

THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDE

Introduction

This guide was created for people who want to facilitate—or are thinking about facilitating—an Explore God discussion group.

This guide will get you up-to-speed on what a discussion group is and what it takes to facilitate one. We'll address common questions from facilitators and outline the content for The 7 Big Questions series.



Does Life Have a Purpose?



Is There a God?



Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering?



Is Christianity Too Narrow?



Is Jesus Really God?



Is the Bible Reliable?



Can I Know God Personally?

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THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDE

Overview and Facilitator FAQs

1 What is an Explore God discussion group?

An Explore God discussion group is about having honest conversations in a respectful environment that encourages questions and authenticity.

An Explore God group is an opportunity for people to come together to ask, consider, and discuss challenging questions about their beliefs. A group facilitator will do the following:

- Invite questions
- Create conversation
- Promote self-discovery
- Encourage spiritual growth

2 Can anyone be a Discussion Group Facilitator?

If you can be hospitable, push play on a video, and ask questions, you can be a Discussion Group Facilitator.

Create a welcoming environment:

- Match the space to the size of the group.
- Provide snacks.
- Reduce distractions.
- Consider video requirements.
- Look at the videos and questions ahead of time.
- Ask open-ended questions that fuel discussion.
- Arrive early and stay late.

3 Who should I invite to an Explore God discussion group?

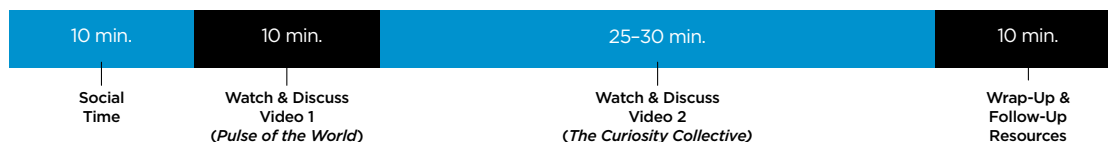
Explore God discussion groups are for just about anybody.

- Aim for 2-10 participants.
- Build trust by investing in relationships beforehand.
- Include people with different spiritual perspectives.
- Invite people who have something in common.
- Tailor the invitation so it feels natural.

4 What happens during a discussion group?

Explore God discussion groups are highly customizable and can be done in a variety of formats.

Please customize this example to meet the needs of your group.



5 How can I make this a great experience for everyone?

Keep in mind that you are a facilitator, not a teacher.

The goal of an Explore God discussion group is to create a safe place where people can seek credible answers to challenging spiritual questions.

- Foster honest questions in a respectful environment.
- Encourage discussion instead of teaching.
- Be honest. You don't need to have all the answers.

THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDE

1

Session One: Does Life Have a Purpose?

Social Time

Take ten minutes for the group to get acquainted over snacks and refreshments. Then, after gathering everyone into a comfortable circle, share something like the following Introduction.

Introduction

This Explore God discussion group is an opportunity for all of us to consider what we think about lots of spiritual issues. Each week, after a few minutes of social time, we'll gather like this to watch two short films. Then we'll take some time to discuss them, poke holes in them, agree, and disagree. There's nothing for you to prepare each week, and you can participate at whatever level you feel comfortable. That's one great thing about this group—it's a discussion. It's about exploration. I'm not here to convince anyone about anything. I'm on the journey just like you. The reality is that none of us has it all figured out. We all have questions and we can probably learn something from everyone. I would like to ask that each of us be respectful of others' views. We're not here to debate or argue. We're not here to fight. We're not here to bite, kick, scratch, and spit. We're here to foster great conversation around arguably some of the most important questions we all have. Does anyone have any questions about this before we begin?

Video 1: *Pulse of the World on Purpose*

This video is a 2.5-minute survey of many people's responses to this question.

Questions for Discussion

- Did you identify with anyone's expressed views in the film? If so, who and what resonated with you?
- Are you surprised to learn that 85 percent of people are clear about the meaning and purpose of their life (64 percent strongly agree and 21 percent somewhat agree)? Why or why not?

