

Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader's Guides chapters 1-10

Timothy Keller “The Reason for God”

(These guides were created for those leading Community Life Groups in their Study of Timothy Keller's book “The Reason for God”)

Keller, Timothy, The Reason for God, New York, Penguin Books, 2018

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Grace of Christ Yakima
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Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week One: Chapter One

Grace Community Life Group Leader Guide

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller

Week 1: Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1 “There Can’t Be Just **One** True Religion” (pages xi-21)

Purpose of Community Groups

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- Support and care. Community Life Groups are the best way to care for others, and to be cared for by others. Share your needs, and respond to the needs expressed by others.

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Get to Know you questions (The first week or two you may spend a majority of your time getting to know each other).

1. Share two things about yourself not many people know.
2. Describe the most extravagant meal you’ve ever eaten. Where were you? When was this? What was prepared and what did you eat? How did it make you feel?
3. What has been the most helpful book you’ve ever read regarding faith and spiritual life (This does not have to be a Christian book)? What did it help you understand about God, about spiritual life?
4. Someone you know asks you which book in the Bible they should read to understand Christian faith? What book would you recommend to them? Why?
5. What are the most common problems people have with Christian faith?

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

Introduction

1. There Can’t be Just One Religion

2. How Could a Good God Allow Suffering

3. Christianity is a Straightjacket

4. The Church is Responsible for so Much Injustice

5. How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell

6. Science has Disproved Christianity

8. The Clues of God

9. The Knowledge of God

10. The Problem of Sin

11. Religion and the Gospel

12. The (True) Story of the Cross

13. The Reality of the Resurrection

14. The Dance of God

Chapter 1 Opening Quotes

"How can there be just one true faith?" asked Blair, a twenty-four-year-old woman living in Manhattan. "It's arrogant to say your religion is superior and try to convert everyone else to it. Surely all the religions are equally good and valid for meeting the needs of their particular followers."

"Religious exclusivity is not just narrow – it's dangerous," added Geoff, a twentysomething British man also living in New York City. "Religion has led to untold strife, division, and conflict. It may be the greatest enemy of peace in the world. If Christians continue to insist that they have 'the truth' – and if other religions do this as well – the world will never know peace."¹

Preface and Introduction Questions

- What are some of the reasons the "none" group is growing more rapidly than other "religious" group?
- Do you agree that the world is getting both "more religious" and "less religious" at the same time?
- What type of Christian faith were you exposed to growing up? Positives? Negatives?
- Do Social Justice types tend toward Moral Relativism (the belief that everyone decides for themselves what is right and wrong)?
- Do Moral Majority types tend to have less concern for the poor?
- If you are a Christian, why are you a Christian? If you are still exploring Christian faith what is it that is most troubling about the Christian message, what keeps you in the "exploring" stage?
- What is the strongest argument AGAINST Christian faith?
- Of the three stories included at the end of the introduction, which most resonates with you?

"People who blithely go through life too busy, or too indifferent, to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defensive against either the experience of tragedy or the probing question of a smart skeptic." Timothy Keller

Chapter 1 Questions

- Do you agree with the author that one of the most difficult aspects of Christian faith for many is the Christian claim of exclusivity?
- How do you respond to the quote on page 4, "If Christians are right about Jesus being God, then Muslims and Jews fail in a serious way to love God as God really is, but if Muslims and Jews are right that Jesus is not God but a teacher or prophet, then Christians fail in a serious way to love God as God really is."
- How can a religious group's claim to exclusive truth lead to isolation from others, stereotyping others, and even violence against others outside the group? Is that where Christian faith's claim to exclusivity lead those who follow Jesus?

¹ The quotes at the beginning of each chapter are taken from an e-mail survey of young New Yorkers in their mid-twenties who were asked to articulate their main doubts and objections to Christianity. The names have been changed.

