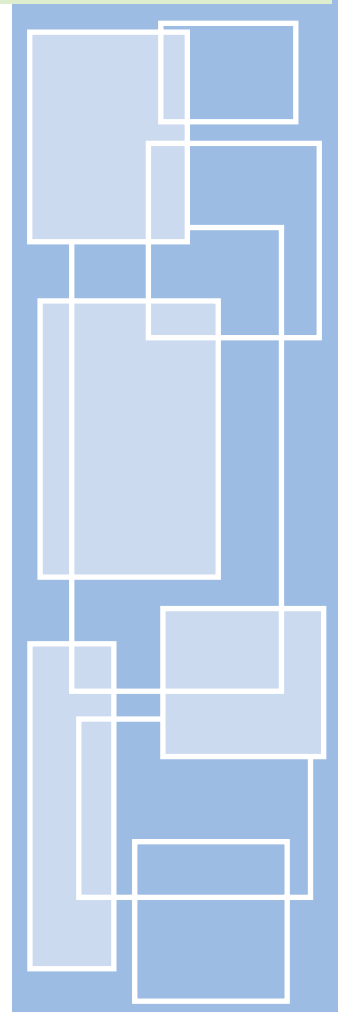
Paul was confronted in Athens by a dizzying array of temples and gods. The visit clearly posed a challenge to him and to the growth of the church. What did it mean to present the story of Jesus, the man who is God, in a place where there were dozens of gods, goddesses, statues and myths? How could Paul relate his exciting story of the uniqueness of Jesus in such a 'multi-choice' world?

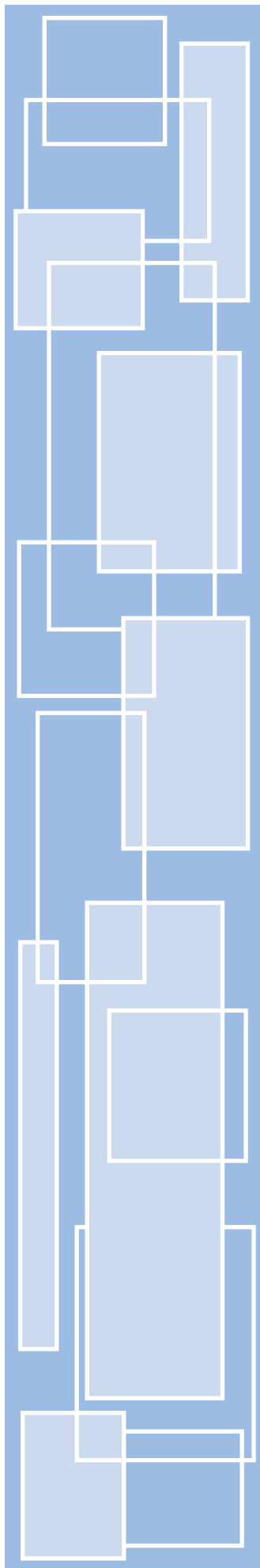
Paul's famous sermon offers us a helpful introduction to understanding the nature of other faiths. It also guides us as to how we can make the hope of the Christian good news relevant to people from other faiths.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

Acts 17:16-32. The church was growing. God's plan was under way: for renewing the whole world and also for building a people following him from all countries and cultures. Paul's special calling was to make Jesus known to non-Jews (Gentiles) and to extend the church beyond Jerusalem and exiled Jewish communities. Hence his journeys to cities across the Roman Empire. The remains of the ancient temples at the Acropolis in Athens are visible today. In Paul's day,





the fusion of Greek and Roman idol worship at the bustling cradle of western civilisation would have been even more evident.

We notice that Paul was 'observing the city full of idols', taking the scene in, trying to understand it. For Paul, first and foremost an observant Jew, the idolatry would have been deeply offensive. Initially, Paul spends time discussing and teaching in the synagogue, among the expatriate Jewish communities and God-fearing Gentiles and in the marketplace. Eventually, though, on the invitation of some of the Greek philosophers, he converses with the Athenians on their home territory, the Areopagus, effectively the marketplace of religion and serious thought.

Some of the ideas and beliefs that Paul encountered are mentioned, others are hinted at:



Epicureans (17:18) believed that God was far away from his creation, that everything that is created is bad and corrupt and that only the world of the spirit is significant and worthwhile.



Stoics (17:18) believed that God was in the world, a part of it, and nothing was therefore 'wrong' and godless.



Gnostics believed that there was a 'secret' wisdom and purpose within each of us and therefore God would be found through an inner revelation or self-discovery, not available to anyone else. Paul quotes one of the Greek poets (17:28), stating that 'we are also his children'. The statement 'in him we live and move and have our being' is also a quotation from the same Gnostic poet.

The crucial background to this story is that Paul is faced with an array of confusing and challenging beliefs, all searching after God, but all offering an incomplete and flawed understanding.

But Paul evidently spent time studying those beliefs. He was not afraid to affirm what was true in those beliefs, even quoting some of their texts, whilst challenging what he felt was wrong and presenting his hope in Jesus.



STARTING IT

☆☆☆ The human spider's web

Split into groups of between six and eight, each group standing in a close circle. Instruct each member to extend their left hand across the circle and grasp the right hand of the member opposite. Then ask each person to extend their right hands across the circle and grasp the left hand of another member. The challenge is to unravel the 'spider's web' of interlocking arms without letting go of anyone's hands. Set a time limit and if you have more than one group, make it into a competition to see who can fulfil the task first.

How did it feel at first, having been set this task? People probably felt that it was impossible, too complicated. The only way to achieve the end result is to see the big picture and to communicate clearly as to how to untangle the knots.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by other religions. They are a complex mixture of beliefs, history and culture, some that we will recognize and others that seem alien. For us, the 'big picture' is that we are all human and all fail. But God loves us and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we have hope and life. Jesus is the crucially important frame of the big picture.

☆☆☆ Looking for the altar to the unknown god

Read **Acts 17:16-32** together. Use the Work-out sheet to explain some of the different beliefs that Paul was addressing in Athens.

It is important to emphasize Paul's willingness to study and understand contemporary beliefs. Read through the sermon and notice how Paul addresses each of the beliefs, finding some common points of human contact and wisdom, but also offering a challenge.

Paul uses the 'altar to an unknown god' as a doorway to the hearts and minds of the Athenians. This altar seems to have been a catch-all possibility, to a god that the Athenians perhaps didn't know, but maybe existed. For Paul, this altar becomes the symbol that bridges the gap between the limited understanding of the Athenians and the fullness of the good news in the story of Jesus.

☆☆ True or false?

Play this game in groups of five or six. Write on flashcards the names of various famous characters, dead or alive. Choose a range of historical and contemporary names known to the young people. Keep the pile of cards face down. One person from each group takes the top card, reads the name, but does not share the information. Their group members are then to guess the name on that card by making statements to that person to which the person in the know may only reply 'true' or 'false'. So, for example, someone from the group might make the statement 'The person is dead', or 'The person is a man'. Encourage quick-fire statements. Give the groups three cards each, face-down, taking turns around the group to take the card, the game ending when all the cards are correctly guessed by a group.

We need to build up a picture, listening and learning, before we can know someone else's story. Paul took time to sort the true and the false in the beliefs of those around him.

☆☆ I pass these scissors crossed

Play this classic 'lateral thinking' game as an illustration of the need to look below the surface and look for the symbols and signs that might help us understand another person's beliefs.

Sit on chairs in a circle. Pass around a pair of scissors. Before doing so, say either, 'I pass these scissors crossed', or 'I pass these scissors uncrossed.' For 'crossed' your legs or feet should be crossed, and uncrossed if you say 'uncrossed'. The key to passing correctly is catching on to the fact that whether or not the scissors are crossed is totally irrelevant. All that matters is that your legs should be crossed if you say 'crossed', and vice versa. It helps to add to the confusion by drawing attention to scissors, by at first ostentatiously presenting them to match what you say – and later doing the opposite. Cue confusion and hilarity. If one or two begin to catch on, encourage them to keep quiet about the solution. Some people will get it right unknowingly, adding to the confusion for a while!

Do we take time to observe and listen to what is going on in people's lives, or are we quick to judge?

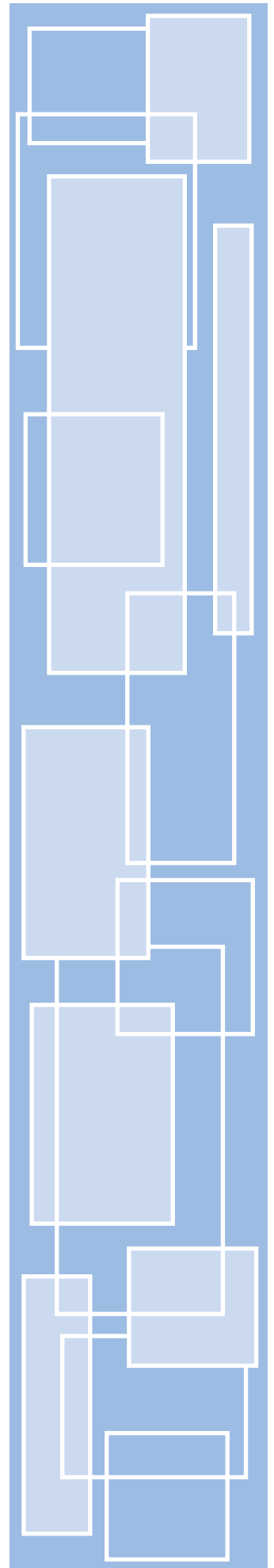


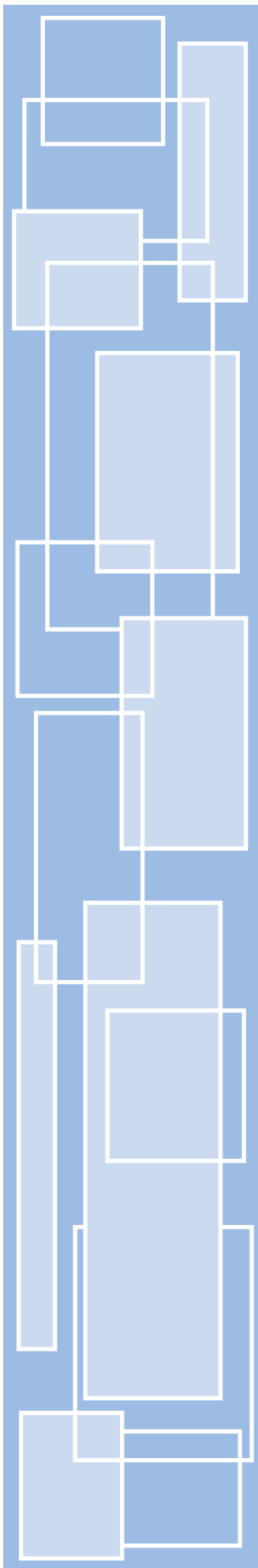
TEACHING IT

☆☆ Listening, learning, doing, speaking

The story of Paul in Athens is an excellent four-part model (see Work-out sheet) for us as we try to find appropriate ways of relating to people of other faiths:

- **Listen** Paul clearly spent time listening to the concerns and hopes of the Athenians. What are the needs of those around us who do not follow Jesus? What are their hopes in life, their priorities?





- **Learn** Paul had read some of their important texts, was able to quote their philosophers. What kind of homework can we do on the beliefs of others?
- **Do** The importance of Paul's message relied not primarily on the ideas he was conveying but on the concrete reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. How can we make known something of that example amongst our communities? How are we to offer something more than just 'ideas' to people and follow the example of Jesus' ministry?
- **Speak** Paul finally spoke – on the invitation of the local philosophers, and on their 'home turf'. He made connections, praised what was good, but also gave a challenge. Are we able to wait for invitations, but when invited, praise what is good rather than demonizing everything? And are we able to see that the message of Jesus also offers a challenge to the world?

Paul used the 'altar to the unknown god' as his bridge for communication. What might be the equivalent to the altar to the unknown god among your friends and family? It might be a search or a yearning for something that offers a ray of light to God, that you can 'speak into'. It might be something very simple like the fact that a good friend occasionally offers up a prayer when he or she is struggling. Such people might not call themselves Christians, and there may be all sorts of superstitious understandings around the practice of prayer. However, the prayer is a gateway, a sign that a person believes, deep down, that there is a God and that this God should listen. We can connect with that truth and offer hope.

DOING IT

☆☆☆ Pray it!

Cut out and distribute the prayer reminder sheets. Ask each person to think about a friend or member of their family who is not yet a Christian and for whom God might want them to pray. This person may be from another faith group or have no religious beliefs at all.

Write the name of this person on the page. In pairs, pray for those named. What might their needs be, their hopes, fears? Invite members to use this sheet as a prayer reminder for the week ahead, and to write in comments and appropriate pieces of information. Suggest that they ask God to show them what they should do this week to make Jesus real to their chosen person, and encourage them to pray for an invitation to speak to them.

☆☆ Graffiti wall: 'The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls.'

Paul was able to take some of the poetry from another belief system and communicate the story of Jesus through it. This exercise encourages us to recognize truth where we find it, and affirms the 'glimmers of God' in the words of people who may not yet know him. Take the large sheet, either pinned to a wall or other surface or resting on the floor, and use the marker pens to write down truths about God and the world from popular culture.

These could be drawn from song lyrics, advertising slogans or quotations in the news. The group may need the magazines as sources of inspiration. Explain that some of the slogans or quotations might present a truth about God, or might be an opening that offers a challenge as well as a truth. For example, the L'Oréal slogan 'Because you're worth it' says something about the value of human beings. We would want to agree with that but offer the challenge that our value is not dependent upon what we buy.

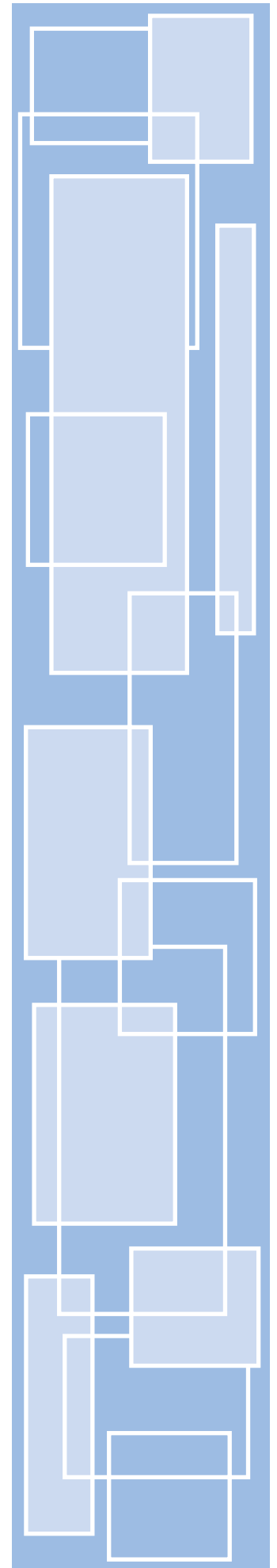
Don't be afraid to generate discussion about the items chosen so that some

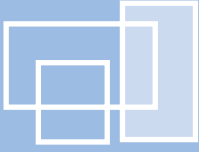
critical element comes into play. Coca-Cola's 'the real thing' could be a way in to presenting Jesus as 'the real thing'. There might be some statements that we can find no agreement with, as being opposed to the Christian gospel. Nike's 'Just do it' might be one such example. Use this time to build up the skills of the group in working out what can be affirmed as truth.

☆☆ Confess it

If we are honest, we are often quick to judge people with other belief systems, usually because of ignorance and fear. Over the next few sessions, we will be taking time to learn about some specific religious systems and to consider how we can relate to them as Christians. A key starting point is to recognize that we are all human, with the same hopes and fears, mixture of good and bad. Though we believe there is something vitally important about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for the whole world, we often fail as Christians to love others appropriately.

Give everyone a small slip of paper and a pen. Take some quiet time to write any thoughts or actions that have been wrong in our attitudes to those of other faiths. If we have judged too quickly, demonized whole groups, been determined not to listen, write it down as a confession. Ask each person to fold up their slip of paper and put it in the bin placed in the centre of the group. When everyone has done that, pray a prayer of confession about our attitudes to people of other faiths, asking for a spirit of wisdom, learning, compassion and humility.