Video 2: *The Curiosity Collective: Does Life Have a Purpose?*

This is a 10-minute collection of subject matter experts discussing the question “Does life have a purpose?” It displays the various questions, struggles, and perspectives of these individuals regarding this week’s topic. See what they have to say and discuss it.

Questions for Discussion

After watching the video, choose from this list of questions or ask some of your own to facilitate discussion. There’s no need to limit your discussion to these questions or to feel pressured to cover all of them in the time you have.

- In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
- In the video, Lysa observed, “If I could just discover the right thing, a better job, financial blessing, the right person to love me, the right kids with the right accolades, then I’d feel satisfied.” In what things have you sought satisfaction? Did they satisfy?
- Can you share both a time when life seemed like a random series of events and a time when it seemed like there was an intentional plan unfolding?
- In what ways might someone’s view of eternity affect their sense of meaning and purpose?
- If you believe we all have a purpose, what role does God play in that—if any?

Wrap-Up

Thoughts to Share with the Group

To the best of your ability, summarize the main points of your group’s discussion. Or, if you are more comfortable, use the text below as a launching pad for concluding the session.

When life seems to make little sense, it’s easy to fall prey to the “It’s meaningless!” trap. Indeed, the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes is built around these very words. In stark contrast stands the book of Job, in which the lead character exclaims, “Though [God] slay me, yet I will hope in him” (Job 13:15). In other words, hard experiences in life can jade us to any sense of purpose. Rather than looking at life through the lens of our experience, another option is to look for some sense of truth outside ourselves.

Follow-Up Resources

As you wrap up this session, share or summarize these bullets:

- Acknowledge that with a topic as big as this, there is no way to answer the question comprehensively.
- Inform the group that you’ll be sending some follow-up resources so people can continue to explore God.
- Thank people for joining the discussion, and invite them to stick around if they want to continue the conversation.

Explore More on Purpose

The following resources are designed for deeper exploration of the topics of purpose and the meaning of life. If you are doing this series offline, you can e-mail these resources to your group after the session. Simply copy this section and paste it into an e-mail.

Videos

- How Do You Find Purpose in Life?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/how-do-you-find-purpose-in-life-video>)
- The Pursuit of Purpose
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/the-pursuit-of-purpose-video>)

Articles

- What Is My Purpose?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/what-is-my-purpose>)
- Does Life Have a Purpose?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/does-life-have-a-purpose>)

Recommended Books

- *The Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg
(<http://amzn.to/146rVyc>)
- *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren
(<http://amzn.to/1dkFD92>)

Additional Content on Purpose

- "Meaning and Purpose," Explore God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/meaning-and-purpose>)

Scripture Focus

Jesus states in Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Discovering our purpose is one of the most important endeavors in life. If what Jesus says is true, then if we simply ask, seek, and knock, God will meet us wherever we are and address our heart's desire.

Based on our group's conversation, how does this thought impact you? If it's true that "each of us has a pretty unique story to play" in the world, what's your role? If you keep a journal, take some time to note your responses there.

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Session Two: Is There a God?

Social Time

Take ten minutes for the group to catch up and reconnect over snacks and refreshments. Then, after gathering everyone into a comfortable circle, share something like the following Introduction.

Introduction

Dostoevsky said, “Without God, everything is permitted.” Thus, knowing the answer to today’s question helps us know how to live: in submission to God or to ourselves only.

A. W. Tozer famously quipped, “What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” So, with that, let’s look at how others answered this important question in the first video, *Pulse of the World on God*.

Video 1: *Pulse of the World on God*

This video is a 2.5-minute survey of many people’s responses to this question.

Questions for Discussion

- Did you identify with anyone’s expressed views in the film? If so, who and what resonated with you?
- To what do you attribute the 11 percent decline in the belief in God over the past twenty years?

Video 2: *The Curiosity Collective: Is There a God?*

This is a 10-minute collection of subject matter experts discussing the question “Is there a God?” It displays the various questions, struggles, and perspectives of these individuals regarding this week’s topic. See what they have to say and discuss it.