- How have you seen the three approaches to “contain” the excesses of religious groups (pages 5-18) lived out around you and in the larger world? 1) Outlaw religion, 2) Condemn religion, 3) Keep religion completely private.
- How do you respond to the quote (Stephen Carter of Yale) on page 15 “Efforts to craft a public square from which religious conversation is absent, no matter how thoughtfully worked out, will always in the end say to those of organized religion that they alone, unlike everybody else, must enter public dialogue only after leaving behind that part of themselves that they consider most vital.”
 - Is it possible for any of us to dismiss what is most important to us when we enter into public conversations and decisions?
 - Everyone has a worldview they bring with them as they make decisions about politics, relationships, ethics, priorities. Do you agree with this? Discuss.
 - Has the author made a reasonable case for the statement he includes at the bottom of page 17 and top of 18, “Secular grounds for moral positions are no less controversial than religious grounds, and a very strong case can be made that all moral positions are at least implicitly religious. Ironically, insisting that religious reasoning be excluded from the public square is itself a controversial “sectarian” point of view.”
- Do you agree with the claim (page 19) “Christianity provides a firm basis for respecting people of other faiths.”
 - What examples do you have that violate this understanding? People who claim to be Christians but show little or no respect for those who believe differently.
 - What examples do you have that support this understanding? People who claim to be Christians who show great respect for those who believe differently?
 - Which of the two above represent most accurately what Jesus models and commands? Can you think of scripture verses and stories that reinforce your understanding of how Christians are to relate to those with different beliefs?
- Quote on page 20, “Christians, then, should expect to find nonbelievers who are much nicer, kinder, wiser, and better than they are. Why is this?”
- Read the second to last paragraph on page 21, beginning, “Why would such an exclusive belief system lead to behavior that was so open to others?” Do you agree with the author’s conclusions? Discuss.

Additional Resources for Leaders

Scripture for Consideration

- Acts 17:16-34 Paul’s response to other faiths. *“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.”*
- 1 Peter 3:15-16 Peter’s instructions on respect. *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”*
- John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

- Acts 4:11-12 “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
- Romans 10:9-13 “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
- Mark 10:42-45 “And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
- 1 John 2:23 “No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also”
- John 8:58 “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”
- John 10:27-30 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”
- Acts 16:29-31 “And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ ³¹ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”
- 1 Timothy 2:5-6 “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

C.S. Lewis on other faiths

From “Mere Christianity”

- “If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong all through. If you are an atheist you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a Christian, you are free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of the truth. When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong. As in arithmetic—there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong: but some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others.”

From “the Great Divorce”

- We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a river but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but away from it and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good.”

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Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Two: Chapter Two

Grace Community Life Group Leader Guide

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller

Week 2: Chapter 2 “How Could a Good God Allow Suffering” (pages 22-34)

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Get to Know you questions (The first week or two you may spend a majority of your time getting to know each other).

6. Where is one place you have traveled to, visited, that you would return to tomorrow if you had the chance? Why is that place such a draw for you?
7. Where were you when you heard about the Earthquake in Haiti (January 2010)? How did watching the news coverage make you feel? How did you respond personally? How did you resolve what happened there with your belief in God (or if you do not believe in God, how did you make sense of what happened)?
8. Share about your first experience in church (or if you were raised in the church, your first clear memory). Was your experience in church positive or negative? Discuss your answer.

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
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Chapter 2 Opening Quotes

Chapter 2: How Could a Good God Allow Suffering?

1. "God allows terrible suffering in the world. So he might be either all-powerful but not good enough to end evil and suffering, or else he might be all-good but not powerful enough to end evil and suffering. Either way the all-good, all-powerful God of the Bible couldn't exist." Hillary, an undergrad English major
"This isn't a philosophical issue to me," added Rob, Hillary's boyfriend. "This is personal. I won't believe in a God who allows suffering, even if he, she, or it exists. Maybe God exists. Maybe not. But if he does, he can't be trusted."²

Chapter 2 Questions

1. Is there evil and suffering in this world? Provide examples.
2. Why is the presence of evil and suffering an excuse for some not to believe in God?
3. Is this chapter's title the BIGGEST problem people have with the God of Christian faith?
4. What's your response when someone brings up evil & suffering as a reason they do not believe in God?
5. Does Christian faith create the "problem of evil" because it claims that God is: 1) "All-Powerful", 2) He is "All Good" and loves us, and 3) that there is evil in this world?
 - a. How does Islam, and its understanding of Kismet (Fate), address this problem?³
 - b. How does Hinduism and Buddhism, with their belief in reincarnation and Karma, address this problem?⁴
 - c. How does atheism make sense of evil and suffering?
6. Do you agree with Philosopher Mackie (page 23) "if a good and powerful God exists, he would not allow pointless evil"?
7. How does the Biblical story of Joseph (sold by his brothers into slavery, accused of a crime he didn't commit, years in prison, separated from his family ...) speak to the Christian response to evil and suffering? (story in Genesis. Read Genesis 37:12-28, 39:1-41:57, 50:15-21)
8. Keller asks, *Could there be a reason God allows evil and suffering to exist?*
 - a. Is the story of the man who lost his sight (page 25) a satisfactory answer to evil and suffering?
 - b. What possible positive purpose could evil and suffering serve?

