

Small Group Guide

The One and Only | "What is a Christian Anyway?" Pt. 2

BEFORE YOU MEET

Encourage group members to reflect on this question before gathering: When you hear the word "God," what is the first image or idea that comes to mind, and where did that image come from?

OPENING DISCUSSION (10-15 minutes)

Start with a lighter question to get conversation flowing before moving into deeper material.

- Have you ever been lost -- on a hike, on a road trip, or somewhere else -- and had to find your way back? What did you rely on to get your bearings?
 - What is one thing from the sermon that stood out to you, surprised you, or stayed with you this week?
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Use these points to orient your group before moving into discussion. You do not need to read them all aloud -- choose what is most helpful for your group.

1. The Nicene Creed is like an ancient map. Written in 325 AD, it is one of the oldest agreed-upon statements of Christian belief. It has unified Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and Charismatic Christians for over 1,700 years. When new ideas or philosophies lead us off course, the Creed - and the way it illuminates the revelation of Scripture - helps us find our way back.

2. We believe in one God. Christians are not on a trail where all paths lead to the same destination. The belief in one God means that every other spiritual system, deity, or practice is a different trail going to a different place. This is not a popular claim in our culture, but it is a core Christian conviction.

3. God is the Father Almighty. The word "Father" points to two realities: first, that those who follow Jesus are adopted into God's family and can relate to him with intimacy; second, that God is the originator and source of all things. He is not simply one good thing among many -- he is the source from which every good thing flows.

4. Good gifts are conduits, not the source. Relationships, meaningful work, beauty, comfort -- these are real gifts from God. But when we disconnect those gifts from the Giver, we treat the conduit as the source and eventually find ourselves empty and thirsty.

5. God is the maker of all that is seen and unseen. He made each person with intention and purpose. He saw you before you were born. His thoughts toward you are too vast to count. And underneath everything -- even his grief or frustration over our wandering -- is love, because God in his essence is love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Work through as many of these as time allows. You do not need to cover every question.

On One God

1. In the sermon, Milissa said that Christians are on one trail that leads to one God, and that all other spiritual paths lead to a different destination. How does that claim sit with you? Is it difficult to hold in today's culture? Why or why not?
2. The ancient Israelites recited the Shema -- "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" -- multiple times every day. What practices, if any, help you stay anchored to the belief that God alone is God? What might it look like to be more intentional about this?
3. Are there areas of your life where you have been tempted to treat God as one option among many, or to add spiritual practices alongside faith in God rather than rooting everything in him? What has that looked like?

On God the Father

4. Milissa noted that if your experience of an earthly father was painful or absent, it can be hard to relate to God as Father. How has your experience with your own father -- for better or for worse -- shaped the way you think about God? What would it mean for you to let God redefine what a perfect Father looks like?
5. Glenn Packiam is quoted in the sermon as writing: "A new job makes us happy, so we start acting as if the job is a source of our joy. A friendship or new relationship brings us comfort, so we fool ourselves into believing that friendship or relationship is a source of comfort we feel. Relationships, meaningful work, and the beauty of creation and art are conduits, conduits of joy and peace and comfort and more. They are not the source." Where in your own life have you been treating a conduit as though it were the source? What has that cost you?

6. Ephesians 3:20 describes God as able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine. In what area of your life do you most need to be reminded that God is more than enough?

On God as Maker

7. Psalm 139 describes God as knitting each person together in the womb, ordaining all their days before they were born, and thinking thoughts about each person too vast to count. What does it stir in you to sit with the idea that God saw you before you existed and has been thinking about you ever since?
8. Milissa said: "He sees you now when you feel unseen, when you feel overlooked, when you feel alone or invisible. He sees the parts of you that you keep hidden from others. He sees things about you that you don't even know about yourself. But we don't need to be afraid that God sees us, even at our worst." Is this true for you? Does "God sees you fully" feel more like a source of comfort or fear? What shapes your answer?
9. The sermon closed with this question: "How would your life be different if you began to really live into this idea that all the days of your life were ordained before you even took your first breath?" How would you answer that question for yourself?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or two of these to discuss as a group, or encourage individuals to choose one to practice before you meet again.

- Recite the Shema daily. For one week, begin each morning by saying aloud: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Notice how it reorients your perspective before the day begins.
 - Identify your conduits and your source. Make a short list of the good things in your life -- relationships, work, comforts, routines. Then ask honestly: Am I treating any of these as a source rather than a gift from God? Bring what you find to God in prayer.
 - Pray through Psalm 139. Read Psalm 139 slowly this week, pausing after each section. Let it become a personal prayer. Pay particular attention to the verses about God seeing you and knowing you before you were born.
 - Practice gratitude as theology. Each day this week, when you notice something good -- a meal, a conversation, a moment of beauty -- pause and thank God specifically, acknowledging him as the source of that gift rather than simply enjoying the gift itself.
 - Bring a need to God. Milissa prompted the congregation to bring their needs to God in prayer during the service. If you held something back, find a quiet moment this week to bring that specific need to God -- not as a formula, but as an act of trust that he is enough.
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CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together by praying through the three declarations from the sermon, either as a group or with one person leading:

- We believe in one God -- and we lay down the things we have made into gods in our lives.
- We believe in the Father Almighty -- and we thank him for the good gifts he has given us, acknowledging him as the source.
- We believe in the maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen -- and we thank him that he sees us, knows us, and has made us with intention and love.