Questions for Discussion

After watching the video, choose from this list of questions or ask some of your own to facilitate discussion. There's no need to limit your discussion to these questions or to feel pressured to cover all of them in the time you have.

- In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
- What makes it easy to believe in God? What makes it hard to believe in God?
- What role—if any—did God play in your family when you were growing up? How does your upbringing impact your beliefs now?
- In the video, Andy shares that he's convinced God exists because of “cosmological constants” and their impact on life. What has convinced you that God either does or does not exist?
- What do you think of Corey's suggestion, “If there is a God, I can't prove him, nor can I disprove him with science”?
- What do you think could convince you to change your current stance on God's existence—be that belief or unbelief?

Wrap-Up

Thoughts to Share with the Group

To the best of your ability, summarize the main points of your group's discussion. Or, if you are more comfortable, use the text below as a launching pad for concluding the session.

Most of us “hope there's something else out there.” And the thoughts people have about God are as diverse as the people who've thought them. Most have attributed their life to some form of god or Supreme Being. As we saw and discussed, there is ample evidence supporting this. Yet, it seems, for us to be confident that there is a God, he/she/it must “reveal himself to us in a way that makes sense.”

Psalm 19:1 states, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” In other words, if there is a God, all people have experienced him, though they might not have known it or attributed that experience to God. This week, keep an open mind and consider how the creation around you might speak of God and his plans.

Follow-Up Resources

As you wrap up this session, share or summarize these bullets:

- Acknowledge that with a topic as big as this, there is no way to answer the question comprehensively.
- Inform the group that you'll be sending some follow-up resources so people can continue to explore God.
- Thank people for joining the discussion, and invite them to stick around if they want to continue the conversation.

Explore More on God

The following resources are designed for deeper exploration of the topic of God's existence. If you are doing this series offline, you can e-mail these resources to your group after the session. Simply copy this section and paste it into an e-mail.

Videos

- Evidence of God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/evidence-of-god-video>)
- Are We Created?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/are-we-created-video>)

Articles

- Is God Real?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/is-god-real>)
- Is God Personal?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/is-god-a-personal-god>)

Daily Stream of Inspiration

- Top 50 Questions about God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/top-50-questions>)

Recommended Books

- *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller
(<http://amzn.to/182feqr>)
- *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancey
(<http://amzn.to/146skk8>)

Additional Content on God

- "God," Explore God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/god>)

Scripture Focus

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." In other words, creation reflects its creator. If God exists, all people have seen and experienced God, though they might not have known it or attributed that experience to God.

In what ways have you experienced (or not experienced) God's presence through creation? How did those experiences affect your belief (or disbelief) in God? If you keep a journal, take some time to note your responses there.

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Session Three: Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering?

Social Time

Take ten minutes for the group to catch up and reconnect over snacks and refreshments. Then, after gathering everyone into a comfortable circle, share something like the following Introduction.

Introduction

Why does God allow pain and suffering? This is a very common question and is possibly the most difficult to answer. It is undoubtedly one of the most significant obstacles for many people who are questioning whether God exists or whether they should trust him. So if this has been a hard question for you, know that you're not alone. Watch what others say in the first video, *Pulse of the World on Pain & Suffering*.

Video 1: *Pulse of the World on Pain & Suffering*

This video is a 2.5-minute survey of many people's responses to this question.

Questions for Discussion

- Did you identify with anyone's expressed views in the film? If so, who and what resonated with you?
- Was it surprising to learn that the top question people would ask God is, "Why is there pain and suffering in the world?" What would be some of the questions you'd ask God?

Video 2: *The Curiosity Collective: Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering?*

This is a 10-minute collection of subject matter experts discussing the question "Why does God allow pain and suffering?" It displays the various questions, struggles, and perspectives of these individuals regarding this week's topic. See what they have to say and discuss it.

Questions for Discussion

After watching the video, choose from this list of questions or ask some of your own to facilitate discussion. There's no need to limit your discussion to these questions or to feel pressured to cover all of them in the time you have.