² The quotes at the beginning of each chapter are taken from an e-mail survey of young New Yorkers in their mid-twenties who were asked to articulate their main doubts and objections to Christianity. The names have been changed.

³ Islamic faith: God also created us for a test, and part of this test is to experience trials with suffering and evil. Passing the test facilitates our permanent abode of eternal bliss in paradise. The Qur'an explains that God created death and life, **"so that He may put you to test, to find out which of you is best in deeds: He is the The-Almighty, The-Forgiving."** (Qur'an 67:2)

⁴ Hinduism and Buddhism believe in Karma. Karma = If you are experiencing trouble and misfortune you are only receiving in this life the just rewards or punishments for your intentional actions in your previous life. The universe is just. Every intentional misdeed is balanced out.

9. Keller quotes C.S. Lewis for a reason suffering may actually PROVE the existence of God.
- “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. but how had I got the idea of “just” and “unjust”? ... “What was I comparing the universe with when I called it unjust? ... Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too – for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it didn’t happen to please my private fancies ... consequently atheism turns out to be too simple.”
 - Does Lewis have a point? Is our belief in justice, evil, suffering actually a proof for God?
 - Is there a real “good and bad” or do we call evil “bad” because we just don’t happen to like it?

“Though the Christian faith does not provide the reason for each experience of pain, it provides deep resources for actually facing suffering with hope and courage rather than bitterness and despair.”
Peter Kreeft (page 26)

“The death of Jesus is qualitatively different from any other death.” Page 30.

10. How does the cross, Jesus offering up His life, change how we understand suffering?
- a. God doesn’t like evil and suffering
 - b. God joins us in the evil and suffering we face
 - c. God overcomes evil and suffering and God promises He will put to right all wrongs, all sufferings, all evil.

“They say of some temporal suffering, ‘No future bliss can make up for it,’ not knowing that heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory”. C.S. Lewis (page 34)

11. How do you respond to the author’s conclusion to this chapter (pages 33-34)? Has this chapter been helpful? How will you respond when someone comes to you and raises this objection to Christian faith?

Additional Resources for Leaders

- A Grace Disguised, Jerry Sittser (The story of the sudden loss of his wife, mother-in-law and daughter)
- A Grief Observed, C.S. Lewis (His journal recording his thoughts, doubts, struggles on the death of his wife)
- The Problem of Pain, C.S. Lewis (A theoretical/theological treatment of pain and suffering)

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Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Three: Chapter Three

Grace Community Life Group Leader Guide

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller

Week 3: Chapter 3 “Christianity is a Straitjacket” (pages 35-51)

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Get to Know you questions

9. What is the highest point (elevation-wise) you’ve ever been (not counting trips in airplanes)? Where were you? When were you there? What did it take for you to get there? What did you see and how did it make you feel?
10. Describe your first car? How did you get the car? What are two memories about the car? What happened to that car?
11. When you hear the word “freedom” how do it make you feel? Have you ever been somewhere where there were significant restrictions on personal freedom? Explain. When was a time you felt most “free”? Where were you? What made you feel “free”?

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Chapter 3 Opening Quotes ... Christianity is a Straightjacket

1. Christians believe that they have the absolute truth that everyone else has to believe – or else ... that attitude endangers everyone's freedom." Keith, a young artist living in Brooklyn
2. "Yes," said Chloe, another young artist. "A 'One-Truth-Fits All' approach is just too confining. The Christians I know don't seem to have the freedom to think for themselves. I believe each individual must determine truth for him – or herself."⁵

Chapter 3 Questions

12. Does Christianity claim there is an absolute TRUTH to which ALL are ultimately accountable?
 - a. If yes, what are those TRUTH claims? Consider:
 - **Acts 17:16-34** Read Paul's response when faced with all of the other faiths affirmed in Athens. *"Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols."*
 - **Deuteronomy 6:4-6** "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart"
 - **Isaiah 45:21** "Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.
 - **John 14:6** "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
 - **Acts 4:11-12** "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
 - **Romans 10:9-13** "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
 - **1 John 2:23** "No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also"
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 - **Acts 16:29-31** "And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ³¹ And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"

