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# COMMUNITY GROUPS

## RIVERS CROSSING CHURCH

Community Group Discussion Guide

April 23, 2023

Ask Me Anything Week #2 / Pastor Paul Taylor

Is There Only One Way To Heaven?

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. Icebreaker Question | What's one thing you're proud of accomplishing in the past year? What's one thing you're hoping to accomplish in the next year?
2. Each year since 2004, the Oxford Dictionary has announced a word of the year. In 2016, their 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."<sup>1</sup>
  1. <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016>
    - a) What do you see as the dangers of living in a "post-truth" society? Have you experienced this cultural shift in your everyday life? If so, explain.
    - b) How might this shift change our conversations with others about religious belief?
3. During his sermon, Pastor Paul shared three cultural assumptions about religion that accompany this week's question - Is There Only One Way To Heaven?
  - 1) All major religions are equally valid and teach the same thing.
  - 2) Each religion sees part of spiritual truth, but none can see the whole truth.
  - 3) It's arrogant to insist your religion is right and to convert others to it.
  - a) Which of these questions have you heard before? In what context did they arise?
  - b) Do any of these questions reflect things you've either wrestled with in the past or are currently wrestling with about Christianity and/or religious belief?
  - c) Did anything Pastor Paul shared in response to these questions catch your attention, challenge or confuse you? If so, explain.

"We are tempted to "There is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp, but if this is used to invalidate all claims to discern the truth it is in fact an arrogant claim to a kind of knowledge which is superior to all others." - Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

## DIVING DEEPER

4. Read John 5:22-23, John 8:42-47, John 10:7-18, and John 14:1-11. Then discuss the corresponding questions together.

**John 5:22-23 (NIV)** - <sup>22</sup>Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup>that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

**John 8:42-47 (NIV)** - <sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. <sup>43</sup>Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. <sup>44</sup>You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. <sup>45</sup>Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! <sup>46</sup>Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? <sup>47</sup>Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

**John 10:7-18 (NIV)** – <sup>7</sup>Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. <sup>11</sup>“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup>The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

**John 14:1-11 (NIV)** – <sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup>You know the way to the place where I am going.” <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” <sup>6</sup>Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” <sup>8</sup>Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” <sup>9</sup>Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup>Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. <sup>11</sup>Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

a) Based on these scriptures, does Jesus Himself claim to be the only way to know God and receive salvation from God? Support your answer with words from these texts and/or other Bible passages you know.

b) Do you personally believe Jesus’ words – “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6)? If yes, why do you hold this belief? If no, why not?

c) Read Acts 4:11-12 and 1 Timothy 2:1-7. Did the early church leaders, who wrote the books of the New Testament, view Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven?

**Acts 4:11-12 (NLT)** – <sup>11</sup>For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, ‘The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.’ <sup>12</sup>There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”

**1 Timothy 2:1-7 (NIV)** – <sup>1</sup>I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— <sup>2</sup>for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup>This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup>For there is one God and one mediator between God and

mankind, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. <sup>7</sup>And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

5. It's been argued that the exclusivity of religious belief – claiming there's only one way to heaven – naturally leads to feelings of superiority and an “us versus them” mentality. Pastor Tim Keller summarized this in his book *The Reason for God*:

“Religion, generally speaking, tends to create a slippery slope in the heart. Each religion informs its followers that they have “the truth,” and this naturally leads them to feel superior to those with differing beliefs. Also, a religion tells its followers that they are saved and connected to God by devotedly performing that truth. This moves them to separate from those who are less devoted and pure in life. – Tim Keller

- a) Read Ephesians 2:1-10. How does (or should) the Christian gospel – salvation through faith in Jesus Christ – undermine any feelings of superiority for those who believe it? How does this passage from Ephesians support that?

**Ephesians 2:1-10 (NIV)** – <sup>1</sup>As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup>And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- b) It's also been argued that the exclusivity of religious belief leads to intolerance and violence toward those with different beliefs. What does the Bible teach about how Christians should view and treat those with different beliefs?

## TAKING IT HOME

6. Read 1 Peter 3:13-18 together. How can we have discussions of religious exclusivity in a way that promotes understanding and respect rather than conflict and division?

**1 Peter 3:13-18 (NIV)** – <sup>13</sup>Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” <sup>15</sup>But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup>keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of

their slander. <sup>17</sup>For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

7. Is there anyone you're currently discussing your faith in Jesus Christ with? If so, how's it going? What questions have arisen in the course of your conversation(s)? If not, is there anyone God has placed on your heart to begin talking with? Close group by praying for these relationships and future conversations.

## PRAYER REQUESTS

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## RIVERS CROSSING - THINGS TO KNOW

1. Man Day | Get ready for a day of fun as Rivers Crossing hosts Man Day: A one-day men's event with team-based challenges, awesome prizes, food, and community! Man Day is Saturday April 29th from 9am - 1:30pm at YMCA Camp Kern. Learn more and register at <https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1660462>.
2. Alpha at Rivers Crossing | Whether you're skeptical, exploring faith, or wrestling with doubt, Alpha is a safe place for you to bring your questions and connect with others. Our next Alpha class will take place this summer, from June 15th - August 3<sup>rd</sup>. Learn more about Alpha and register for the summer class at the link below: <https://riverscrossing.com/alpha/>
3. Preteen Extreme | Who is ready to Race to the Extraordinary this summer at Preteen Extreme? Sign your preteen up now for an experience they'll remember for a lifetime at Preteen Extreme on Saturday, June 17th at Camp Kern. They will conquer an obstacle course, seek out the cross, work together to canoe, aim at archery, grow in community with their small group, and much more! Learn more and register at <https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1639769>
4. New Community Group Leaders | Interested in leading your own Community Group or have anyone you believe would make a great Community Group leader? If yes, we'd love the opportunity to connect with you or them and share more about our vision for groups at Rivers Crossing. We're always looking to create more space for people to experience and grow in the extraordinary life together!  
New Group Leader Interest Form:  
<https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/people/forms/414625>.
5. 2023 RC Students Summer Camp | Next summer (June 19-24, 2023), RC Students is going to Eagle Sky of the Ozarks for camp! We truly believe that Summer Camp is one of the best ways for your Junior High or High School student to get connected in RC Students. They'll build lasting bonds with other students and their leaders that will continue throughout the year. Most importantly, your student will have a week to focus on connecting with Jesus in a new way. Learn more and register below: <https://riverscrossing.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/1450605>