- In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how difficult is it for you to reconcile the existence of both suffering and God (1 = easy; 10 = impossible)? Why?
- One of the *Pulse* speakers noted, "Some of the best lessons I've learned in life . . . came from very painful times." In what ways might good come from bad? Do you have any experience with this?
- If there's a God, why do you think he allows evil in the world?
- In the video, what did you think of James's suggestion that God "understands our suffering . . . [and] is seeking to heal it"?

Wrap-Up

Thoughts to Share with the Group

The Problem of Evil states that an all-powerful and perfectly good God would not allow evil to exist in the world. Responses to this argument vary within Christianity and other faiths. Maybe it's a test of our faith. Or perhaps God is simply unable to change our circumstances.

Romans 8:18 says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." In this passage, the Apostle Paul suggests that something good always comes of something bad. Indeed, a few verses later he affirms that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him." Scripture proposes that, despite the painful circumstances in which we often find ourselves, God can somehow use them for his and our good.

Follow-Up Resources

As you wrap up this session, share or summarize these bullets:

- Acknowledge that with a topic as big as this, there is no way to answer the question comprehensively.
- Inform the group that you'll be sending some follow-up resources so people can continue to explore God.
- Thank people for joining the discussion, and invite them to stick around if they want to continue the conversation.

Explore More on Pain and Suffering

The following resources are designed for deeper exploration of the topic of pain and suffering. If you are doing this series offline, you can e-mail these resources to your group after the session. Simply copy this section and paste it into an e-mail.

Videos

- What Is the Source of Pain and Suffering?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/what-is-the-source-of-pain-and-suffering-video>)
- Why Does a Good God Allow Pain and Suffering?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/why-does-a-good-god-allow-pain-and-suffering-video>)

Articles

- Why Is There Pain and Suffering?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/why-is-there-pain-and-suffering>)
- Does God Care When I Hurt?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/does-god-care-when-i-hurt>)

Recommended Books

- *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis
(<http://amzn.to/182ftBE>)
- *Evil and the Justice of God*, N. T. Wright
(<http://amzn.to/1dkGk23>)

Additional Content on Pain and Suffering

- "Pain and Suffering," Explore God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/pain-and-suffering>)

Scripture Focus

In Romans 8:18, Paul says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

In what ways might your pain and suffering reveal something good and beautiful in the world one day? If you keep a journal, take some time to note your responses there.

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Session Four: Is Christianity Too Narrow?

Social Time

Take ten minutes for the group to catch up and reconnect over snacks and refreshments. Then, after gathering everyone into a comfortable circle, share something like the following Introduction.

Introduction

Christianity is seen by some as a narrow and mostly irrelevant belief system. Why? The Christian Church at one point in history was sought out for knowledge of reality. The Church was taken seriously by the wider culture. In many circles, that is no longer true. Let's see how some people responded to today's question: Is Christianity too narrow?

Video 1: *Pulse of the World on Christianity & Culture*

This video is a 2.5-minute survey of many people's responses to this question.

Questions for Discussion

- Did you identify with anyone's expressed views in the film? If so, who and what resonated with you?
- What do you think about the statistic that "nearly half of all US adults believe it doesn't matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons"?

Video 2: *The Curiosity Collective: Is Christianity Too Narrow?*

This is a 10-minute collection of subject matter experts discussing the question "Is Christianity too narrow?" It displays the various questions, struggles, and perspectives of these individuals regarding this week's topic. See what they have to say and then discuss it.

Questions for Discussion

After watching the video, choose from this list of questions or ask some of your own to facilitate discussion. There's no need to limit your discussion to these questions or to feel pressured to cover all of them in the time you have.

- In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
- Does the media represent Christianity accurately? Do Christians represent Christianity accurately?
- In the video, Corey suggests, "When people say that all religions are the same, that sounds really humble and tolerant." Why does he go on to say that those claims are actually exclusive?
- How have people used religion for good? For bad?
- What are some examples of situations in which most people believe that narrow ideas are good?
- What exclusive claims do you hold? Do you allow yourself to be vulnerable when discussing your views with others?