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- **1 Timothy 2:5-6** “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.
- b. If no, how would you define the main beliefs of Christian faith?
13. What do we make of other faiths that claim they have the absolute TRUTH? Can all religious claims of all faith groups be TRUE?
- What do we do when two faith groups hold diametrically opposite beliefs about God?
14. Do you agree with Foucault that “all truth claims are power plays”? (page 37). What is the main difficulty with Foucault’s statement?
15. What is meant by, “The new rebel is a skeptic ... by rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything” G.K Chesterton (1874 – 1936) (page 38)
16. How do you respond to the author’s claim (on page 39) that “The idea of a totally inclusive community is, therefore, an illusion. Every human community holds in common some beliefs that necessarily create boundaries, including some people and excluding others from its circle”?
- Is it possible to belong to a group without agreeing to that group’s understandings on particular core beliefs: what is true or not true, behavior that is acceptable or not acceptable, held by that group? If yes, please provide examples.
17. Does claiming there is no absolute TRUTH also become an absolute TRUTH claim?
- Is the claim that all paths/faiths ultimately lead to the same God an absolute TRUTH claim?
 - Is the philosophical/religious claim that, “everyone decides for themselves what is true” the answer? What are the problems with this belief?
18. Do you agree with the author that Christianity has not insisted other cultures adapt to western concepts (honesty requires we acknowledge there have been clear violations of this in the history of Christian missions but those are not the error of Christian faith, rather the error of those evangelizing) instead Christianity “has taken more culturally diverse forms than other faiths”? (page 46)⁶
19. How would you define the concept of “freedom”? What does freedom look like in a person’s day to day life?

⁶ See note 25 for this chapter in the back of the “Reason for God” book.

20. Does Christianity deprive a person of their freedom? Discuss how it might, or might not, limit individual freedom.
- Is a person free only if they are able to do and believe whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want?
 - What happens when the freedom of person A crashes into the freedom of person B? Does a stop sign, a speed limit, the requirement for a driver's license, take away a person's individual freedom?
 - What would a family, or a society, look like if everyone who was a part of that family/society decided for themselves how they wanted to live?
21. Discuss the author's comment (page 47) "In many areas of life, freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones, the liberating restrictions."
- a. What of Keller's claim about love and freedom? (pages 47 – 48). And, "for a love relationship to be healthy there must be a mutual loss of independence." (page 50)
22. How does being a Christian lead you to treat those who hold other beliefs, those who are a part of other faiths, those who disagree with you? (See 1 Peter 3:15, "Gentleness and respect ...")

Additional Resources for Leaders

Quotes by C.S. Lewis (1898 – 1963)

- "One of the greatest difficulties is to keep before the audience's mind the question of Truth. They always think you are recommending Christianity not because it is true, but because it is good. And in the discussion they will at every moment try to escape from the issue 'True-or False' into stuff about a good society, or morals, or incomes of Bishops, or the Spanish inquisition, or France, or Poland—or anything whatever ... One must keep on pointing out that Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."
- "If your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazi less true, there must be something—some Real morality—for them to be true about. The reason why your idea of New York can be truer or less true than mine is that New York is a real place, existing quite apart from what either of us thinks. If when each of us said 'New York' each meant merely 'the town I am imagining in my own head', how could one of us have truer ideas than the other? There would be no question of truth or falsehood at all."

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Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Four: Chapter Four

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The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller

Week 4: Chapter 4 “The Church is Responsible for So Much Injustice” (pages 52-69)

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Get to Know you questions

12. What was your favorite cartoon growing up? When did you first watch that cartoon? What was it about that particular cartoon you liked?
13. Share an experience you had with a sports fanatic. Where were you? What team were they fanatical about? How were they being fanatical? Did you join in ... or quietly walk away?
14. Where were you on Sept 11 when you heard, or saw, religious fanatics had crashed into the World Trade Center? What were your first thoughts?