Looking for the altar to the unknown god

There were people from many faiths in Athens. You could almost describe it as a religious supermarket with SO much choice.



I'm a **Jew**. We believe in one God who created everything. He revealed himself to our father Abraham. He gave us his laws through Moses and he guided us through his prophets.



Hi! I'm an **Epicurean**. We believe that God is far away from his creation. In fact the material world is bad and corrupt. Only the world of the spirit is worthwhile.



Yo! I am a **Stoic**. We believe that God is in the world. In fact, he's part of it. Therefore nothing is 'wrong' or godless.



Hello! As a **Gnostic**, I believe that there's a 'secret' wisdom and purpose within each of us. We find God through an inner revelation or self-discovery – not available to anyone else.





The altar to the unknown god

Paul's message is that Jesus has died – and has risen again. And that message is for everyone!



You're a Jew? The promises God made to Abraham are now available to everyone!



Epicurean? God is near and has made himself known in Jesus!



You're a Stoic? God is the Creator of all. He cannot be controlled by men and women.



So you are a Gnostic? The good news is available, can be known by all. We know because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.



Listen, learn, do, speak

Listen Paul spent time listening to the concerns and hopes of the Athenians. What are the needs of those around us who do not follow Jesus? What are their hopes in life, their priorities?



Learn Paul had read some of their important texts, was able to quote their philosophers. What kind of homework can we do on the beliefs of others?

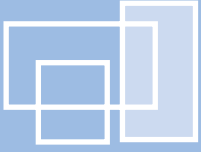


Do Paul's message focused on the concrete reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. How can we follow that example in our communities? How are we to offer something more than just 'ideas' to people? How should we follow the example of Jesus' ministry?



Speak Paul finally spoke – openly and plainly, showing great respect for the beliefs of his hearers. How can we follow his example?





Pray it!

Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!
Pray! Pray! Pray! Pray!
OK? OK? OK? OK?

This week
I'm going
to pray for...

This week
I'm going
to pray for...

This week
I'm going
to pray for...

This week
I'm going
to pray for...

Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!
Pray! Pray! Pray! Pray!
OK? OK? OK? OK?



EQUIPMENT

- Photocopies of the Work-out sheet
- Bibles
- Pens
- 'Five pillars' jigsaw sheet
- Advice cards for 'Stereotypes'
- Small strips of coloured paper, including blue strips for 'Stereotypes'



TEACHING POINT

The beliefs of Muslims and Christians have many common elements. Understanding some of these will help us to relate to Muslim people and to appreciate the distinctive aspects of our own faith.



GROUP AIM

To learn the basics of Muslim belief and to see beyond stereotypes so as to relate to Muslim people with love and confidence.

Islam: Beyond the veil



LEADER'S GUIDE

Before you begin, make sure that you've read the introductory pages about the background to the series.

It seems that hardly a day goes by without Muslim people and Islamic belief being the focus for some news event. As a result, there is a huge interest in the subject, often coloured by fear and confusion.

How should Christians relate to Muslims? There is no doubt that this is one of the greatest challenges facing the church today.

In this session, we will look at some of the core Muslim beliefs. More importantly, we'll try to get a sense of how Muslims in Britain might feel about the world.

This series is partly an exercise of 'standing in the shoes of others'. Only when we can empathise and understand something of others, can we love them. God showed the amazing depth of his love for us by 'standing in our shoes' to the ultimate: he became one of us, and even died for us. So, we won't be going through an exhaustive list of doctrines and beliefs; just looking at a few key beliefs, and then focusing on some of the culture and history that is almost as important as the doctrines.

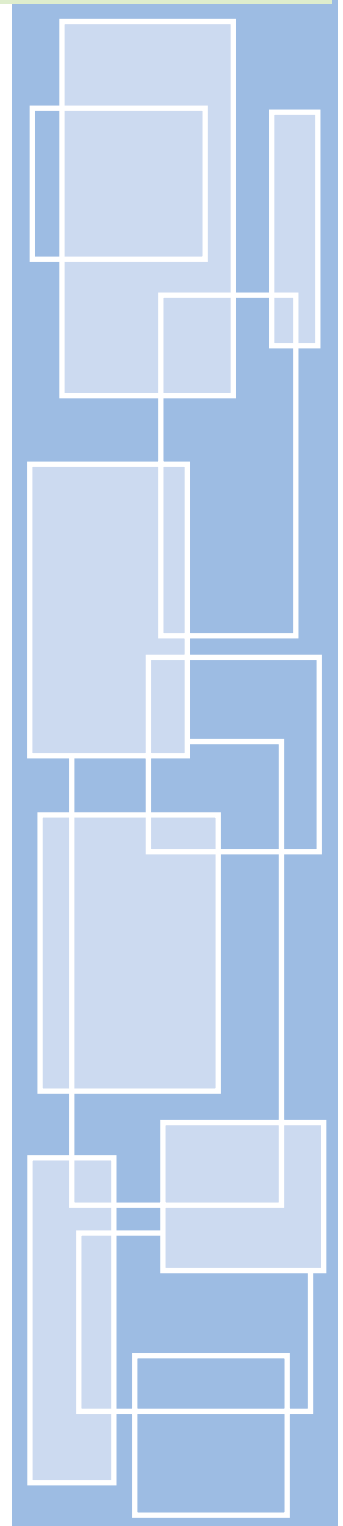


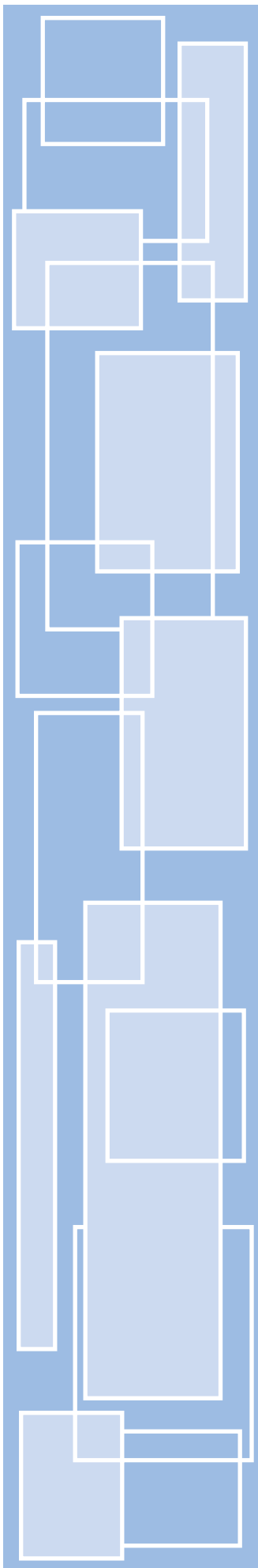
BIBLE BACKGROUND

Luke 24:13-35. Two grieving disciples are walking to the village of Emmaus after the crucifixion of Jesus. They are in despair. All their hopes for what Jesus could have done for their nation seem to have evaporated. Jesus seemed to be God's servant and victory seemed to be assured with him. Yet, they must have got it wrong.

They hadn't grasped that God's victory would be demonstrated in, and made possible through, the death of Jesus – and that, through suffering, new life and the kingdom of God would be realized.

This account has important parallels with our relationship to Muslim people. Muslims find it hard to believe that a servant of God could suffer and die. As a result, they do not believe that Jesus died on the cross. They acknowledge that he was a prophet, though, and spoke God's words.





As Jesus quietly walked alongside these two disciples, resurrected and victorious, we see a lovely model of how we should walk alongside Muslim people. Jesus gently shared the scriptures. He pointed to God's plans, which are not imposed on the world by force: they are brought about through sacrificial love. Thus the two disciples gradually discern Jesus as more than a prophet. He is the true likeness of God who lives with and journeys alongside us.

☆☆☆ Five pillars

In advance, print the jigsaw-puzzle Work-out sheets and cut up to create enough puzzles for the young people to work on in pairs, or in larger groups. Distribute the puzzles and challenge the young people to complete them as quickly as they can. (Some may have done a similar activity at school.)

Make a large version of the completed puzzle. The central belief of Islam is that there is one God. The ultimate aim of men and women is to submit to the will of Allah. This is the basic duty of all Muslims.

☆☆ The Christian pillars

In pairs, write a couple of sentences that sum up the Christian message. You could make these into bookmarks so that you can keep them with you, or text them to a friend.

Challenge the group to respond to the question: 'Is there some activity that Christians **must** do to follow Jesus?' Take this opportunity to remind the group that the Christian faith is not dependent on our actions, because we always make mistakes, but on what Jesus has done for us.

☆☆ The Qur'an

Muslims believe that the Qur'an (the Muslim scriptures) is the word of God revealed by God to his prophet Muhammad. It was revealed in Arabic, and may only be properly read in Arabic. Muslims regard any translation as an 'interpretation'.

Reciting and remembering verses is very important to Muslims. Many Muslims try to become *Hafis*: those who can recite the entire Qur'an from memory (it's nearly as long as the New Testament).

Learning parts of the Bible has a long tradition within Christianity. Learn a verse or two during the session. You can make it fun by putting the words in balloons which the young people have to burst by sitting on them. It is worth mentioning here the fact that Muslim people show great respect not only to the text of the Qur'an – but also to the actual book itself, which is always handled with great care, is never placed on the floor – and the idea of sitting on texts from the Qur'an would be shocking to a Muslim visitor to the group!

You could write the words on the bottoms of cups then fill them with lemonade, so they have to drink all the lemonade to get the words. Suggested verses: **John 3:16; Romans 8:28; John 10:10; 1 John 4:7.**

Why not challenge group members to memorise a whole chapter in the coming weeks – perhaps a chapter from one of the Gospels, as it keeps Jesus as the focus, and has lots of narrative.

Remind the group that remembering verses is one thing. Obeying them is the really important bit.



TEACHING IT

☆☆☆ The road to Emmaus

Read **Luke 24:13-35** as a group. Explain that the disciples recognized that Jesus

was a prophet of God, without realizing that he was God. The reality of the crucifixion prevented them from seeing how God could use an apparent failure for good. Veiling his identity, the risen Jesus drew alongside them and took time to listen to their hopes and fears, their disappointments and their misunderstanding. He then explained his life and death in the context of God's plan as expressed in the Jewish scriptures: how it was necessary for God to suffer and die to bring new life to the whole of creation.

This is similar to the challenge we face in engaging with our Muslim neighbours. We must take time to listen to their concerns, hopes, fears and disappointments and to be aware of their own views on scripture and the prophets. Then, walking alongside them, we can gently share the story of Jesus – and he may be recognized for who he really is.

☆☆ The life of Muhammad

What are the six most important events in your life so far? Where and when did they take place? Invite group members to list their answers to these questions. Listen to some of the (no doubt, humorous) responses.



Display the following events from the life of Muhammad (see the timeline on the Work-out sheet).

AD570 Muhammad is born in Arabia in the tribe of Quraysh. His father had died before his birth. The prophet's mother dies when he is six.

AD595 Marries Khadija, a wealthy widow, and works in her trading business.

AD610 Muhammad's first call to be a prophet whilst meditating in a cave on Mount Hira near Mecca.

AD622 The migration (*Hijrah*) to Medina. Muhammad is invited by converts who want him to resolve conflicts between different groups. The Muslim calendar dates from this year.

AD629 Muhammad and 10,000 Muslims return to Mecca. All the idols in the Ka'ba (large stone monument) are destroyed. Start of mass conversion to Islam by tribes.

AD632 Muhammad dies in Medina.

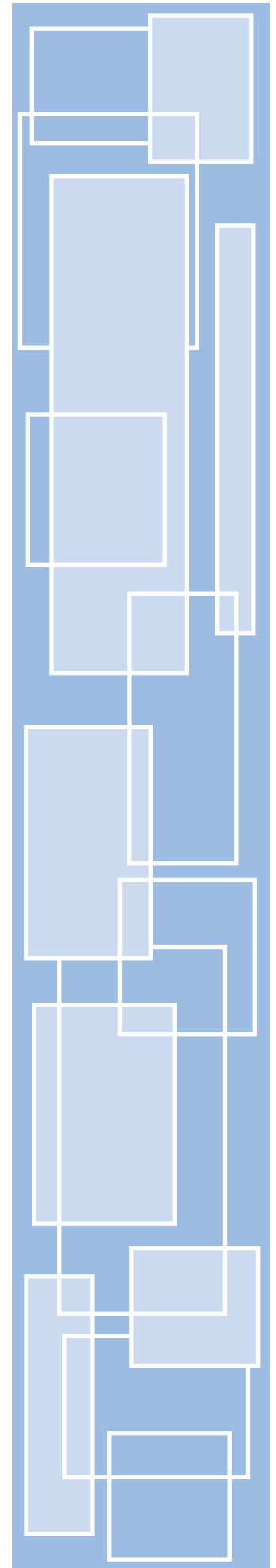
Muhammad is a very special person for Muslims. They believe he was the last prophet and the one to whom God revealed the Qur'an. When they mention his name, many Muslims will add: 'Peace be upon him'.

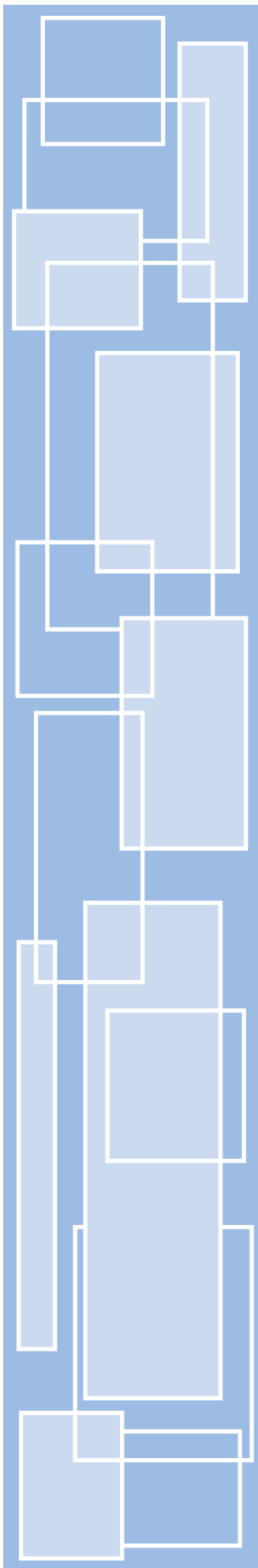
Now ask the young people to think of the six most important events in the life of Jesus. Discuss as a group what these events teach us about Jesus, and how he's different from Muhammad.



☆☆☆ Pray it

Muslims pray at set times, using set postures and prayers. Much of the praying is done kneeling down. Our 'praying postures' say a lot about our attitudes to God and to ourselves. Changing posture can also change our prayers and our feelings. Lead a time of prayer where the group members pray in different postures: kneeling, standing, sitting, lying prostrate. Make sure it is genuine prayer and doesn't degenerate into a game. Discuss afterwards how it feels praying in





different ways, and whether it challenges the group to think about their posture in prayer.

☆☆ Stereotypes

Prepare the 'advice cards' from the Work-out sheet. For this game to work you need to have a 'stooge', a group member (or two if you have a large group) who has agreed in advance to be 'excluded'. Invite a confident member with whom you have a good relationship. A young leader may be ideal.

You will need a supply of papers of various colours. Keep all the blue sheets to one side. Cut up the paper so that you can give each person a mixed-colour set of ten pieces of paper (but don't include any blue paper). Give your stooge (stooges) a set of ten pieces of blue paper, and no other colours. Give each person an advice card, which they must not show to others. Give the stooge the card that's blank apart from an asterisk.

The game is very simple: the young people have to collect as many bits of paper as possible. To collect paper, they offer one of their pieces to someone else; that person must then give them two in return. The advice cards will help.

Stop the game after about eight minutes. Find out who has the most paper and award a prize. Find out if anyone didn't do well. Your stooge should speak up, possibly with some heartfelt complaints. Ask everyone to show their advice cards – this will reveal that the game was a set-up.

It can be very painful when people have an incorrect image of us. Many Muslim people feel that they are at a disadvantage because of negative media coverage of their beliefs, customs and community.