Wrap-Up

Thoughts to Share with the Group

To the best of your ability, summarize the main points of your group's discussion. Or, if you are more comfortable, use the text below as a launching pad for concluding the session.

Many people would insist that it's intolerant or "ignorant to say that Christianity is the only right religion." But, in the end, it might be best to admit that we're all exclusivists. All of us make exclusive claims about most things—religion included. Yet the challenge seems to be finding a tone of gentleness in the midst of conversation and even disagreement.

In Jeremiah 29:4-11, God calls his people to be present in their city in a way that enables it to flourish, while remaining focused on God. "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7). In other words, the God of the Bible commands his people to be gracious and charitable toward all people—including those who do not share the same faith. Is it possible to have an honest yet graceful dialog about important matters like faith?

Follow-Up Resources

As you wrap up this session, share or summarize these bullets:

- Acknowledge that with a topic as big as this, there is no way to answer the question comprehensively.
- Inform the group that you'll be sending some follow-up resources so people can continue to explore God.
- Thank people for joining the discussion, and invite them to stick around if they want to continue the conversation.

Explore More on Christianity and Culture

The following resources are designed for deeper exploration of the topic of Christianity and culture. If you are doing this series offline, you can e-mail these resources to your group after the session. Simply copy this section and paste it into an e-mail.

Videos

- Do Christians Represent Christ?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/do-christians-represent-christ-video>)
- Who Did Jesus Claim to Be?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/video-who-did-jesus-claim-to-be>)

Articles

- What Is Christianity?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/what-is-christianity>)
- Is Truth Relative?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/is-truth-relative>)

Recommended Books

- *Mud and the Masterpiece*, John Burke
(<http://amzn.to/19KY9Dv>)
- *But Don't All Religions Lead to God?*, Michael Green
(<http://amzn.to/19Xclrd>)

Additional Content on Christianity and Culture

- "Christianity," Explore God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/christianity>)
- "Culture," Explore God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/culture>)

Scripture Focus

In Jeremiah 29:4-11, God calls his people to be present in their city in a way that enables it to flourish, while remaining focused on God. "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7).

What are some practical ways you can seek the peace and prosperity of your city? How might these actions contribute to the common good in the world? If you keep a journal, take some time to note your responses there.

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Session Five: Is Jesus Really God?

Social Time

Take ten minutes for the group to catch up and reconnect over snacks and refreshments. Then, after gathering everyone into a comfortable circle, share something like the following Introduction.

Introduction

Is Jesus really God? The implications of this question are clearly enormous. Every aspect of society would be impacted by the confirmation that Jesus was literally God in the flesh. Also, if Jesus were God, then his words take on much greater meaning. They're more than simply wise words of an influential prophet or philosopher. On the other hand, if he's not God, then the entire Christian faith is undermined. As Paul said, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead (i.e., do something that only God could do), then faith in him is in vain (1 Corinthians 5:14). Let's take a look at what some people have to say about Jesus.

Video 1: *Pulse of the World on Jesus*

This video is a 2.5-minute survey of many people's responses to this question.

Questions for Discussion

- Did you identify with anyone's expressed views in the film? If so, who and what resonated with you?
- Does it seem consistent with your experience that "67 percent of US adults . . . have a personal relationship with Jesus"? Why or why not?

Video 2: *The Curiosity Collective: Is Jesus Really God?*

This is a 10-minute collection of subject matter experts discussing the question "Is Jesus really God?" It displays the various questions, struggles, and perspectives of these individuals regarding this week's topic. See what they have to say and then discuss it.

Questions for Discussion

After watching the video, choose from this list of questions or ask some of your own to facilitate discussion. There's no need to limit your discussion to these questions or to feel pressured to cover all of them in the time you have.