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Introduction | 8. The Clues of God |
| 1. There Can't be Just One Religion | 9. The Knowledge of God |
| 2. How Could a Good God Allow Suffering | 10. The Problem of Sin |
| 3. Christianity is a Straightjacket | 11. Religion and the Gospel |
| 4. The Church is Responsible for so Much Injustice | 12. The (True) Story of the Cross |
| 5. How Can a Loving Gods Send People to Hell | 13. The Reality of the Resurrection |
| 6. Science has Disproved Christianity | 14. The Dance of God |
| 7. You Can't Take the Bible Literally | Epilogue: Where do We Go from Here? |

Chapter 4 Opening Quotes ... The Church is Responsible for So Much Injustice

1. "I have to doubt any religion that has so many fanatics and hypocrites," insisted Helen, a law student. "There are so many people who are not religious at all who are more kind and even more moral than many of the Christians I know."
2. "The church has a history of supporting injustice, of destroying culture," responded Jessica, another law student. "If Christianity is the true religion, how could this be?"⁷

Chapter 4 Questions

23. Is the church hypocritical and, are most or all Christians hypocrites?

- Offer your definition of a "hypocrite"?
- What types of hypocrisy are present in the church, and in the lives of Christians?
- Is hypocrisy a major problem when others are asked to consider Christian faith?
- What would a non-hypocritical Christian look like?
- Who do you know of who is **not** a hypocrite (in every area of their life)? Provide 2 examples (with details from their life).
- What would you say to someone who dismissed Jesus because of Christians they knew who were hypocrites? Are you at times a hypocrite regarding your Christian faith? If yes, How do you resolve the apparent conflict between your hypocrisy and your Christian faith? If no, take a closer look at your life.
- How does the hypocrisy of the church, and of our Christian life, compare to the hypocrisy condemned by Jesus? (See: Matthew 6:1-16, Mark 7:1-23, Luke 13:10-17)

24. The author lists three issues related to hypocrisy that need to be addressed:

1. Glaring character flaws of Christians

- Are you aware of a moral failure committed by a Christian leader? If yes, how did their moral failure impact your faith? What were the consequences of their moral failure for their family, for their church, for the community where they live, for the reputation of the Christian faith?
- How can some who are non-Christian live better moral lives than some Christians?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the author (pages 54-55) that we should expect some non-Christians to lead "better" lives than some Christians because:
 - ◆ God provides everyone with "common grace" (Common Grace = Good gifts given by God. Rain falls on the just and the unjust. Beauty is given to all. God places in everyone the knowledge of what is good (conscience) and the desire to want to do what is good (soul/will). Every good choice made by Christians and non-Christians is ultimately a gift given by God. This God-

⁷ The quotes at the beginning of each chapter are taken from an e-mail survey of young New Yorkers in their mid-twenties who were asked to articulate their main doubts and objections to Christianity. The names have been changed.

given knowledge and desire can be suppressed or silenced due to external and internal influences.)

- ◆ change in a Christians life is often gradual? Some Christians begin from a much more difficult starting point and have farther to go.
- ◆ the church is a “hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints” and so you would expect to find people with more obvious wounds, needs, flaws in the church.

2. The church’s support of war, violence and injustice

- Has religion, and Christian faith in particular, incited violence and encourage injustice over the centuries? Provide examples.
- Do the errors of the church through the centuries (supporting at times racism, slavery, oppression, imperialism) reflect the will and heart of Jesus? Discuss.
- Did Jesus speak for or against justice, equality, peace?
 - Consider: John 3:16, Galatians 3:28-29, Romans 12:17-18, Matthew 5:43-48
- Does the author’s examples of “god-less” governments (Pol Pot in Cambodia, Stalin in the Soviet Union, Mao in China, Hitler in Germany) provide a counter to the argument that religion is the main cause of injustice in this world? (Pages 56-57) Discuss.

3. Fanaticism

- i. The author states that those who are considered fanatical are “overbearing, self-righteous, opinionated, insensitive, harsh. Why? It’s not because they are too Christian but because they are not Christian enough.” And, fanatics fail “to be fully committed to Christ and His gospel.” (pages 58-59)
- ii. Do you agree or disagree with his statement above?

25. Respond to the quote (by Swiss theologian Karl Barth: 1886 - 1968) “it was the church, not the world, who crucified Christ.”