Some feel that they are portrayed as terrorists or troublemakers. (We may not agree with this perception, but the point is to understand how others feel). Consequently they are sometimes treated unjustly. They may even be the victims of misinformation spread by racists and extremist political groups.

Spend some time praying for Muslims who feel hurt or resentful as a result of being wrongly treated. Challenge the group (and yourself) to see each Muslim person as an individual. Encourage members to try to get to know people personally before making judgements about their character.

☆☆ Telling your story

There is a long history of Christians and Muslims arguing about theology.

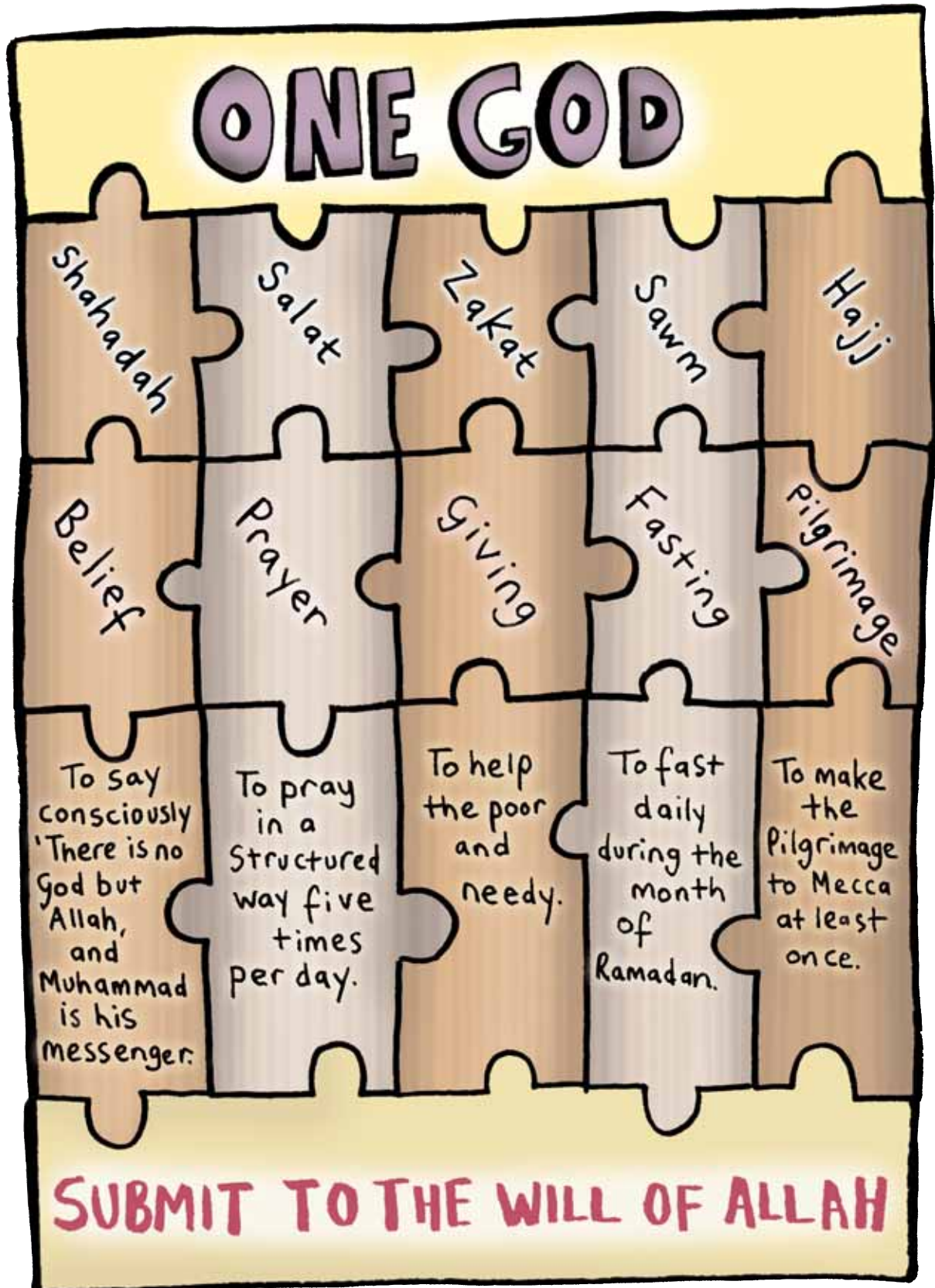
People are more likely to be touched by hearing personal stories than by disputes. Such stories are particularly significant if they reflect Muslims' concerns about life and faith.

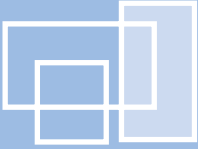
Give the young people three minutes to think of what God has done for them. It could be a conversion story or another important moment in their journey of faith. Then ask the young people to practise telling these stories to one another. As they are preparing, encourage them to think about explaining what their relationship with Jesus is like. Why do they love Jesus? Why is Jesus so important? What place do the Bible and prayer have in their lives?

For some, this might be very challenging as it might expose areas that they have never thought about. Encourage the group to share stories of what God is doing in their lives with friends outside the group. It might not come naturally to have conversations like this with our 'not yet Christian' friends. But such stories will certainly interest our Muslim friends.



The five pillars of Islam





The life of Muhammad

AD570 Muhammad is born in Arabia in the tribe of Quraysh. His father had died before his birth. The prophet's mother dies when he is six.



AD595 Marries Khadija, a wealthy widow, and works in her trading business.



AD622 The migration (Hijrah) to Medina. Muhammad is invited by converts who want him to resolve conflicts between different groups. The Muslim calendar dates from this year.



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AD629 Muhammad and 10,000 Muslims return to Mecca. All the idols in the Ka'ba (large stone monument) are destroyed. Start of mass conversion to Islam by tribes.



AD632 Muhammad dies in Medina.





Advice cards

Don't trust anyone who has blue paper. Blue-paper people will take your paper, but won't give you any in return.

Never give to blue-paper people. They always cheat.

Blue-paper people already have more pieces than you in a secret supply. Don't give them any more.

Blue-paper people have been told not to give any paper away. Stay away from them.





EQUIPMENT

- Photocopies of the Work-out sheet
- Bibles
- Pens
- Cards for 'What is God like?'
- Cocktail sticks
- Cork tiles, pins, string/wool
- Sheets of A4 paper



TEACHING POINTS

Hinduism is a complex mixture of beliefs in which the divine can reside in both people and things, and may be known in them also.

Christians believe that God is separate from creation and that he chooses to make himself known to human beings.



GROUP AIMS

To understand some key concepts of Hinduism.

To recognize the importance of family and community in Hindu belief and culture, in order to foster positive relationships between Christians and Hindus.

Hinduism: A melting pot of beliefs



LEADER'S GUIDE

Before you begin, make sure that you've read the introductory pages about the background to the series.

There are many forms of Hinduism covering a variety of beliefs and practices. So it is difficult to pinpoint a set core of Hindu beliefs.

There is currently pressure in the UK for a more 'systematic' kind of Hinduism, making it possible for it to be taught as a school subject and to make it more readily understood by people with a 'systematic' outlook. Hence the Swaminarayan Temple in north London has a permanent exhibition explaining Hinduism.

There is also a movement in India to promote a single Hinduism under the title of *hindutva* or 'Hindu-ness'.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

Romans 8:18-28. St Paul is writing to members of the church in Rome, the heart of an empire that is opposed to the gospel. These people are suffering persecution.

In this famous passage, Paul puts the sufferings of Christians in the context of God's plans for his people and for the world.

He does not tell them that this world does not matter and that the real business of God occurs in heaven. Neither does he say to the church their suffering is the end of the story and that God wants life to be a constant struggle.

Instead, Paul reminds the church that the whole of creation is waiting to be freed and that people who do his will are part of his plans to make everything new and to bring an end to suffering.

As followers of Jesus, we will become the people we are truly intended to be, which is to be like Christ (8:29). This process has already started and continues whenever we do God's will.

God loves the world. We can see signs of his love everywhere. As a loving, almighty creator, God wants to restore those parts of the world that are broken.

✪✪✪ What is God like?

Prepare sets of cards in advance (Work-out page 38) for an activity in small groups. Each group will need a set of cards.

Invite the groups to sort their cards into two or more categories of their own choice. It doesn't matter how they choose to categorise! Call a halt after a few minutes and invite someone from each group to talk about their sorting process.

Remind members of the account of creation in Genesis. Now ask them to re-sort the words into two categories:

- God as creator
- God's creation.

A Christian worldview affirms that God is separate from creation.

✪✪✪ Stick with it

This activity is suitable for individuals and for small groups. Give each person or group a set of six cocktail sticks. The challenge is to arrange the sticks in a configuration so that they create (in order):

- 1 equilateral triangle
- 2 equilateral triangles
- 3 equilateral triangles
- 4 equilateral triangles
- 6 equilateral triangles
- 8 equilateral triangles,

Set a time limit of eight minutes and then reveal the solution from the Work-out sheet. Prepare for a volley of cocktail sticks from unsuccessful participants.

Discuss the best approach to success. Those who got stuck on minor details probably were unable to find alternative ways of assembling the triangles. Those that began to think outside the box would have had a better chance of meeting the challenge.

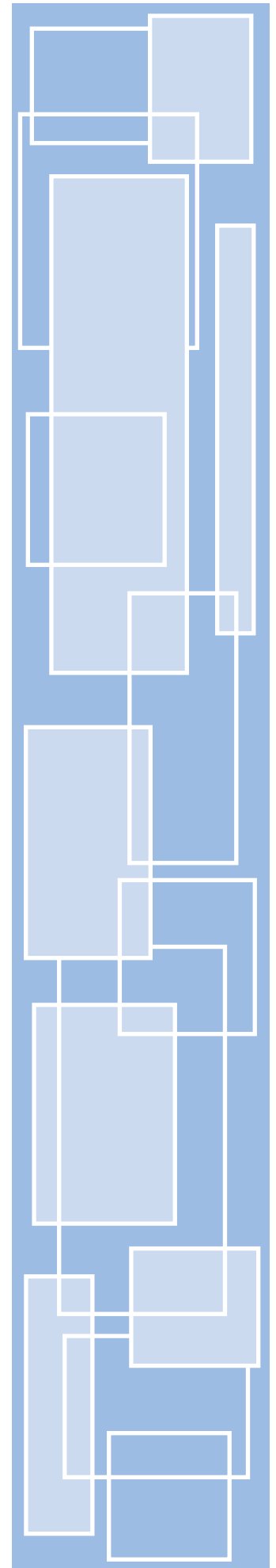
Hinduism may seem very alien to Christians.

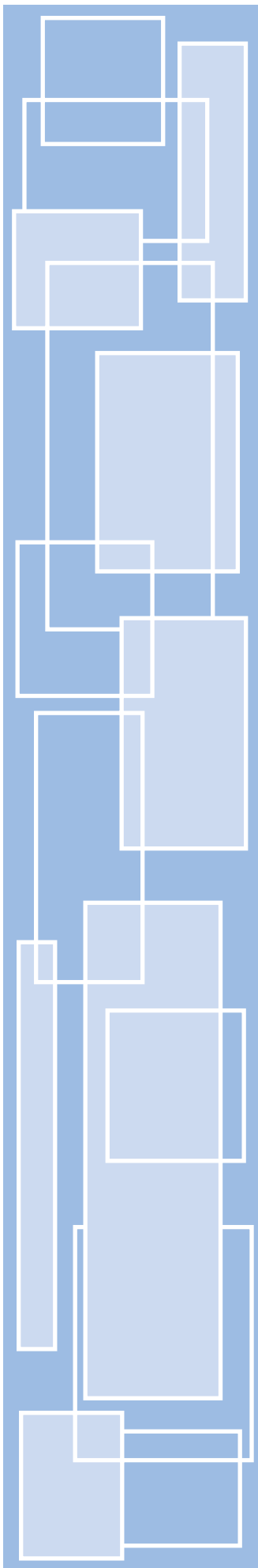
To understand this faith and to communicate confidently with Hindus, it helps to see some of the human concerns underlying the Hindu faith.

✪✪ Family ties

Family relationships are very important for Hindus. *Dharma* (the path of righteousness, duty and responsibility) is fulfilled through relationships.

The Hindu family is usually a much larger unit than the 'nuclear' family prevalent in many households. Failure to fulfil one's family duty will result in bad *karma*, which in turn may affect future lives. All family members are aware of their family commitments and these are often put before personal wishes. The Bible speaks about families and our roles within them.





Give each member of the group a cork tile and access to push pins and cotton/string /wool. Give the following instructions:

- Place a pin in the middle of the tile to represent yourself
- Add a pin for each member of your family
- Which pins represent people who influence the decisions that you make, and to whom you must listen – in short, the people you have to obey? Wind the cotton around these pins.

This activity can be a paper-and-pen exercise if you prefer.

Explain that for Hindu people (and for many people of South Asian background) the number of pins representing family members is likely to be very large. Hindu people experience a high degree of family expectation. Both the Old and New Testament reflect a culture in which the extended family was the norm. In fact, the biblical norm of extended families holding influence over individuals would be recognizable to many Hindus.

Refer to **Exodus 20:12** and **Ephesians 6:1-3**. How should we, as Christians, honour our parents and our families in a culture that emphasizes the individual?



TEACHING IT

☼☼ What goes around comes around...?

Read **Romans 8:18-28**. 'Why do good people suffer and why, so often, do bad people prosper?' These questions reflect some of the difficult facts of life confronting people in every age and in every part of the world. They crop up in the Bible, too. The psalmist often asks God why he allows such seeming unfairness (for example, **Psalms 73**).

Belief in reincarnation may seem strange to us. But it's worth noting that it offers an answer to this universal sense of injustice. When we're faced with a world in which the wealthy and the wicked live in ease, there's comfort in the belief that present wrongs will, in a future life, be righted. A belief in reincarnation encourages the poor and oppressed to lead lives of virtue and devotion, for which they may be rewarded in a future life of wealth and blessing. Similarly, the belief may encourage those who are privileged towards lives of fairness and moderation.

The Christian answer to the question of suffering does not involve reincarnation. We have no other life to live but this one! Jesus has suffered, just like us. His death on the cross has begun to unravel all the injustice and all the brokenness of the world. We wait patiently for the newness of God's kingdom, but it is 'breaking in' now and we are a part of that process.

Despite their very different understandings regarding suffering, Christians and Hindus should be able to empathize with one another on the questions behind those beliefs.

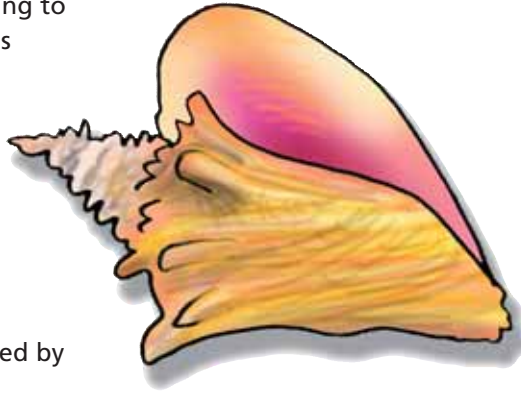
We should never mock other beliefs – or patronize those who hold them. Instead we should be ready to share the hope that the Christian story brings to the hard realities of human suffering.

☼☼ Some key Hindu beliefs

Hinduism isn't based on adherence to a set of core beliefs. Key concepts include:

- Only God (*Brahman*) is real. Everything else is an illusion. There is a little bit of God in everything (*atman*). The divine resides in the heart of each individual.

- There are many stories and tales referring to specific gods and goddesses that Hindus revere. Some of the Hindu festivals remember and recount these tales of gods and goddesses.
- The universe is sustained by *dharma*, which represents among other things, divine law, the path of righteousness, duty, responsibility, justice and truth.
- The divine has responded to human need by coming to earth in various forms called avatars.
- Individuals are judged on their actions both good and bad in this life and in past incarnations (*karma*).
- Liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*sansara*) is the goal of human life when the soul returns eternally into the abode of God. This liberation is known as *moksha*.



Share the Work-out sheet and draw attention to the above beliefs. What would you see as the Christian goal of human life? An important church document (the *Westminster Catechism*) states that the goal of humanity is to 'glorify God and enjoy him forever'. Our purpose begins now and we glorify God in our actions in this world, which is being restored by him.