- In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
- Was Jesus a historical figure, in your opinion? Why or why not?
- What did Leonce mean when he said, "Religion says 'I do, therefore I'm loved.' Jesus says, 'You're loved, therefore you do'"?
- Christians believe that sin separates humanity from God. Yet Jesus, through his death, bridges that gap. Why do you think Jesus had to die in order to accomplish this?
- In the video, Bryan says "[Jesus] was resurrected—rose up from the dead—with over five hundred witnesses. They saw him and, based on that encounter, were willing to die in order to testify as to what they saw." What do you think about his claim?
- What do you think about Jesus's claim to be God?

Wrap-Up

Thoughts to Share with the Group

To the best of your ability, summarize the main points of your group's discussion. Or, if you are more comfortable, use the text below as a launching pad for concluding the session.

It's fashionable to suggest that Jesus was a good teacher, a man with an important message of love, and that's all. He wasn't God; that's impossible. However, the problem with that perspective is that he claimed to be God. (In John 10:30, Jesus said, "I and the Father are one.") Consequently, in C. S. Lewis's words, Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Furthermore, assuming that he lived, he also predicted his death and resurrection. Then hundreds of witnesses claimed he fulfilled that prediction and indeed rose from the dead. What do we do with that?

You may be curious about what Christians believe about Jesus. To explain that, let me start here: It probably wouldn't shock anyone if I declared that things are not as they should be. And no matter how hard we might try to change that reality, the world continues on in its brokenness. Lying, cheating, stealing, envy, greed, anxiety . . . well, you get the picture. It's a mess. The Bible, which we'll discuss next week, says that this mess was created when humanity chose to go their own way and live outside God's generous parameters. And we've been reaping the consequences since. Unfortunately, no amount of kissing up is going to make up for our waywardness. Our relationship with God has been so fractured that only he can repair it. And he does.

Simply put, in order to right the wrongs of the world, God entered his creation in the person of Jesus Christ. "The Bible says that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He bore the burden of our shortcomings for us. And then he rose from the grave to defeat the power of sin, brokenness, and death in the world. This was done so that when we abandon our own efforts—which always fall short—and simply accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, our relationship with God is restored. And we, like Jesus, are given a new life in order to become all that God made us to be."¹

This is the gospel; this is the good news. God loves each of us so much that he gave us the gift of his son. And if we believe in him, we receive the gift of eternal life.

God loves; God gave; we believe; we receive.²

¹ Norton Herbst, "What Is the Gospel?" *ExploreGod*, <http://www.exploregod.com/what-is-the-gospel>.

² Summarized from Andy Stanley's sermon "Go Fish, Part Five: Muddy Water."

Follow-Up Resources

As you wrap up this session, share or summarize these bullets:

- Acknowledge that with a topic as big as this, there is no way to answer the question comprehensively.
- Inform the group that you'll be sending some follow-up resources so people can continue to explore God.
- Thank people for joining the discussion, and invite them to stick around if they want to continue the conversation.

Explore More on Jesus

The following resources are designed for deeper exploration into the topic of Jesus. If you are doing this series offline, you can e-mail these to your group after the session. Simply copy this section and paste it into an e-mail.

Videos

- How Is Jesus Different?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/video-how-is-jesus-different>)
- Can You Like Jesus But Hate Religion?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/can-you-like-jesus-but-hate-religion-video>)

Articles

- The Historical Jesus
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/the-historical-jesus>)
- Who Is Jesus?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/who-is-jesus>)

Daily Stream of Inspiration

- Jesus Said What?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/jesus-said-what>)

Recommended Books

- *Jesus Among Other Gods*, Ravi Zacharias
(<http://amzn.to/19Xd4hh>)
- *Simply Jesus*, N. T. Wright
(<http://amzn.to/13X1pwe>)

Additional Content on Jesus

- "Jesus," Explore God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/jesus>)

Scripture Focus

In Mark 8:29, Jesus asks Peter a heavy question. "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Based on the evidence you've heard, who do you say Jesus is? If you keep a journal, take some time to note your responses to these questions there.

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Session Six: Is the Bible Reliable?

Social Time

Take ten minutes for the group to catch up and reconnect over snacks and refreshments. Then, after gathering everyone into a comfortable circle, share something like the following Introduction.

