

The Trouble with Christianity: Christians Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Questions (encourage everyone to answer):

- This week's "Trouble with Christianity" suggested that one of the greatest obstacles that people often have to Christianity is *Christians*. It was Mahatma Gandhi who famously said, "*I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.*" Or consider this quote from Brennan Manning, who once said: *The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.*
 - Have you ever heard someone express similar opinions? Have you ever felt this way yourself?
 - What do you suspect is the reputation of Christians in our culture?
 - In your circles, what are Christians known for? What do you wish Christians were known for?
- Let's look at the words of Jesus in Luke 10 to get His perspective.

Read Luke 10:25-37

- What question does the "expert in the law" ask Jesus and *why* does he ask it? (vs. 25)
- Read Deut. 6:5 and reflect on how well the "expert in the law" answered this question.
 - What do you think it means to love God with your whole being?
 - Why do you think the command to "love your neighbor" accompanies the command to "love God"?
- **Who is my neighbor?** The question that prompts the parable is, "Who is my neighbor" (vs. 29). Take a moment and go around the room to ask this same question to each other. If asked, "who is your neighbor", what would you say?
 - My guess is that most of us would respond with the names of those who live beside us. We have a very narrow and specific definition of neighbor. In the same way, the "expert in the law" has a narrow definition of a "neighbor" and Jesus intends to broaden it. In order for us to see what Jesus is doing here we must first do some work in the OT law.
 - Jewish teachers usually used "neighbor" to mean "fellow Israelite" (Leviticus 19:18), but the wider context of Leviticus 19 could widen this view (Leviticus 19:34). This is in fact the debate that the "expert in the law" is trying to engage Jesus in. Read Leviticus 19:18 and Leviticus 19:34 and discuss as a group who you think the law of God includes in the word "neighbor."
- **In the Parable of the Good Samaritan**, Jesus illustrates who a neighbor is by telling a surprising story that whereby religious leaders pass by someone in need and the only one to help is an unlikely Samaritan.
 - One helpful way to experience the shock of this parable is to modernize it, imagining who Jesus might choose as his main characters if He told this story today. Discuss as a group who the likely characters would be if Jesus told this story in our time and place.
- On Sunday we noticed that **all three characters "see"** the man in need, yet only one person "saw" him in a way that would eventually lead to helping him.
 - The passage does not specify, but why do you suppose the religious leaders might have seen the man but crossed by on the other side?
 - What are some reasons why we might see those in need and cross by on the other side?
 - How would we want someone to see us if we were the one in the ditch?

- In verse 33, Jesus says that the samaritan “*took pity on him*” Based on Sunday’s teaching, would you agree this is a good translation? If not, why not?
 - The word for “compassion” is a word that appears 12x in the Gospels, and 9/12x this word shows up in direct relationship to Jesus, who, upon feeling “compassion” immediately performs a miracle. Of those 9 occurrences, 3 are in parables: the *Unmerciful Servant*, the *Prodigal Son*, and the *Good Samaritan*. In each case, the one who shows compassion is representative of God. Read these 3 parables and consider the role of compassion in God’s response to humanity (Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 15:11-32).
- It was said on Sunday that “*love sacrifices for the sake of the other.*”
 - Read Eph. 5:25. In the marriage relationship, we show love through sacrifice. But what are the implications of Jesus’ teaching that loving our neighbor requires sacrifice as well?
- Our guest preacher said that the key to unlocking this parable is not to *try and be like the Good Samaritan* but to first identify with the person in the ditch. Agree or disagree, and why?
 - Like the Good Samaritan, Jesus goes through great lengths in bringing us to wholeness. Discuss and describe the significance of all Jesus endured to secure our redemption?
 - What are some of the implications of being recipients of Jesus’ sacrificial care? (see 2 Cor. 5:15, 1 Cor. 6:20, Gal. 2:20.)

Application:

- Now answer the question again, Who is your neighbor? If possible, write down a name of someone who might be classified as “the other” in your life. How might Jesus be calling you to be a neighbor to them?

Pray: First, thank God for responding to us while we were helpless in the ditch, unable to save ourselves. Then, ask God to help us respond to others with the same selfless love so that they might see Jesus in us and through us.