DOING IT

🙏🙏 Pray it

The psalmist often asks questions of God about suffering. Have you ever asked questions in prayer? They can be an important part of our prayer life as we bring areas that we struggle with (confusions, doubts, questions) to God. God listens. He is not distant from us. He is committed to us and to justice in the world.

Give everyone an A4 sheet of paper and a pen. Some young people may feel embarrassed to express doubt or questioning in spoken prayer. Invite them to jot down some of their questions on the paper. Topics might include global issues of suffering: famine, war, disaster. Or they may be closer to home: family illness or bereavement.

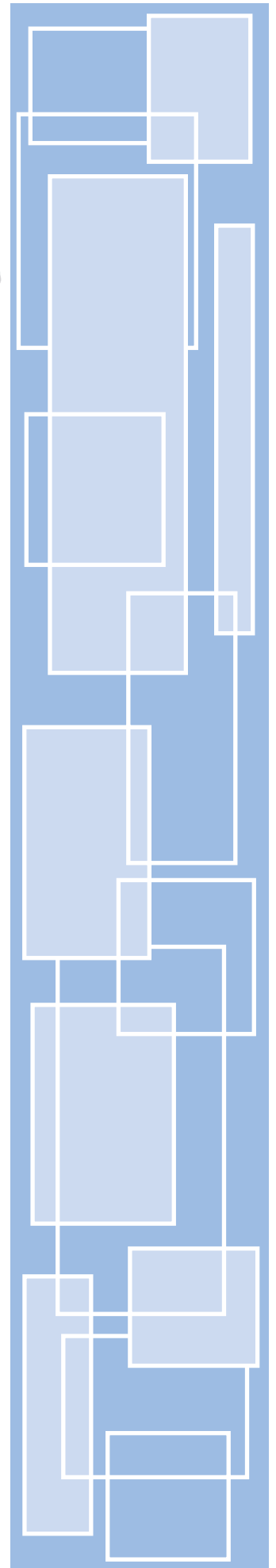
Encourage the young people to keep their notes safe, perhaps in their Bibles. At a future meeting, ask if anyone would like to share a question – and ask if God has spoken to them about it. Read **Romans 8:18-28** again.

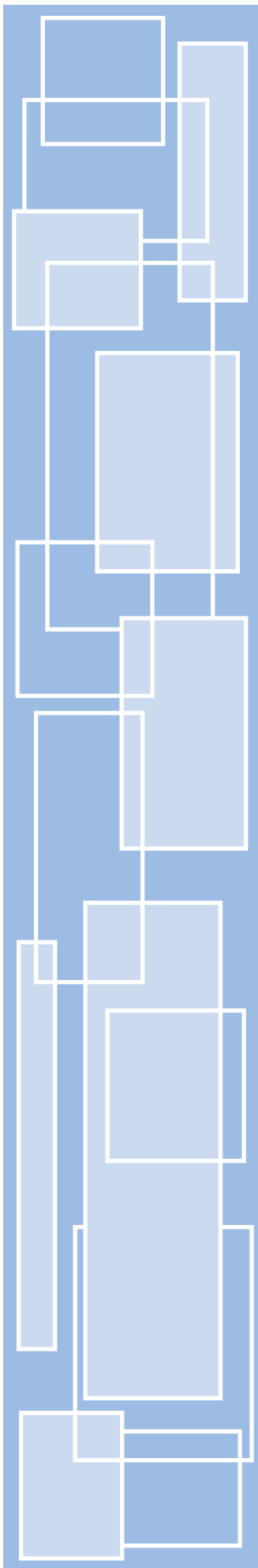
🙏 Pop idol

Hindu beliefs include devotion to gods and goddesses expressed through practices that we might describe as idol worship. In this respect, Christians could be tempted to feel superior to Hindu people, and also because of their readiness to see God living in creatures or in man-made objects.

Are there times, though, when all of us worship man-made things? What are the 'gods' that we place on pedestals? That so-cool mobile phone? That must-have garment? Friends, money, food – whatever?

Encourage group members to share honestly about times when they make things more significant than God. And – shock! horror! – reveal the news that leaders are not immune to such failings! Have a time of confession, sharing the mistakes we make. Read aloud **Romans 8:28** to finish this time of prayer.





✿✿ Glorify God

Distribute the 'Glorify God' Work-out sheets. Challenge the group members to think about areas of their lives in which they could glorify God a bit more than at present. Ask them to jot down ideas that are relevant to each of the six boxes on the sheet.

Ideas might include de-gunking and tidying a bedroom (family); or zipping your lip when tempted to gossip (friends). The 'world' section may be the most challenging as we consider responsibilities beyond our own circle of family and friends. Involvement with organizations such as Tearfund or Amnesty may offer a way forward.

Encourage the young people to challenge themselves, but also to be realistic and positive! We are created to glorify God 'and enjoy him forever'. Remind everyone that celebration is an essential aspect of glorifying God.



Some key Hindu beliefs



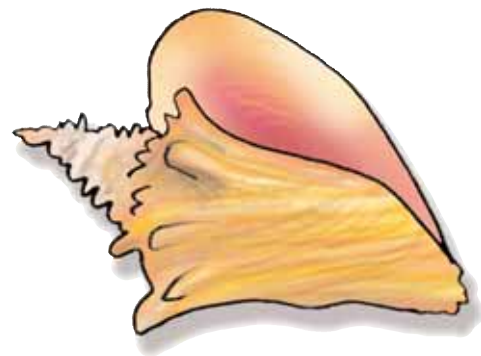
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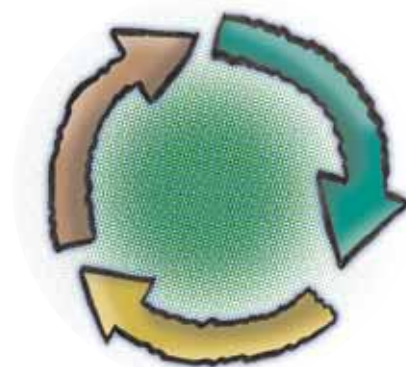
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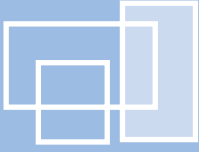
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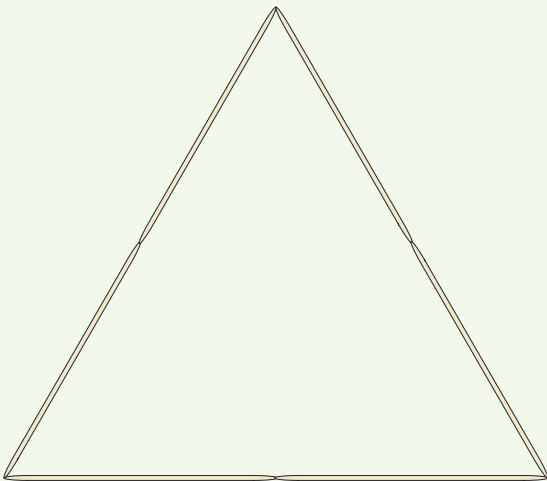
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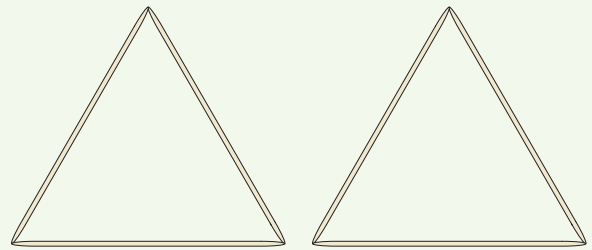
WORK-OUT

Stick with it!

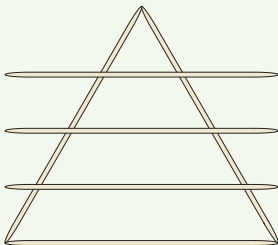
Solution



one triangle (two sticks per side)

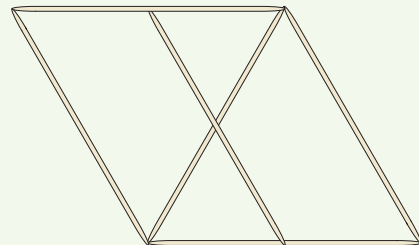


two triangles

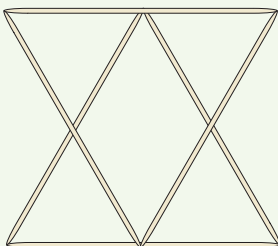


four triangles

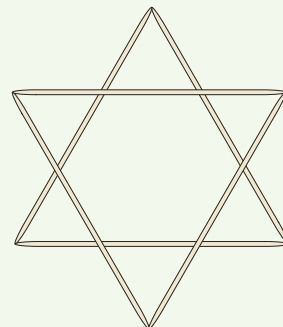
or



four triangles



six triangles



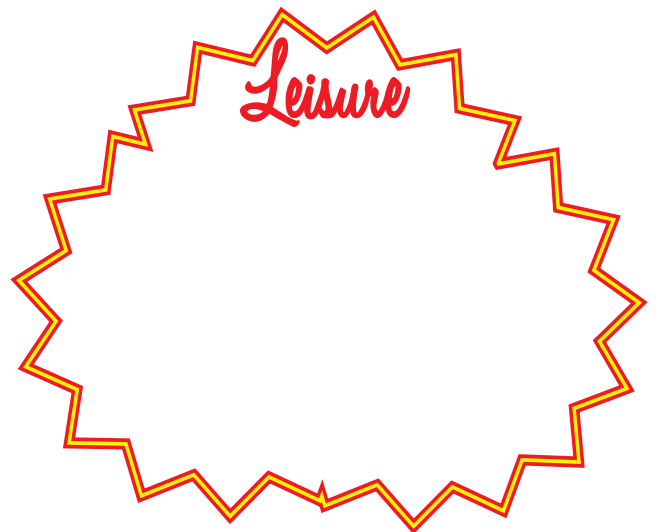
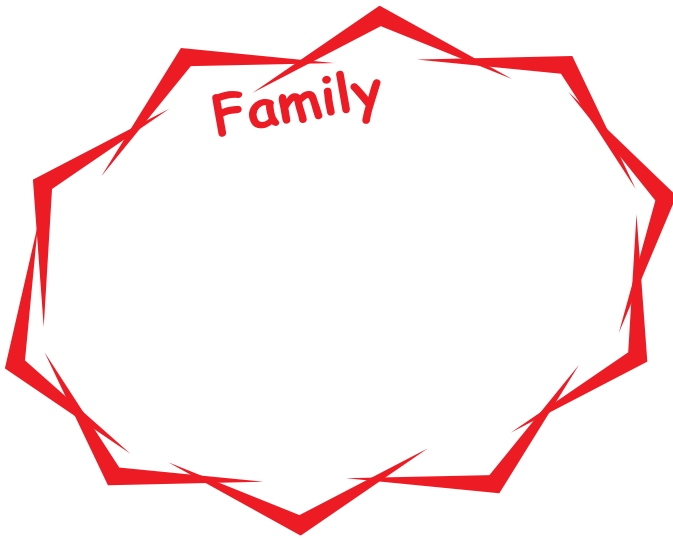
eight triangles

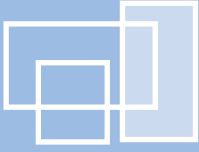


Glorify God!

Glorifying God at home? At work? With your mates? How's it going?

Why not check your lifestyle?





What is God Like?

Cards

god	rice	earth
economy	gender	lawn
man	sea	demon
garden	cow	angel
woman	bread	wheat
sky	boy	grass
spirit	blood	girl
tree	land	water
	house	

**TEACHING POINT**

Sikhs have a strong sense of family and community. They emphasise truth in their worship of God. Understanding these aspects of Sikhism will challenge a Christian's approach to truth and the church's practice of hospitality.

**GROUP AIM**

To learn some of the core beliefs and practices of Sikh people so that we may be able to communicate with them confidently and sensitively.

**EQUIPMENT**

- Photocopies of the Work-out sheet
- Bibles
- Pens
- Cakes for the 'Seva'
- Sheets of A4 plain paper and rolls of sticky tape for 'Raising the Bible'

Sikhism: Gurus and gurdwaras

**LEADER'S GUIDE**

Before you begin, make sure that you've read the introductory pages about the background to the series.

Sikhism originated in the Punjab area of North India during the sixteenth century.

This faith was founded by Guru (teacher) Nanak, who had become disillusioned with the Hindus and Muslims he saw around him.

Guru Nanak viewed the surrounding religious practices as hypocritical and superficial and sought after truth. He gathered a band of followers, developing a distinctive way of life.

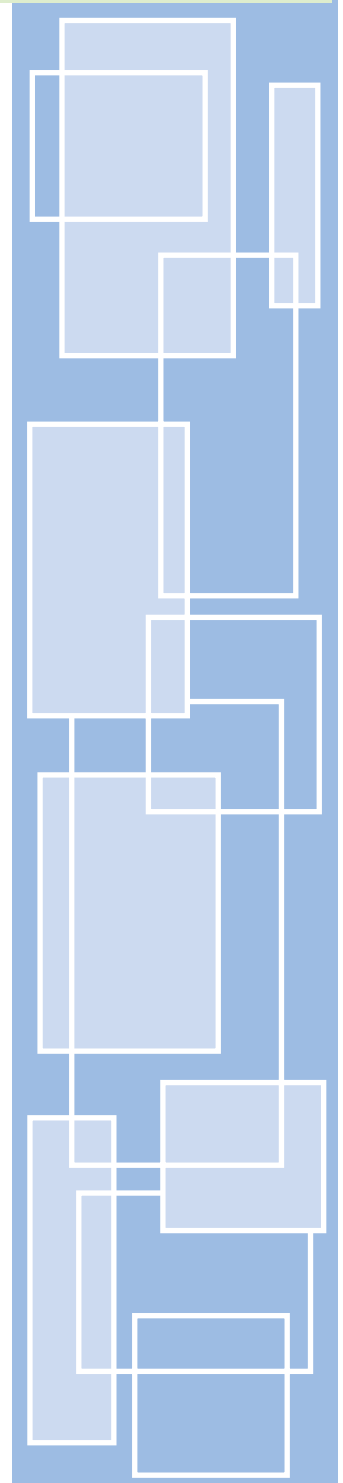
Over the next 200 years, the religious writings of Guru Nanak and the nine gurus who followed him were collected to make the holy book of Sikhism, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. The scriptures have the same status as the classic teachers of the faith, hence the use of 'Guru' in its title.

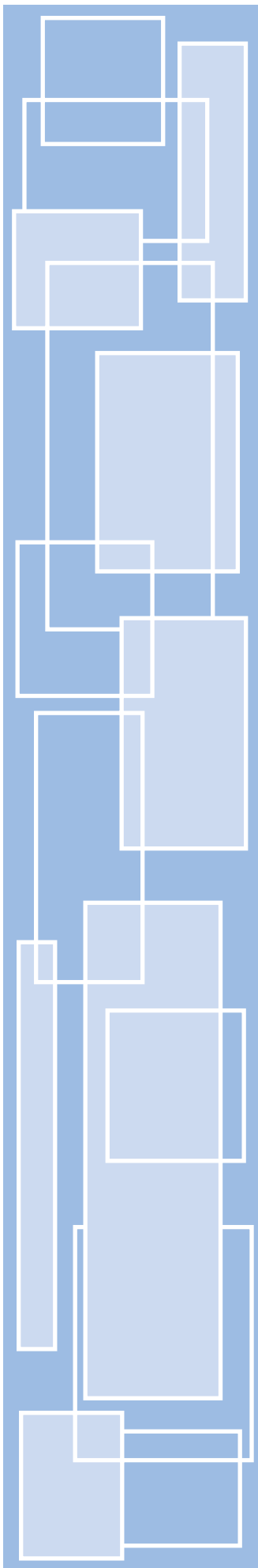
Sikhs respect and honour people of other faiths and do not question the authenticity of other religions. One is born a Sikh and the idea of conversion is alien. Therefore, the Sikhs that one meets will all have family links to the Punjab: the faith is integrally linked to the culture, community and history of that region.