Introduction

The reliability of the Bible is being challenged on multiple fronts. At this point in history, an intelligent and thorough conversation about the reliability of Scripture is essential. Jews and Christians hinge their faith squarely on the words of the Bible. Therefore, if the Bible is not reliable, the implications for these faiths are significant. On the other hand, if the Bible is a reliable record of historical events (not to mention theological principles), then the entire world must consider God's plan as recorded in it. Let's watch the first video together.

Video 1: *Pulse of the World on the Bible*

This video is a 2.5-minute survey of many people's responses to this question.

Questions for Discussion

- Did you identify with anyone's expressed views in the film? If so, who and what resonated with you?
- What does it mean that "80 percent of Americans identify the Bible as sacred literature yet only 43 percent of Christians firmly believe the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches"?

Video 2: *The Curiosity Collective: Is the Bible Reliable?*

This is a 10-minute collection of subject matter experts discussing the question "Is the Bible reliable?" It displays the various questions, struggles, and perspectives of these individuals regarding this week's topic. See what they have to say and discuss it.

Questions for Discussion

After watching the video, choose from this list of questions or ask some of your own to facilitate discussion. There's no need to limit your discussion to these questions or to feel pressured to cover all of them in the time you have.

- In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
- What are a few of the various sources of truth that people consider?
- If someone asked you to describe the story of the Bible, what would you say?
- Do you think it's possible that a book could be inspired by God? Why or why not?
- As quoted in the film, how might it be possible that the Bible is “the true human story that underlies our experience and our existence”?
- How relevant is the Bible to your everyday life?
- What might make you inclined to rely on the Bible as a source of truth or guidance in your life?

Wrap-Up

Thoughts to Share with the Group

To the best of your ability, summarize the main points of your group's discussion. Or, if you are more comfortable, use the text below as a launching pad for concluding the session.

The Bible is understood in a variety of ways: a book of myths, a violent story about an evil god, a book of wisdom about life, the living Word of God, a legal document that prescribes every area of life. But it's more than that. It also claims to be God-breathed. And through fulfilled prophecy, it has shown itself to be something beyond just human creation—indeed, perhaps even supernatural.

Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” In other words, this writer seems to think that there is something special about this book—that it will outlast nature. Another passage states unequivocally that the Bible is “God-breathed.” If any of this is true, then clearly the Bible is worth our sincere consideration.

Follow-Up Resources

As you wrap up this session, share or summarize these bullets:

- Acknowledge that with a topic as big as this, there is no way to answer the question comprehensively.
- Inform the group that you'll be sending some follow-up resources so people can continue to explore God.
- Thank people for joining the discussion, and invite them to stick around if they want to continue the conversation.

Explore More on the Bible

The following resources are designed for deeper exploration into the topic of the Bible. If you are doing this series offline, you can e-mail these resources to your group after the session. Simply copy this section and paste it into an e-mail.

Videos

- What Is the Bible?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/video-what-is-the-bible>)
- Is the Bible Relevant?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/is-the-bible-relevant-video>)

Articles

- Can I Trust the Bible?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/can-i-trust-the-bible>)
- Is the Bible Reliable?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/is-the-bible-reliable>)

Daily Stream of Inspiration

- The 40 Most Popular Bible Verses
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/40-most-popular-bible-verses>)

Recommended Books

- *Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, Craig Blomberg
(<http://amzn.to/146tzQk>)
- *Yes or No? Straight Answers to Tough Questions About Christianity*, Peter Kreeft
(<http://amzn.to/146tGv4>)

Additional Content on the Bible

- “Bible,” Explore God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/bible>)

Scripture Focus

Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

In what ways might the Bible be “offering a better story, a story to help make sense of our crazy human existence”? If you keep a journal, take some time to note your responses to these questions there.

THE 7 BIG QUESTIONS DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDE

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Session Seven: Can I Know God Personally?

Social Time

Take ten minutes for the group to catch up and reconnect over snacks and refreshments. Then, after gathering everyone into a comfortable circle, share something like the following Introduction.

