

NIGHT ONE

Opening: Over the next four weeks we will explore some of the tough questions that confront Christianity. This is an exploratory process and one that will hopefully encourage you and edify you as we wrestle with these questions in light of Scripture, history, philosophy, and culture. Maybe these barriers to belief in Jesus are actually signposts. Maybe tough questions are healthy and help us pursue God and truth. This handout and Rebecca McLaughlin's book will provide the content to help us go deep.

1. Session 1 | Introduction

a. What are we doing/Why does this matter?

i. Information vs. Transformation

It's possible to know a lot about geology but never experience Yosemite or the Grand Canyon. It's possible to know a lot about Christianity and miss God. The primary aim of these sessions isn't to give you a bunch of information to prove anything with 100% certainty. We want to explore the tough questions because we know that those questions need exploration and God and truth can be found in that exploration. This is often where doubt and struggle give way to a God of truth, goodness, and beauty. And so, our goal is to have God form you rather than have us merely inform you.

ii. We Need a Worldview Shift

1. Facts and Feelings in a Post-Truth World

St. Augustine famously said, *our hearts are restless until they find rest in God*. Our greatest joy is found outside ourselves – outside our desires, our wants, our hopes and dreams. We don't self-satisfy. We find rest in God by learning to live in his world on his terms, not our world on our own terms. As much as we might agree with this statement in our minds it important to recognize just how counterintuitive it is. Our world has conditioned us to think the opposite. This conditioning is a long and slow process and the residue of such conditioning produces fear, doubt, and skepticism towards St. Augustine's phrase. If God appears absent from most parts of our day by the culture at large, and that same culture has hard-hitting questions against our faith, that is going to have an effect on how we think and relate to God.

Belief -> Truth -> Knowledge -> Faith

2. Session 2 | Ch. 3 How Can You Say there's Only One True Faith?

- a. **Bumper Sticker** "My God is too big for any one religion." What species of truth is religious truth? Are the various world religions making competing claims on reality, or are they simply different voicings of one truth? And, if they are making competing claims, does disagreement entail hostility, or can people of conflicting beliefs live peacefully together? To many modern ears, the idea that a religion can be objective and universal seems like a category confusion (p.48). Before we jump in, let's recognize our own conditioning. We have been trained to be skeptical toward religion and the unseen, while being conditioned to accept without question what science tells us, as well as what we can see. By the way, science is awesome, but it has its limits.

- b. **Ancient Hindu Parable** Blind Men and the Elephant. "The story paints a vivid picture of our individual limitations. It is supposed to be a natural corrective to our natural arrogance and appears to be a humble approach, offering a framework for respecting all religions equally. But on closer inspection, the elephant paradigm creates more problems than it solves." (p.49)
 - i. **The Problem of Respect** Based on the story, Religions are not right or wrong, but each holds some aspect of truth. However, the only person who is in a position of respect is the narrator of the story and the person proclaiming that all religions are the same. Everyone else is blind. The beliefs and convictions of others are not taken seriously, but waved off as two sides of the same truth. This does not seem respectful, although at the outset, it seemed like it was.
 1. Tolerate people (love people), but it is not necessary to accept as true bad or false ideas. Trying to persuade others to change their beliefs is a sign of respect. Treating others as thinking agents with the ability to discern truth and not just be products of their environment and conditioning gives them dignity and respect. When people challenge our beliefs, we should be flattered not offended! Beware the echo chamber.

 - ii. **The Problem of Truth** "In 2016, the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year was post-truth: "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." (p.51). Putting a label in front of the word truth does not change the mandatory exclusive and objective nature of truth. 'Religious truth,' 'scientific truth,' 'my truth.' Physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson famously quipped to Stephen Colbert, "The good thing about science" is that "it's true whether or not you believe in it." (p.52) This would apply to 'religious truth' as well. Truth is truth and we need it to navigate reality. Sometimes our beliefs can be wrong. That's why pursuit, seeking, investigating is healthy, necessary, and fruitful.

iii. The Problem of History I don't know about you, but I love when Ed puts up slides of his pictures from Israel. Primarily because when I see the locations the Bible is talking about or what Jesus mentioned, it gives a sense of history and reality that is reassuring. It increases my trust/faith. "The incompatibility of different religions comes in to sharp focus when we examine history. Historical truth is challenging: we all bring our individual and cultural biases to questions of history, and sources have often been distorted or selectively destroyed. But we cannot abandon the search for objective truth in history. There is too much at stake." (p.53)

1. Jesus Rising from the dead – central truth claim of Christianity. There is historical evidence and alternatives are lacking. The NT writers themselves stake their trust in Jesus on this event they claim took place (see 1 Cor 15). Whether we think the claim is strong or weak, it is nonetheless a historical claim.

iv. The Problem of Conversion Examples of those who convert from one religion to another, leave religion to have no religion. We would assume that they think those views they left are not true. We would not dare to say to an atheist who left their Christian heritage that they still believe Jesus is the Son of God or that their atheism leads them in the same direction as following Jesus.

v. The Problem of Broad as opposed to Narrow? When a musician plays their instruments "correctly" in a "narrow" way, beautiful music is produced that stirs the soul. If things that are built by engineers operate according to their "narrow" design, they function and fulfill their purpose. This can help shift our demand for more options and rather look at the one option that is readily available and offers us what we were always looking for.

vi. The Problem of Jesus Truth by definition is exclusive and Jesus, in John 14:6, claims Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, therefore limiting our options and blowing up the elephant approach. However, no other figure is so scandalous in terms of forgiveness, redemption, and eternal life. Jesus' death and Resurrection weaponizes God's Grace in such a way that allows for eternal life with God to be a gift that transforms us. That is where the tension must be felt. Grace and Truth.