**BIBLE BACKGROUND**

Luke 15:11-32. The parable of the prodigal son is one of Jesus' most powerful stories because it is one of the most shocking. The original hearers would have noted its shock value. Sikhs, too, would be able to relate to the scandal that Jesus describes.

The idea that a son would ask for his inheritance before his father's death was outrageous. In effect, the son was saying that his father might as well be dead for all he cared. In the culture of the time, that was an unforgivable sin. The son's subsequent return would have been viewed as adding insult to injury.





The original audience would not have expected the turn that Jesus took when he told the story. They would never have dreamed that the father would welcome him with a banquet and a new cloak, let alone that he would hitch up his robe and run out to welcome his son!

The father's actions were shocking because he would be seen as shaming himself by allowing the son back. The father would have been within his rights to kill the son for the way he had dishonoured the family.

In this parable, Jesus emphasises God's love and mercy, ahead of the truth and justice aspects of his character.

*** Raising the Bible

Divide the group into teams of five or six. Ensure each group has four sheets of A4 paper, some sticky tape and a hardback Bible. Explain that the challenge is to use the paper to support the Bible so that no part of it is in contact with the flat surface on which you are working (most probably the floor or a table top) – the higher off the surface you raise the Bible, the better.

Give the teams about ten minutes to create their solution and judge the best.

The best solution is to roll each A4 sheet into a tube, taping it closed and supporting the Bible at four corners by the four tube 'legs'.

Explain that the Sikh scripture, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, is regarded as the word of God and as the 'Lord' of Sikhs. Special rituals attend its use and if one is used at home, the book will even have its own room, especially reserved for devotions.

*** Group identity

Divide the group into two teams for a team-naming competition. Ask each group to choose a great team name that identifies it as well as possible. Now invite each to share its name with everybody – non-verbally. Cue frantic miming.

As in a game of charades, one team mimes while the other attempts to guess. Discuss together which name best identifies the team and why.

Sikhism developed as a way of separating a group from other religious communities. Its distinctive aspects were an important marker of identity and continue to bind Sikh families together. For example, we will notice Sikh males by their turbans or topknots: one of their 'distinctives' is for males not to cut their hair.

** What is a Christian?

Use a flipchart or OHP to brainstorm a list of Christian 'distinctives'. Ask, how do people know we are Christians? Discuss the responses. These may include: colour, race, wearing of symbols, attendance at certain buildings, and participation in certain rituals. Challenge the group to consider how people can guess we are Christians. Read **Galatians 5:22-23** in which St Paul describes the 'fruit of the Spirit'. Suggest that these are the things that should identify us as Christians.



TEACHING IT

*** Welcome home!

Read **Luke 15:11-32**. From its foundations the Sikh faith has emphasised truth. We must be very conscious as Christians, then, of not falling into the trap of hypocrisy and superficiality to which Sikh people are particularly sensitive.

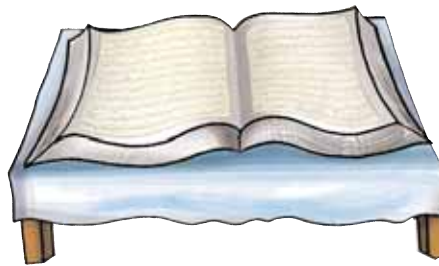
This emphasis on truth, justice and honour may mean that a Sikh would have difficulty relating to the parable of the prodigal son.

However, this is also an opportunity to demonstrate that God is above all loving and full of mercy. Jesus deliberately tried to shock in order to highlight his 'radical' depiction of God, using a narrative that seems to be leading us towards themes of justice and punishment. The father was willing to be shamed in order to be reconciled to the son. Jesus died on the cross for us: God accepted 'shame' on our behalf.

We'd do well to consider the 'elder son' strand of the story. He became jealous of the attention the father gave to the 'lost' son. It's tempting to look at those of other faiths, to despise them and somehow to think that we deserve better. Let's be honest about the ways in which we disappoint God. And let's be grateful for his love and mercy, rejoicing whenever anyone, regardless of their background, discovers something of God's love.

✪✪ Some key Sikh beliefs

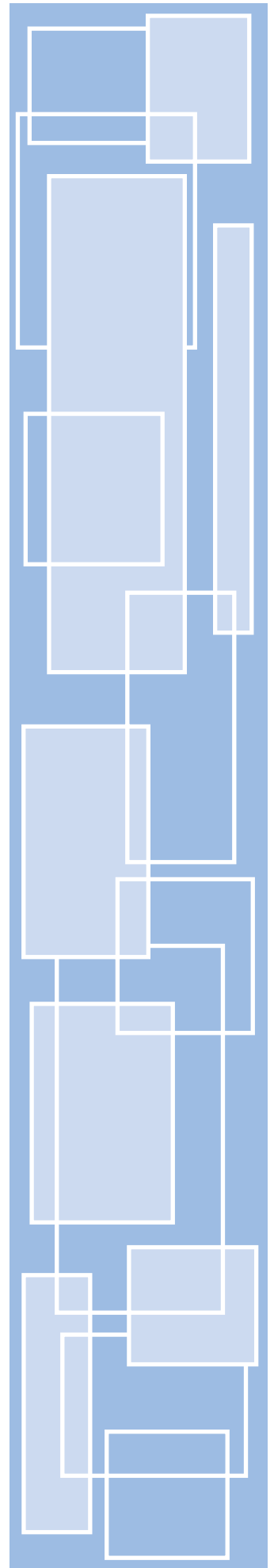
- **Scriptures** The religious writings of Guru Nanak and the nine gurus who followed him were collected to make the holy book of Sikhism, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. The scriptures have the same status as the classic teachers of the faith, hence the use of 'Guru' in its title. The *Mool Mantra* is the basic Sikh creed: 'There is one and only one God. Truth is his name. He is the Creator. He is without fear. He is without hate. Immortal, he is beyond birth and death. He is self-illuminated. He is realized by the kindness of the true Guru. Think! Beyond and in time past he was the Truth, now and forever he will be the Truth.'
- **Reincarnation** Sikhs, like Hindus, believe in reincarnation. There is a strong sense of suffering as fate. Sikhs are encouraged to do good works to gain freedom from suffering in a future life.
- **Places** Sikhs worship in a Gurdwara, or temple, where there are readings from the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, prayers and personal devotions. There are notable holy sites in the Punjab where heroes and martyrs of the faith are remembered. The most famous of these is the Holy Temple at Amritsar.
- **Khalsa** is an important term, meaning 'the pure ones'. This describes the company of faithful Sikhs determined to keep the distinctive practices alive in the face of persecution.
- **Hospitality** Many Gurdwaras are open continually. Guests are welcome and may be offered *prasad*, food given as a token of welcome and hospitality.
- **Service** *Seva* is the name given to acts of service in the Gurdwara or in the community. It may involve the provision of the food, teaching of Punjabi to children, care for the elderly and many other practical expressions of the faith.



Introduce the key Sikh beliefs from the Work-out sheet.

Recent years have brought a '24/7' prayer campaign, encouraging young Christians to set up round-the-clock prayer rooms. A Sikh-background friend says that Sikhs invented this idea!

What can we learn from Sikh hospitality and *seva* of Sikhs? How do you think it might feel for a Sikh to come to your church? Would they expect it to be open on times other than a Sunday morning? What would they find if they came on a Monday evening for example?





DOING IT

*** Pray it!

You may wish to prepare for this activity by gathering a selection of relevant newspaper headlines.

Sikhs have experienced persecution. Take some time to pray for areas of the world where there are conflicts that have links to faith. Christians, sadly, have been guilty of using faith as an excuse for violence. Include an expression of repentance in the prayers.

- Pray for peace among the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities in India.
- Pray for good relations between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.
- Pray for peace between the various faith communities in Northern Ireland.
- Pray for the people of Iraq and for peace between adherents of the Sunni and Shi'a branches of Islam.

** Coat of arms

Look at the Sikh *khalsa* symbol on the Work-out sheet. The cross has become the main symbol of the Christian faith. These days, the cross is used as jewellery, as a fashion statement. For many people it is also an image of the West and of colonial history.

Some families have a 'coat of arms' that represents the family name. Using the shield in the Work-out sheet, draw a coat of arms to represent the Christian faith. You might want to use the cross or to find a different way of presenting the same truth of God's sacrifice for us. Spend some time sharing your respective Christian coats of arms.

** 'Seva'

In Sikh devotions, eating food is often used as a way of praying. As an act of *seva* (service) to one another, share some cakes amongst yourselves. However, rather than just tucking in quickly without thought, encourage everyone to be quiet for a moment before they start eating. Either privately or aloud, thank God for the good things he gives, pray for his sweetness, his love to enter our lives just as the food enters our bodies. Before tasting the cakes, invite people to 'taste' how good God is. This is a way of praying that uses more than one sense. And enjoy!

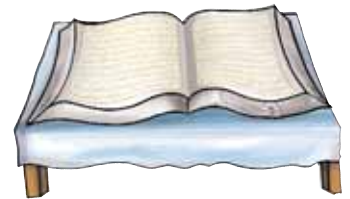


Key Sikh beliefs



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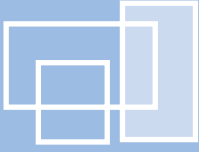


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Sikh 'Khalsa' Symbol





Coat of arms





EQUIPMENT

- Photocopies of the Work-out sheet
- Bibles
- Pens
- Paper
- Bible verses on paper for 'Memory verse'
- String and triangles of coloured paper for the 'Prayer washing line'



TEACHING POINT

There are profound differences between Buddhism and Christianity. We therefore need to listen carefully and respectfully in order to be able to share with gentleness the hope that we have in Jesus.



GROUP AIM

To learn the basics of Buddhist belief.

To see beyond stereotypes so as to relate to Buddhist people with love and confidence.

Buddhism: Enlightening the subject



LEADER'S GUIDE

Before you begin, make sure that you've read the introductory pages about the background to the series.

Buddhism is one of the most ancient of the world's faiths. Its origins go back to the life of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, who lived in India in the sixth century BC.

Broadly speaking, many Buddhists come from, or have roots in, China, Malaysia, Vietnam, Japan and Korea. But there are also western Buddhists, who have become attracted to the mysticism and meditations of the Buddhist faith, perhaps as a deliberate rejection of Christianity and western materialism. There are many different traditions and branches within Buddhism.

Buddhists do not believe in a supreme being or god. Images and statues of the Buddha are a focus of devotion and meditation rather than of worship.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

1 Peter 3:14b-16. Peter writes this letter to a church that is clearly suffering for its faith. There is a strong theme of endurance and perseverance in this letter. Much of Buddhism is a response to the question of suffering.

Christians and Buddhists have a very different answer to this question. But understanding Buddhism faith will help us to find connections so that we can communicate the hope we have in Jesus.

These verses, and the wider section of which they are a part, are a wonderful guide to ethical living in a 'pluralist' world, in which a vast range of beliefs and practices are available, and where, in many places, Christians are in the minority.

Peter's advice instructs the church on the sort of behaviours and attitudes that

pierce through the misunderstanding and competing beliefs that are around. This kind of advice is crucially important for us today.

*** What do we have in common?

Split the group into pairs, preferably linking members who do not know each other well. Each pair has three or four minutes to discover as many things as possible that they have in common.

Aim for a list that exceeds fifteen items. Items can be as simple as 'we both have a brother' or more exceptional ('we have both visited Japan'). Encourage the pairs to find items in common that are as strange as possible, that no one else will have. Award a prize to the pair that has the longest 'unique' list.

Given time, it is interesting how much we can find in common with one another. Many world religions, including Buddhism, address the big questions of life and death. We may disagree with the answers given by a religion, but it is important to know what questions people are trying to have answered.

*** Proverb quiz

Give out copies of the Work-out sheet. Complete the proverbs, working in teams. Go through the answers together and then ask the group to explain the meaning of the proverbs. Do the pictures conjured up by the proverbs make sense? For example, 'the early bird catches the worm' is easy to visualise and does not need much explanation. But what about 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'?

Proverbs are 'pictures' that communicate wisdom and advice. The Bible has a book called Proverbs which contains many such 'pictures', offering wisdom about the world, suffering and the search for 'enlightenment'.

** I like me because....

Split the group into pairs, preferably linking members who do not know each other well.

Ask them to sit looking one another in the eye. Encourage them to sit in ways that show openness and mutual attention (i.e. with arms and legs uncrossed). Ask them to label themselves A and B. Ask A to speak to his/her partner for two minutes on 'what people like about me'. Encourage the listeners to do so without interrupting, but as attentively as possible. After two minutes, switch roles.

Many members will feel uncomfortable with this activity. Ask them to share their feelings about the process. Were they embarrassed? Did they feel they were being bigheaded? Or did some find it very easy?

Buddhists do not believe there is a constant, fixed 'self'. They believe we change from moment to moment and that we were not created as unique individuals.

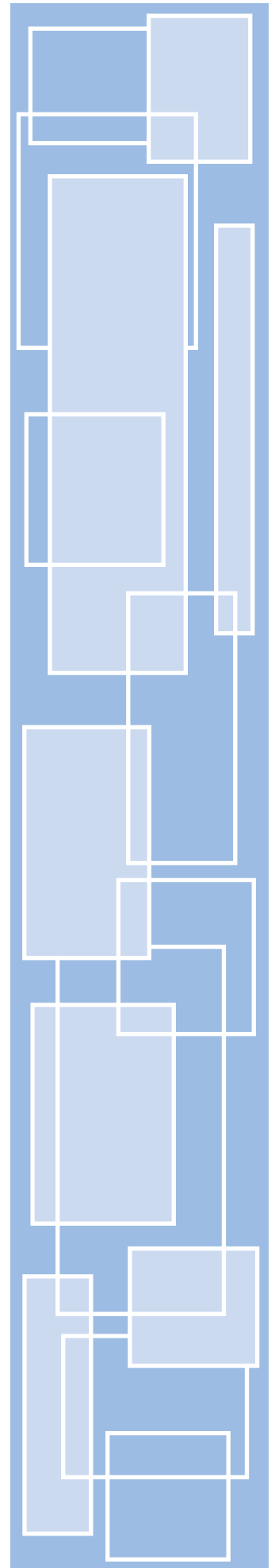
Affirm to the group that God created each of us, unique and special, and that we are 'very good', the summit of God's creation. However, we are created for relationship, not to be isolated and selfish, but to 'love our neighbours as ourselves'.

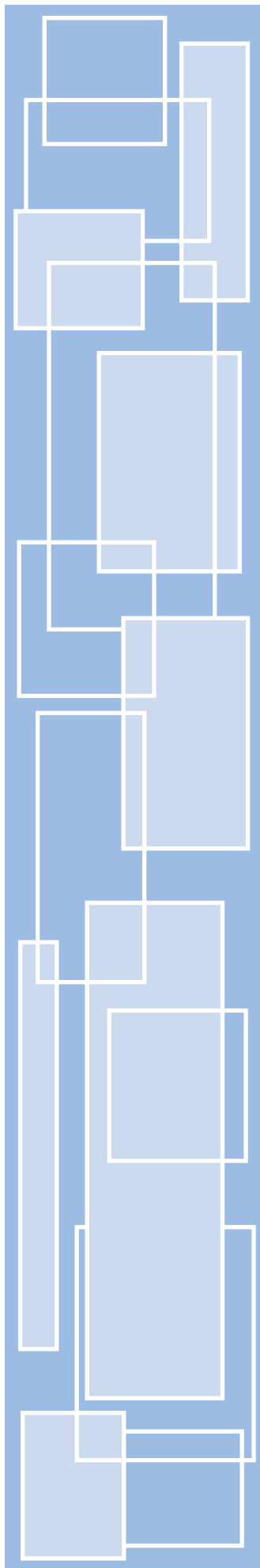


TEACHING IT

*** Guidelines in a confusing world

Read **1 Peter 3:14b-16**. Peter reminds the scattered group of Christians that they





belong to Jesus. They are living in a world that does not understand them and where many different beliefs are being followed.