Introduction

As humans, we crave relationships. Why is that? The Bible teaches that we were created for relationship with God and with one another. On one hand, it's easy to know *about* God. But it's a whole other thing to *know* God.

Video 1: *Pulse of the World on Knowing God*

This video is a 2.5-minute survey of many people's responses to this question.

Questions for Discussion

- Did you identify with anyone's expressed views in the film? If so, who and what resonated with you?
- Is it surprising that 75 percent of adults desire a close relationship with God? Why or why not?

Video 2: *The Curiosity Collective: Can I Know God Personally?*

This is a 10-minute collection of subject matter experts discussing the question "Can I know God personally?" It displays the various questions, struggles, and perspectives of these individuals regarding this week's topic. See what they have to say and then discuss it.

Questions for Discussion

After watching the video, choose from this list of questions or ask some of your own to facilitate discussion. There's no need to limit your discussion to these questions or to feel pressured to cover all of them in the time you have.

- In what ways can you identify with any of the stories in *The Curiosity Collective*? What did you find intriguing or compelling?
- Why might someone resist knowing God personally?
- Propaganda stated that “sin . . . has broken that covenant with [God].” What do you think he meant by that?
- In the video, Pete said, “[Jesus] made it possible for our sins to be removed because his blood was spotless; he was a perfect sacrifice for us.” How could Jesus be perfect? What are the implications of that?
- How might one develop a personal relationship with God?
- In Matthew 7:7, the Bible says that if we seek, we will find; if we knock, the door will be opened. What might this mean?

Wrap-Up

Thoughts to Share with the Group

To the best of your ability, summarize the main points of your group's discussion. Or, if you are more comfortable, use the text below as a launching pad for concluding the session.

The relational nature of humans points to the creator's desire to be in relationship with us. Yet most people recognize a flaw, some sense of brokenness in our relationship with God. “The problem is not that we're bad; it's that we're dead!” one speaker noted. So what gives? Scripture describes a God who passionately pursues the people he created and makes it possible to fix our broken relationship. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” In other words, God takes us, in all our brokenness, and offers to make us whole forever.

Follow-Up Resources

As you wrap up this session, share or summarize these bullets:

- Acknowledge that with a topic as big as this, there is no way to answer the question comprehensively.
- Inform the group that you'll be sending some follow-up resources so people can continue to explore God.
- Since it's the last formal group discussion, invite people to share responses to a few parting questions:
 - How have you grown in your spiritual journey over the past seven sessions?
 - How have others in the group affected you?

Some Notes:

Set the tone by sharing first. Be sure to include ways that your faith has been challenged, ignited, or stretched. You might thank members of the group for specific ways they have encouraged you. Remember to model using as few words as possible so as to maximize their impact and allow plenty of time for others to share.

You may want to refer to (or even print out copies of) the Explore God article titled “How Can I Know God?” (www.exploreGod.com/how-can-i-know-god) to review the basics of the gospel with your group.

Finally, it may be good to plan a social gathering after the group has finished. This is a great way to honor and continue to explore God.

Explore More on Knowing God

The following resources are designed for deeper exploration into the topic of knowing God. If you are doing this series offline, you can e-mail these resources to your group after the session. Simply copy this section and paste it into an e-mail.

Videos

- How Can We Know God?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/how-can-we-know-god-video>)
- Does God Speak to Us?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/does-god-speak-to-us-video>)

Articles

- How Can I Know God?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/how-can-i-know-god>)
- What Is the Gospel?
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/what-is-the-gospel>)

Daily Stream of Inspiration

- 40 Inspirational Readings for New Christians
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/40-inspirational-readings-for-new-christians>)

Recommended Books

- *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer
(<http://amzn.to/17d4UPO>)
- *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis
(<http://amzn.to/13X200A>)

Additional Content on Knowing God

- “Knowing God,” Explore God
(<http://www.exploreGod.com/knowing-god>)

Scripture Focus

Matthew 11:28 says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” James 4:8 says, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.”

In what ways are you craving a relationship with your creator? What steps will you take to develop that relationship? If you keep a journal, take some time to note your responses to these questions there.