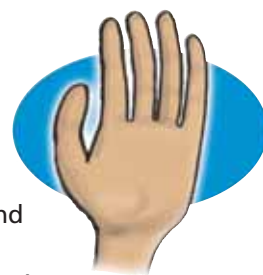
Building on the foundation of belonging to Christ, Peter makes five suggestions:

- 'Do not fear' (3:14) Even when we do not understand people and their beliefs, we need not be afraid of them.
- 'But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord' (3:15) Remember who you are and the source of your life and your priorities.
- 'Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you' (3:15) Are we responding to the questions and issues raised by others? Find out what questions others are asking and be ready to share Jesus as your hope.
- 'Do it with gentleness and respect' (3:15) Buddhism is a faith that values respect and gentleness very highly. Christians should set high standards of gentleness and respect.
- 'Keep a clear conscience' (3:16) Buddhists respect integrity and honesty; many western Buddhists have rejected Christianity as boring and hypocritical.

☯ Some key Buddhist beliefs

The 'Four Noble Truths' are central to Buddhist belief:

- **The truth of suffering** All things change and there is a constant cycle of birth, death and reincarnation.
- **The truth of the cause of suffering** Suffering is caused by selfish desires that create the endless cycle of rebirths. Spiritual ignorance causes this focus on the self and this ignorance only disappears at 'enlightenment'.
- **The truth of the end of suffering** Suffering ceases when desire ceases. This state of leaving 'self' and putting an end to the cycle of rebirth is known as *Nirvana*.
- **The truth of the path leading to the end of suffering** There is an eight-fold path known as the 'Middle Way' for right living which eventually leads to enlightenment.



Distribute the Work-out sheet on the Four Noble Truths.

For Buddhists, suffering is a result of wrongs caused by selfish desires, done in previous lives. For Christians, suffering is part of a much bigger problem connected to the brokenness of the world and its separation from God as a result of human sin during 'the Fall' that we read about in Genesis. It is more serious because it is the result of a fundamental separation from God. Yet, there is a Christian hope in Jesus who has come to break the consequences of sin and restore creation and put an end to suffering.

▶ DOING IT

☯☯☯ Pray it!

Many people are attracted to certain forms of Buddhism because of the practice of meditation. Despite its differences from Buddhism, Christianity also has many traditions that value meditation.

How can we encourage types of prayer that allow for moments of stillness in a busy, noisy world?

Use this opportunity for some Christ-focused meditation, which is completely different from Buddhist inward-focused meditation. Pay special attention to the physical aspects of your environment. This activity is not about copying Buddhist prayer, or worshipping created things. It is, however, about using all that God has given us to worship him.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Aware of our auditory senses** Play some meditative music (ambient chill, a meditation CD, some quiet classical music, birdsong).
- **Aware of our visual senses** Light some candles or tea lights and lower the lighting to enhance the atmosphere.
- **Aware of our sense of smell** Burn some incense or light some scented candles, or burn some joss sticks.
- **Aware of our bodies** Sit on the floor, maybe crossed legs with arms open, symbolising our welcome of God's Holy Spirit.
- **Aware of the Bible** Take one verse from scripture and read it out. Be unafraid of re-reading it. Ask the group to chew over the words, maybe to repeat them after you several times – affirming our guidance from the Bible.
- **Aware of God** End the activity with short prayers thanking and praising God. Emphasise the fact of the 'different' focus of Christian meditation: the created person looks out towards the loving Creator who calls us into relationship with him.

Use the prayer time as a model for teaching about the nature of Christian prayer and its differences from Buddhist beliefs.

✿✿ Memory verse

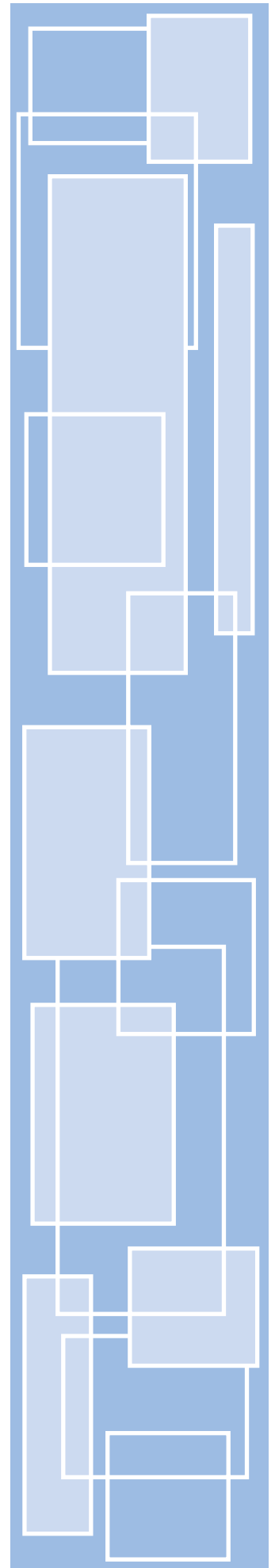
Give out slips of paper, each bearing one of a selection of Bible verses for group members to memorize.

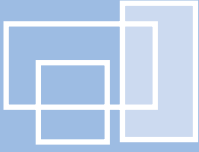
Challenge members to do this – and to spend some time each day meditating on the verse. Encourage them to practise meditation as a way of thinking and reflecting on God's Word. As we chew over a text, it gradually becomes part of us. As St Paul urged: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (**Colossians 3:16**).

✿✿ Prayer washing line

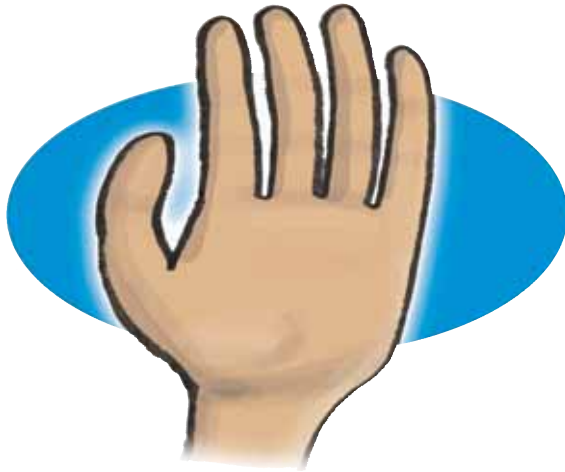
In Buddhist temples, prayers are sometimes written on ribbons that are hung on the walls, or on pieces of paper that are then burned. They act as symbols of the cycle of life, death and reincarnation. No one can know what happens to the prayers, but they add to the cycle of life.

Give out coloured triangles of paper and encourage the group to write prayers on these triangles. Staple them to a long piece of string and hang this in your room, rather like a colourful washing line. Remind the group that we worship a God who is personal, who answers prayer and who loves us: 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know' (**Jeremiah 33:3**).



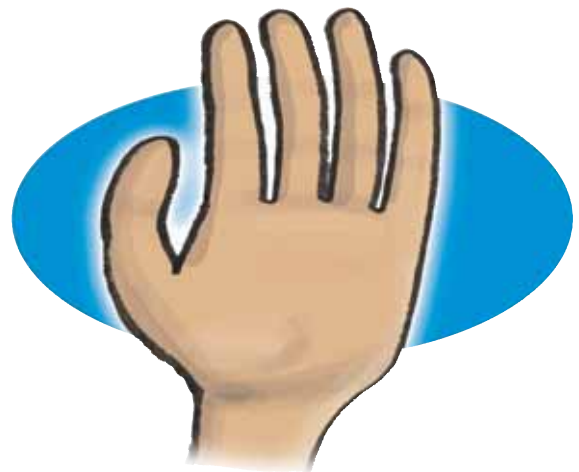


The four 'noble truths' of Buddhism



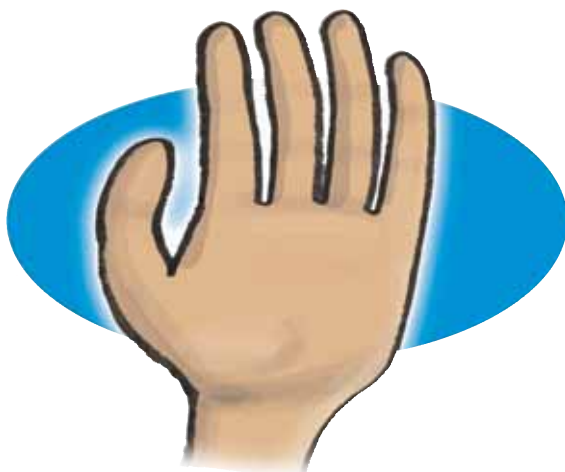
The truth of suffering

All things change and there is a constant cycle of birth, death and reincarnation.



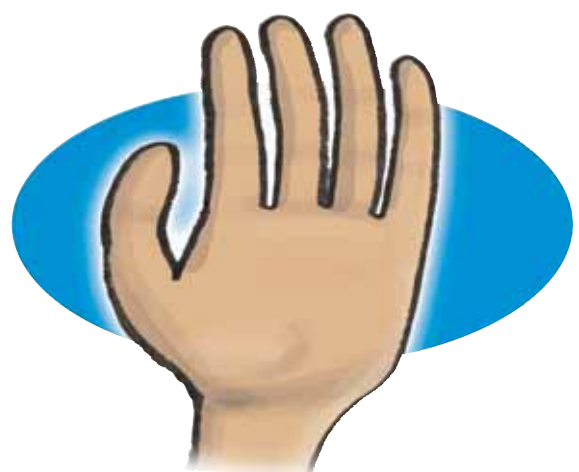
The truth of the end of suffering

Suffering ceases when desire ceases. This state of leaving 'self' and putting an end to the cycle of rebirth is known as 'Nirvana'.



The truth of the cause of suffering

Suffering is caused by selfish desires that create the endless cycle of rebirths. Spiritual ignorance causes this focus on the self and this ignorance only disappears at 'enlightenment'.



The truth of the path leading to the end of suffering

There is an eight-fold path known as the 'Middle Way' for right living which eventually leads to enlightenment.



Proverbs

1. A fool and his/her money
2. When the cat's away
3. Too many cooks
4. Haste makes
5. Crime does not
6. A bird in the hand is
7. The early bird gets
8. Give me liberty or
9. Better late than
10. More haste less
11. A miss is as good
12. Every cloud has a
13. Jack of all trades and
14. Absence makes
15. A stitch in time
16. Beware of Greeks
17. Don't look a
18. Honesty is the
19. Let sleeping
20. There's no such thing as a



Proverbs

Answers

1. A fool and his/her money are soon parted.
2. When the cat's away, the mice will play.
3. Too many cooks spoil the broth.
4. Haste makes waste.
5. Crime does not pay.
6. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
7. The early bird gets the worm.
8. Give me liberty or give me death.
9. Better late than never.
10. More haste less speed.
11. A miss is as good as a mile.
12. Every cloud has a silver lining.
13. Jack of all trades and master of none.
14. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
15. A stitch in time saves nine.
16. Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.
17. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.
18. Honesty is the best policy.
19. Let sleeping dogs lie.
20. There's no such thing as a free lunch.



EQUIPMENT

(Depending on which sections you tackle)

- Photocopies of the Work-out sheet
- Bibles
- Pens
- A4 sheets of paper
- 15 items for 'Pick 'n' mix'



TEACHING POINT

'New Age' spiritualities cover a broad range of practices and beliefs, emphasising the spiritual in every area of life. Many people have become involved in 'New Age' as a reaction to our society's indifference towards spirituality and mysticism, and towards the health of our planet.



GROUP AIM

To recognize some key aspects of New Age spiritualities so as to be able to discern an appropriate Christian response.

New Age spiritualities: Picking and mixing



LEADER'S GUIDE

Before you begin, make sure that you've read the introductory pages about the background to the series.

'New Age' conjures up a variety of images. It is a useful phrase to denote the welter of new and old beliefs that are being 'picked and mixed' in the western world.

There are probably New Age shops in your area. You may have noticed sections of bookshops devoted to alternative spiritualities. You may have come across 'Mind, Body, Spirit' fairs in your area. Maybe you have friends who use crystals or who are concerned about auras.

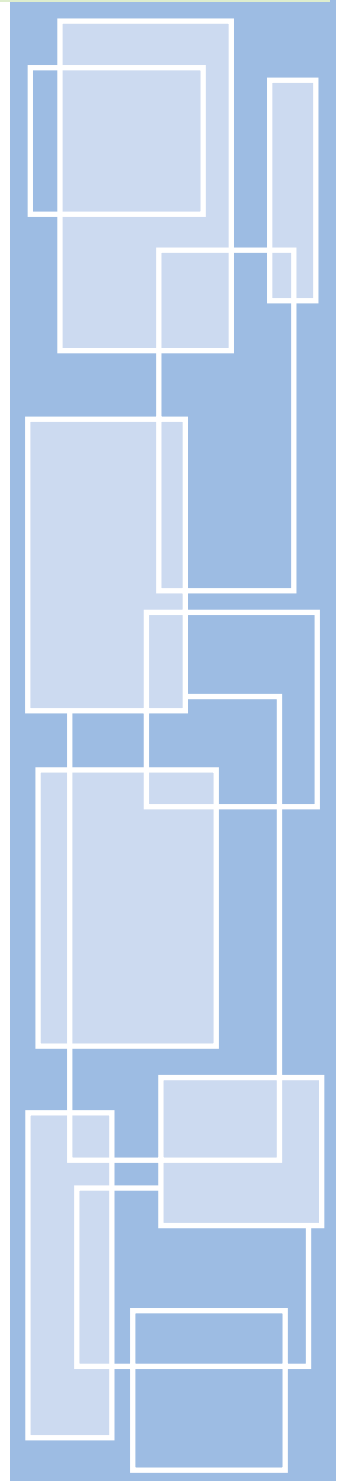
There is a wide spectrum of practice, ranging from the odd and eccentric (UFO watching and alien encounters for example!) to the dangerous (occult practices, such as attempting to contact the dead). We will not be able to analyse the plethora of practices that come under the banner of the New Age. Instead, we'll point out some principles that connect them.

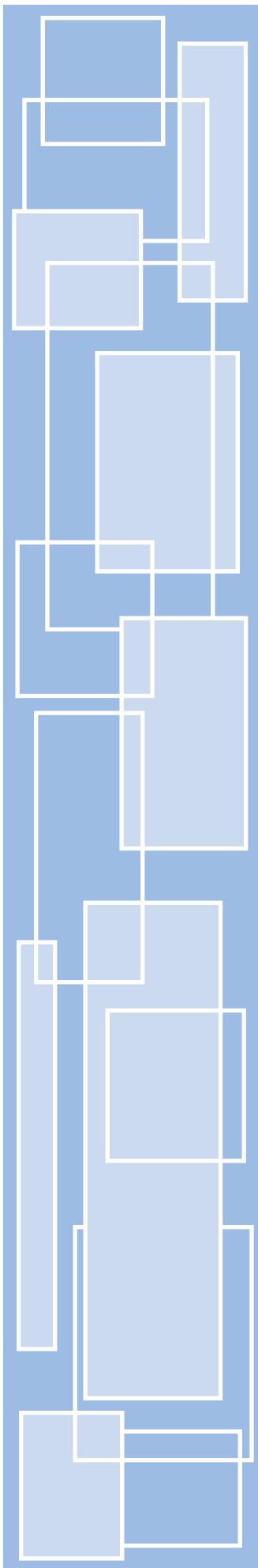


BIBLE BACKGROUND

Acts 19:23-41. Paul had been in Ephesus for two years. Ephesus, like Athens, had many temples to many different gods. Its principal deity was Artemis, the goddess of hunting and childbirth.

Paul's teaching, accompanied by miracles in the name of Jesus, had a huge impact on the city. Ephesus was home to a thriving industry linked to the Artemis cult. The temples and many of the related artefacts are to be seen if you visit Ephesus, which is now in Turkey. The spread of Christianity in the city posed a serious threat to the prosperity of the Artemis manufacturers and traders. No wonder they were protesting!





The Christians were dragged into the amphitheatre (capacity 25,000 people and still standing) and there was a near riot while people shouted out the name 'Artemis' and demanded something be done about the troublesome Christians.

*** Pick 'n' mix

Invite members to form teams of five or six. Gather a diverse selection of fifteen objects and place them on a tray or table top. Cover them with a cloth. Tell the teams about the hidden items and warn them that you will let them see them for sixty seconds. Their challenge is to memorise the items so that they can recall as many as possible when you cover them again. Prizes for the team that remembers the most items.

We live in a pick 'n' mix society, with lots of faiths and practices available for us to choose from – as if they were items on a supermarket shelf. People will choose what suits them and may sometimes mix up beliefs in a way that may not make sense.

Sharing our faith with people from New Age outlook is challenging. God calls us to follow him exclusively. But it is also exciting. We must be able to offer something real. It has to make a difference.

*** Will the real person please stand up!

Give out the pens/pencils and sheets of A4 paper. Ask each member to create a self-describing picture, or series of pictures: of themselves, their hobbies, interests, family – anything! Literal or symbolic. Ask members to keep their pictures private while they are creating them.

Collect all the pictures and stack them face down. Ask a volunteer to choose a sheet from the pile and to reveal the picture. The volunteer then tells the group as much as possible about the creator of the picture by interpreting the sketch. Encourage them to make as many assumptions and guesses as possible.

After each 'introduction', the person who drew that sketch stands and clarifies, corrects or more truthfully completes his or her introduction. That person then pulls out another picture and proceeds to 'introduce' that individual. Keep this going for about five minutes.

We can make certain guesses and assumptions from what we see, but we only get the real picture by listening to the story straight from the horse's mouth!

** Most? Best? Greatest?

Ask group members to work in pairs, preferably with a partner they don't know very well.

Invite them to share with one another their responses to the following questions:

- If you could have a T-shirt printed with a message, what would it say?
- What is your most prized possession?
- What is your greatest achievement?

Invite members to share some of their responses with the whole group.

It's good to talk about the things that matter to us as individuals. Our world endorses a very 'me-focused' outlook: we should make a stand for our rights and strive to get the best for ourselves.

The Christian outlook is different: our desires, our statements and our identity are secondary to what God wants for us.

We can trust God to want the best for us. But the best may not always be what we think it should be! Two major aspects of the New Age movement are the focus on the 'self' and a consumerist approach to spiritual matters. Jesus tells us that we gain life by losing it in love for others (**Matthew 10:39**).

TEACHING IT

*** I predict a riot!

Read **Acts 19:23-41**. Read through the passage. Sketch in some background information about the religious and business life of Ephesus.

Paul had told the Ephesians that 'man-made gods are no gods at all' (**19:26**). At one end of New Age spiritualities are practices and beliefs that do not amount to anything, based on man-made ideas, rather than on the worship of gods. We need to have a healthy sense of realism about what has power and what has not.

But it's important to note that part of Paul's ministry in Ephesus also involved delivery from evil spirits. Sorcery, the abusive use of negative spiritual power, was practised in Ephesus.

This is the tension we hold when we consider the range of New Age spiritualities: from empty to dangerous.

Many people are simply searching and they latch on to ways of meditating or to symbols that they find helpful. Others are engaging in dangerous practices that we are warned against in the Bible, such as sorcery (see **Leviticus 19:26** in which the practice of divination, using mediums, and casting spells is strictly forbidden).

We will need to be sensitive to this range of possibilities. Interestingly, the town clerk of Ephesus states that Paul never once blasphemed the goddess Artemis and did not rob the temples. Even when we disagree, we must:

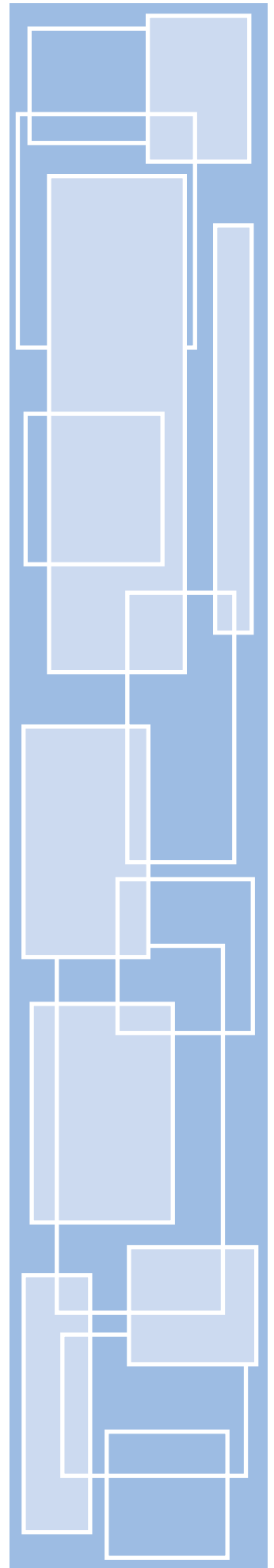
- treat the beliefs of others with respect
- behave with honesty and integrity at all times.

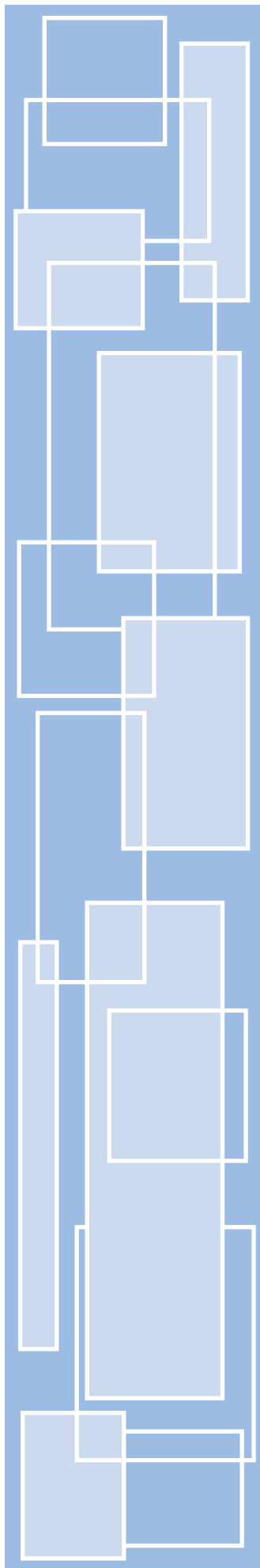
*** Some guidelines on New Age beliefs and practices

Please see the Work-out sheet.

- **Monism** This is the belief that everything that exists is interconnected and actually one. This outlook suggests that there is a mystical unity about the world and the goal of spirituality is to become conscious of this oneness. As Christians, we believe that God is distinct from creation. But we also believe that creation reveals something about God, his love and his creativity (**Romans 1:20**).
- **Paganism** This aspect of New Age beliefs is a form of 'nature religion', possibly involving the observance of ancient festivals and rites. 'Nature' is seen as a spiritual entity with force and life to be venerated and worshipped. Many people embrace New Age in response to the destruction of the natural environment through human interference and exploitation. It's essential that Christians should be strongly aware of our stewardship responsibilities towards God's creation. We should have genuine concern for ecology without falling into the trap of mixing the creation with the Creator (**Genesis 1:26,28; John 1:3**).
- **Sacred self** Some people celebrate the human self as in some way divine, or in possession of a 'divine spark': truth is inside each of us and is discoverable by us. Christians believe that Jesus is the 'Truth': we discover God through revelation, not by our own effort (**John 17:6**).

A variety of practices flows from these three common New Age beliefs. Some of





them draw from Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, or are blended in from psychology and alternative therapies.

Two New Age challenges for Christians:

Do we have a 'spiritual gap'? Those involved in the New Age are not usually interested in rational arguments and abstract ideas. They are often looking for healing and peace. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to enable us to have peace and to serve others through healing. Should we be praying more for healing? Should we be developing and reconnecting with more ancient Christian practices of prayer and meditation, rather than always seeking to fill worship services with noise and talking?

Do we have a 'creation gap'? God wants to restore creation and is saddened by our misuse of it. Many 'New Agers' have reacted against the traditional church: they see it as linked to the forces that have exploited the planet. But there's no reason why environmental awareness and a concern for 'green living' should not be a central part of an individual or church witness.

Many Christians see conservation as part of the church's mission, pointing to the loving Creator of our beautiful planet.



DOING IT

Pray it

Remind the young people about the three wise men who followed the star and found the baby Jesus (**Matthew 2**). Invite them to consider the following....

As astrologers, these 'magi' were doing something forbidden by God and yet they were led right into the presence of Jesus, the Saviour of the World.

Astrology is not an option for us today. At best it's a waste of time and at worst it is the equivalent of telling God that we don't trust him and want to find a way of manipulating creation without him: a dangerous thing to do. That said, we have to accept that God met those three wise men because they were searching.

Think about some of your friends and family who may be searching, but who are possibly looking in the wrong places. They may belong to another faith, be experimenting with New Age ideas, or they may have shared with you how sometimes they pray even though they do not believe in anything. Pray for 'searchers' known to you. Pray that the Holy Spirit may meet them and reveal the King of Kings to them.

Physical/spiritual check-up

Look at the inventory page of the Work-out sheet. Invite the young people to consider various areas of their lives during a normal week. Christians believe that the mind, body and spirit are interconnected. So, when we go to church to worship God, we don't switch our minds off but we use our minds as well as our spirit. When we are at school or at work we ought to be praying and remembering who we are as God's children – and not just exercising our brains, or our bodies.

Think about activities that you are involved in. Is there sometimes a gap between the mind, body and spirit?

For example, youth group member Baz plays football once a week. Once he's donned his kit, he's a different lad – swearing that would make a pirate blush! Looks like there's a bit of a gap between physical and spiritual? Are there any similar aspects of life that members could list in the appropriate box?

Someone else might think that the church youth group doesn't address the members' Monday-Friday struggles. Write that down as an area in which the everyday should influence the spiritual.

Invite the young people to share their thoughts with one other person, and to pray for one another, making a commitment to becoming more 'rounded' Christians.

♻️ Going green!

Distribute the Work-out sheet of 'Going green' conservation tips. Is there anything else that group members could do?

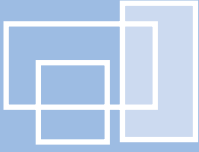
Does your church have a 'green policy'? If not, brainstorm for ideas on how to create such a policy. For example, does the church recycle paper, buy recycled paper? Encourage the group to be a catalyst for church-wide change for good in the area of conservation.



As we have seen throughout this series, other people's beliefs often pose a challenge that can make us better Christians. The New Age movement is passionate about ecology and conservation. So should Christians be!

It would be tragic if people influenced by New Age thinking and practice view Christians as people who are concerned with heaven and not bothered about the earth. We must break down such barriers, otherwise many people will struggle to discover the hope that Jesus offers to them.

A vertical blue bar on the right side of the page. It contains several overlapping white-outlined rectangular boxes of various sizes and orientations, intended for writing notes or answers to the questions on the page.



Some New Age beliefs

Here are just a few commonly held 'New Age' beliefs.

Monism

This is the belief that everything that exists is interconnected and actually one. This outlook suggests that there is a mystical unity about the world and the goal of spirituality is to become conscious of this oneness.

As Christians, we believe that God is distinct from creation. But we also believe that creation reveals something about God, his love and his creativity (**Romans 1:20**).

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This aspect of New Age beliefs is a form of 'nature religion', possibly involving the observance of ancient festivals and rites. 'Nature' is seen as a spiritual entity with force and life to be venerated and worshipped. Many people embrace New Age in response to the destruction of the natural environment through human interference and exploitation.

It's essential that Christians should be strongly aware of our stewardship responsibilities towards God's creation. We should have genuine concern for ecology without falling into the trap of mixing the creation with the Creator (**Genesis 1:26, 28; John 1:3**).

Sacred self

Some people celebrate the human self as in some way divine, or in possession of a 'divine spark': truth is inside each of us and is discoverable by us.

Christians believe that Jesus is the 'Truth': we discover God through his revelation of himself, not by our own effort (**John 17:6**).



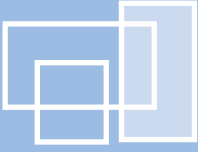
Physical/spiritual check-up

Are some people so heavenly-minded that they're no earthly good? Maybe some are the other way round?

Try to think of ways you get a good physical/spiritual balance in your life.

Bringing the spiritual into the physical

Bringing the physical into the spiritual



Going green!

Print on both sides
of your paper.



Recycle your paper.



Recycle print
cartridges.



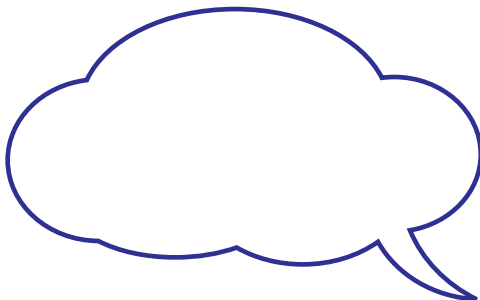
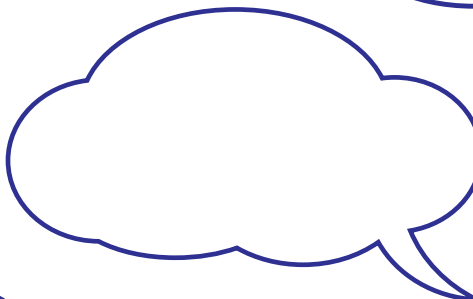
Do a regular
bottle bank visit.



Don't use
plastic bags.



Develop a church
'Green Policy'.





EQUIPMENT

- Photocopies of the Work-out sheet
- Bibles
- Pens
- Large sign: 'Who are you?'
- Modelling material or play dough.
- Country/mission profiles to distribute



TEACHING POINT

The belief that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in one, is central to the Christian faith. This difficult concept has an impact on how we live out our faith. We are called to be like God – in relationship, dynamic, loving, and reaching out to others, reflecting the life of the Trinity.



GROUP AIM

To understand something of the importance of God being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To love and welcome those who differ from us.

The Trinity: Who are you?



LEADER'S GUIDE

Before you begin, make sure that you've read the introductory pages about the background to the series. Display prominently a large sign reading 'Who are you?' in your meeting room throughout the session.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

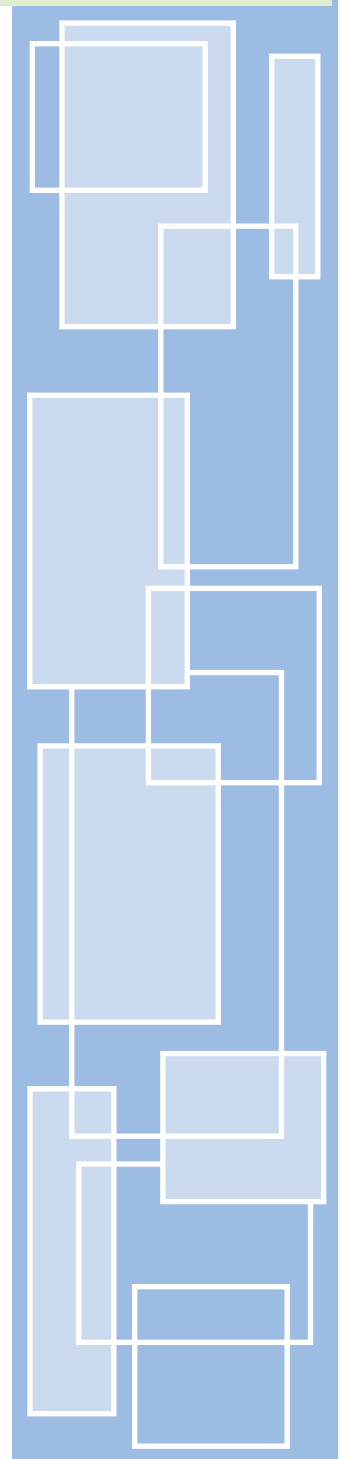
John 17:15-26 Jesus is preparing for his death, aware of the unavoidable suffering ahead of him. He is praying to God the Father, firstly for the disciples who are there with him and, secondly, for those who will follow him in the future: for us! The text of **John 14-17** shows how Jesus is intimately identified with God: 'All I have is yours, and all you have is mine' (**17:10**).

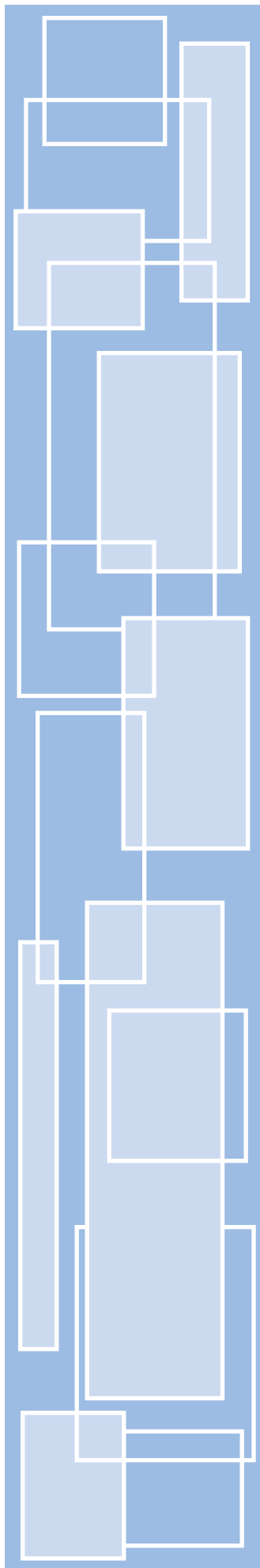
In these prayers, Jesus talks about the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, God's presence with the followers of Jesus after his return to be with the Father. The Holy Spirit is intimately identified with God as the Spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father (**15:26**). In these passages Jesus shows how God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, working in different ways and in different times but always to honour and bless the other parts of the Trinity.

The key verse is: 'As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world' (**17:18**).

What does it mean to follow the example of Jesus, being sent out and empowered by the Holy Spirit? As we think about the Trinity, with its dynamic 'diversity within unity', we can see that God himself is our role model.

The God whom we serve does not keep us comfortably away from the realities of the world and all its diversity. Rather, his example challenges us to encounter a world full of difference, confusion, plurality and conflict. In short, Christians are exactly the kind of people who should be making an impact in a society that has become a melting pot of religions and ideas.





*** Morph

Throughout the session, keep referring to the sign 'Who are You?' All being well, we shall find some answers as the session progresses. Distribute modelling material and challenge the group to create a self-portrait sculpture in five minutes or less. Award prizes in a variety of categories: most creative, best likeness, best unintentional likeness – and so on.

Read **Genesis 1:26** God said: 'Now we will make humans, and they will be like us.' To know what we are like and how we are meant to be, we must understand something of what God is like. We will be exploring what it means for God to be 'in Trinity': Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And that, because of this, he is a God of relationship.

*** Being a Trinity

Ask for three volunteers. Invite them to sit on the floor, shoulder to shoulder, facing outwards, their backs forming a triangle. Ask them to link arms. Now challenge them to stand up from their sitting position without loosening their arms. (If you have enough members, you could have several teams and have a race.)

The Bible teaches that there is only one God, who has three distinct persons. Each person is totally separate, and each totally God. This is beyond the scope of our non-Trinitarian brains. The important thing for us to grasp now is that God exists in relationship. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit love one another and have done for all eternity. The Father knows what it's like to be separated from the Son. The Son and the Spirit know what it is like to obey the Father.

** Four-legged Race

If you have the space, have a four-legged race. It's like a three-legged race, but with trios rather than pairs.

Read **1 John 4**. 'God is love.' This is perhaps the simplest definition of what God is like. If God is love, then he is a God of relationship. If we are created to be like God, then we too are to be in relationship with others. We are not meant to be simply individuals who make no impact on anyone else and on whom others make no impact.



TEACHING IT

*** Host and guest

Read **John 17:15-26**. Draw attention to **17:18**: 'As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world'. Ask the young people: How was Jesus sent into the world? Now explore their responses.

Jesus became a human being: from the moment of his conception he was as vulnerable as any other human being. In terms of feelings, senses, mind and spirit his experience was as human as ours is today.

So when we think about God entering our world and living our life, there's a sense in which he came as a guest. Hard to grasp! After all, the world was created by him. But this is what God chose to do.



But at the same time, Jesus invites us to a new way of living, welcoming us to share his life through the Holy Spirit – and to share in all the goodness of God. So, in a strange way, God is also a host.

This is a helpful way of looking at the Trinity. God is both host and guest, creating and serving, glorifying and being glorified, giving and receiving. And this is how he wants us to be.

At the end of these sessions, remind the young people of the importance of trying to understand others. We need to stand in their shoes, work out their questions. In doing so we can learn deeper things about our own faith. This is one of the great things about being made in relationship! As we reach out to listen and learn, we can grow and find out more about what God is like.



*** Who are you?

Distribute the 'Who are you?' sheets. Remind everyone that we do not exist in isolation. As the sheet makes clear, the theme is based on the number three!

Look at the first 'Who are you?' This is about thinking of ourselves in relation to God.

Invite the young people to write their name and note down three things that are true about them in relation to God. Suggest that they begin with: 'Made in the image of God'. They could add truths like: 'Son/daughter of God'; 'heir'; 'fearfully and wonderfully made'; 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. If you think the young people may need more help, prepare a list of Bible verses referring to our identity 'in God'.

For the next 'Who are You?' ask them to write their name and jot down three aspects of who they are in relation to their family. For example: 'son of Jimmy Jasper'; 'sister of Jonah Jasper' – and so on.

For the final 'Who are You?' ask them to complete their name and to add three aspects of who they are in relation to their friends: 'best friend of Sharon Pink'.

Since we are created in the image of God, we're made to reflect the 'community life' of the Trinity. That being so, we find our true identity through relationship with others.

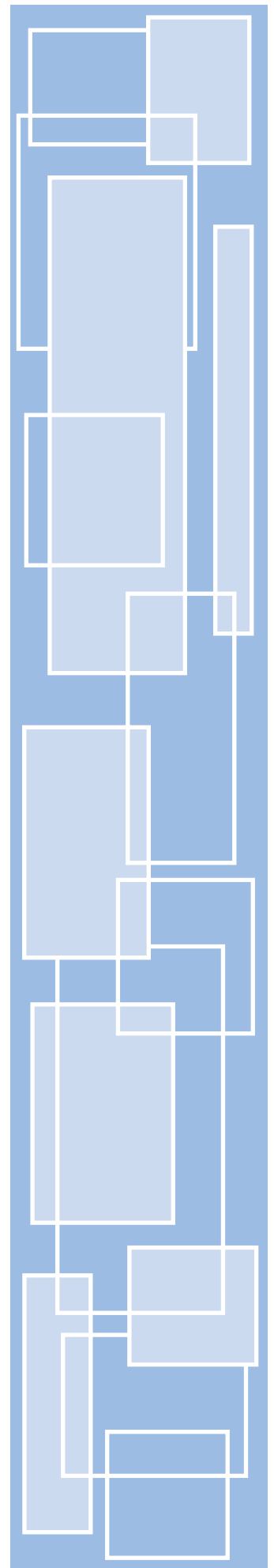
Our world includes people of different cultures and beliefs. We have a responsibility to follow the example of Jesus and to live as both host and guest. So when we love our neighbours we are inviting and welcoming, but we are also to serve them, making ourselves vulnerable.

In what ways can this group be:

- 'Hosts' to people who are different from us
- 'Guests' of people who are different from us?

** Trinity: A quick guide

Share the Trinity handout. Give time for the group to read through it. It is a simple guide for them to keep.



 **DOING IT****☆☆☆ Pray it!**

Being a 'guest' in a relationship means doing some listening: watching what others do, noticing their habits and customs, their likes and dislikes.

Remind the young people that during these sessions they have been encouraged to relate confidently to people of other faiths. We can't relate to others without knowing what they think and believe. That is why it is essential to have some basic knowledge about other faiths.

Spend some time praying in pairs for friends who aren't yet Christians. Write their names on the Work-out sheet. Encourage the group to remember these friends in prayer throughout the week and to commit to finding out more about them. It's good to ask open-ended questions of people: What do you believe? What do you wish for? What gives you purpose in life? What do you think life is all about? To pray for people effectively, it helps to know 'where they are coming from'. We don't need to rush to bring our solutions to them. If we ask open-ended questions, it is likely that our friends may ask us in turn: 'What do you believe?'

☆☆ All are invited!

Spend some time brainstorming about an event to which you could invite friends. In the spirit of being 'hosts', think of a fun activity that you could arrange that would bless friends who do not share your beliefs – people from other faiths, or with no faith at all. This is not an opportunity to preach at your guests. It's simply a practical way of demonstrating love and welcome.

If anyone asks why you have arranged the event, you could explain that you want to show something of the love that God has shown you. But don't feel that the event has to be super-spiritual! You might want to invite friends to a meal that you have prepared and which you serve to them.

Let your creative juices flow to plan a practical demonstration of God's welcoming love!

☆☆ Research

Get hold of a copy of *Operation World* (Patrick Johnstone, Jason Mandryk and Robyn Johnstone, Authentic), or check out its website www.24-7prayer.com/ow/

Operation World has information and statistics about countries all around the world. Choose a country that might be a natural connection for your group (perhaps you have local communities with a particularly country of origin, or a mission link to a particular country). Prepare a profile sheet along the lines of those on the 24/7 website.

The New Wine and Tear Fund magazines carry similar information.

Hand out the profile. Remind the group that we need to do some research to be able to have a connection with people and to pray for them. This is another example of being a 'guest' and acting in loving relationship.

Encourage the young people to do some of their own research. Ask them if there is a country that they have visited or that tugs at their heart as they see the news on TV. Set them a task to prepare their own 'prayer profile' of a country through searching the Internet, compiling clippings from newspapers or sharing stories from people or situations they know in that country.



Who are you?

God

My name is..... And I am also:

a.

b.

c.

Family

My name is..... And I am also:

a.

b.

c.

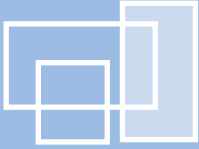
Friends

My name is..... And I am also:

a.

b.

c.

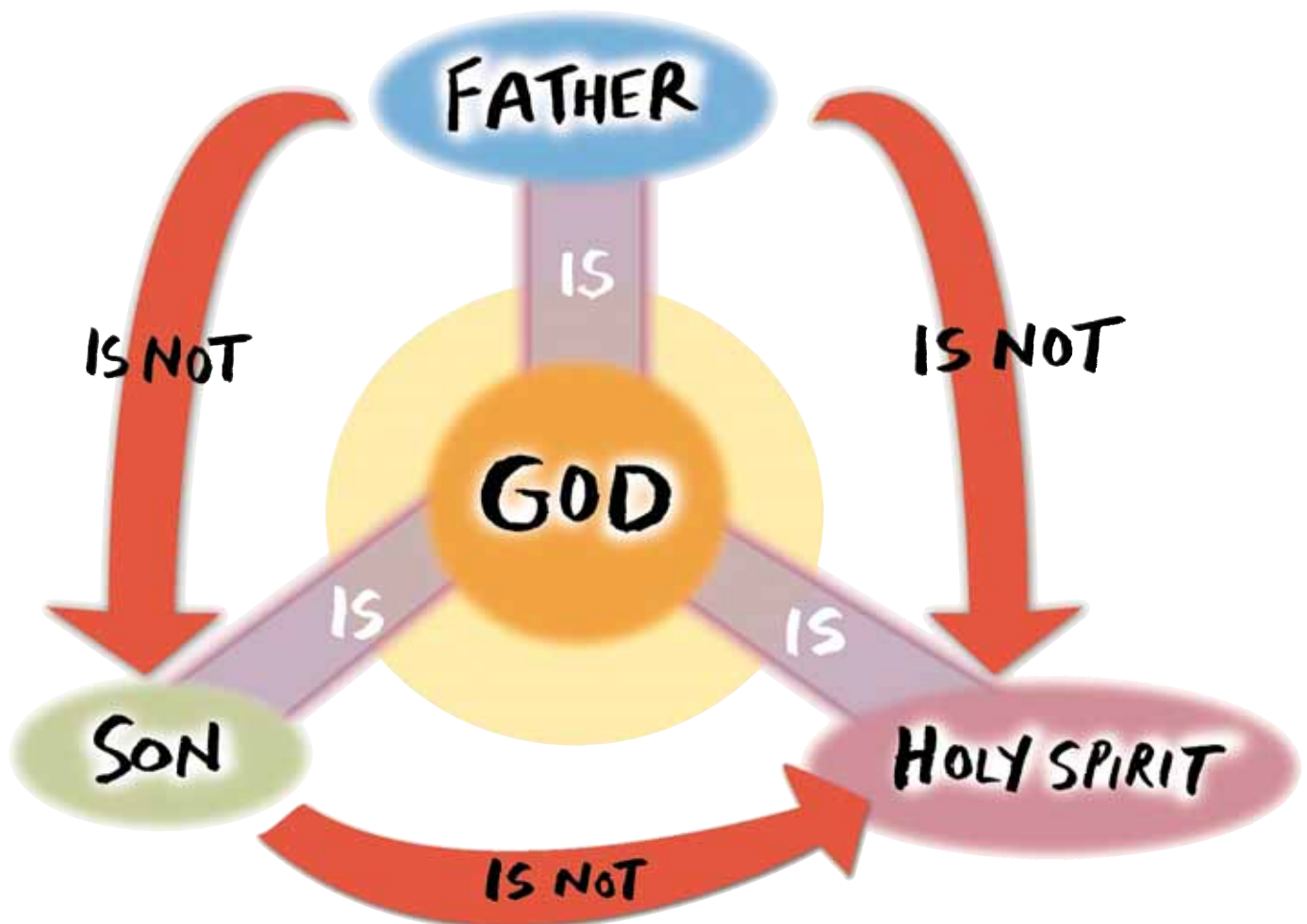


What we learned about the Trinity at our fabulous youth group

Boggled?

The Trinity is a mind-boggling concept. No one has ever managed to get his or her head around it. Actually this is very exciting, but you'll have to wait until later to find out why.

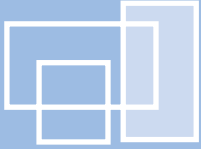
How does the Trinity work?



So God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all distinct and have their own identities and roles. But they are all God and **there is only one God**.

The human brain can't sort this out because we are not 'Trinitarian' beings. Every creature we know exists in one place at one time.

But (this is the exciting bit) God is not the same as us. He is not just a big, ultra-powerful person. (Think of the Greek and Roman gods!)



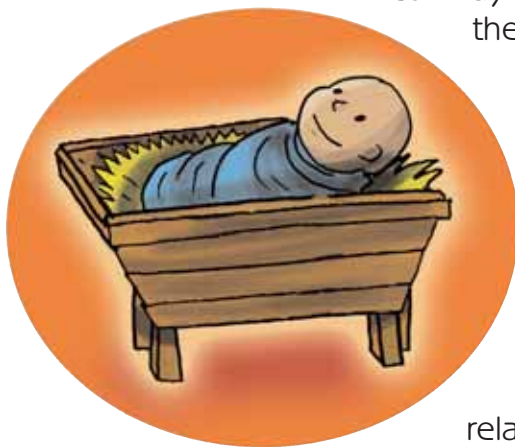
What we learned about the Trinity at our fabulous youth group

Think of a baby girl. When she's hungry she cries. For her life to be good, her parents have to do things she can't do and things she can't understand.

This is a picture of what God is like.

He is SO different from us. He does things we don't understand and can't imagine. There are many things we don't understand:

- Why is there so much suffering?
- How can God hear all our prayers?
- How come Jesus is God's son when there's no mum around?



God says: 'Trust me. You may not know, but I do. I can hear all the prayers because I'm not the same as you. I'm doing things across the world, and across the universe that you don't understand and that you haven't even dreamt of. And there can be a Father and a Son because I'm not a creature who has babies as creatures on earth do. (Jesus was sent to earth to become a human, but he was the Son of God the Father before that).

God knows about relationships and made us to be in relationships. Because we are made in the image of God, a relating Trinitarian God. We're created for relationships. Being in good relationships with God, with others and with ourselves is all part of God's plan for us.

So when we worship God in Trinity we worship a God who is bigger and more powerful than we can imagine. We can trust him in the way that a baby can trust a parent even though the baby doesn't understand everything the parent is doing.

What's more, we worship a God who knows about the joy and fulfilment of relationship, and longs for us to be in good relationship. But he also knows the loss and pain of separation in relationship, the pain of being cut off from loved ones. 'My God my God why have you forsaken me?' (**Matthew 27:46**)

And that's why the Trinity is so exciting.