26. Does Christian faith teach that we are “saved by sheer grace” therefore we “can only become grateful”. (page 61)

- i. Do you agree that Christianity is not, basically, a form of moral improvement but instead salvation by Grace which “is profoundly humbling”?
- b. **Ephesians 2:8-9** “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

27. How should Christians respond to the temptation of power (in politics, in the church)?

- **Mark 10:42-45** “And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones

exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

28. Discuss the distinction the author makes between “honor” based ethics found in certain societies, and “charity-love” based ethics central to Christian faith? (pages 62-63)
- If you passed someone late at night walking down the street carrying something valuable, and there was no one else around, what would be your reason (motivation) for not taking it from them? How would Jesus respond to this question? Read the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and Matthew 5:38-42 and Mark 12:28-31
29. What is the appropriate Christian, Jesus-honoring, response to racism, slavery, and civil rights?
- a. Who led the move to abolish the slave trade in England? (pages 64-65)
 - b. Why were so many of the leaders of the civil rights movement in the U.S. people of deep Christian faith? (pages 66-67)
30. On page 68 the author states “Marx argued that if you believe in a life after this one you won’t be concerned about making this world a better place. You can also argue the opposite. If this world is all there is, and if the goods of this world are the only love, comfort, and wealth I will ever have, why should I sacrifice them for others?”
- a. Do you agree with the author?
 - b. Do you believe Christians should work for peace and justice for all?
 - c. How does a Christian’s confidence in heaven affect how they live their life?

Additional Resources for Leaders

1. Timothy Keller Message on Justice and Mercy:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7vo9pYdbik>

2. John Ortberg and Efram Smith on Social and Racial Justice:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmDwxsIo0XQ>

If you have any questions or comments, if you need help with this study, with members of your group, or with technology, please call (248-7940 x114) or email (curt@yakimagrace.com)

2-4-21 CM

Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Five: Chapter Five

Grace Community Life Group Leader Guide

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller

Week 5: Chapter 5 “How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell” (pages 70-86)

Purpose of Community Groups

- The goal is not to get through the material ... the goal is to get to know each other, and for everyone to gain a better understanding of who Jesus is, and what that means for their life.
- To build safe environment where group members feel safe to share honestly. Consider discussing and agreeing to a set of group guidelines.
 - Confidentiality. What is shared in the group stays in the group. You are free to share what you have said in the group, but not what others have said.
 - Listen when others are sharing. Do not interrupt or attempt to fix the other person. Listen.
 - Do not dominate the group discussion. Let others speak. Encourage others to speak. Be willing to adjust your approach to the group if the group leader indicates others need to be heard from.
- Support and care. Community Life Groups are the best way to care for others, and to be cared for by others. Share your needs, and respond to the needs expressed by others.

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Get to Know you questions

15. Who was your favorite teacher when you were a student in school? What was it that made them such a memorable teacher? Were you able to express your thanks to them?
16. Share a time when, as a young kid, you knew you did something your parents did not want you to do. What did you do, what resulted from what you did, what lessons did you learn?

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

- | | |
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Chapter 5 Opening Quotes ... How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell

1. "I doubt the existence of a judgmental God who requires blood to pacify his wrath," said a frowning Hartmut, a graduate student from Germany. "Someone had to die before the Christian God would pardon us. But why can't he just forgive? And then there's all those places in the Old Testament where God commands that people be slaughtered."
2. "All that is troubling, I agree," responded Josie, who worked for an art gallery in Soho. "But I have even more of a problem with the doctrine of hell. The only God that is believable to me is a God of love. The Bible's God is no more than a primitive deity who must be appeased with pain and suffering."⁸

Chapter 5 Questions

1. Is the belief that God will judge each one according to their beliefs and deeds offensive to those you're acquainted with?
 - If yes, why is this a problem for them?
 - If no, how do they understand God's judgment?
2. The author, reflecting on Robert Bellah's conclusion, "the most fundamental belief in American culture is that moral truth is relative to individual consciousness," states on page 72, "our culture, therefore, has no problem with a God of love who supports us no matter how we live. It does, however, object strongly to the idea of a God who punishes people for their sincerely held beliefs, even if they are mistaken."
 - What would society, and our lives, look like if we were not accountable to God for the life we lived, instead God accepted us no matters our choices or beliefs?
3. The author states that it is often more a sense of revulsion than doubt that causes people to reject the Christian belief in God's wrath and hell. He identifies several beliefs within this:
 - A. A God of Judgment simply can't exist**
 - Keller asks, "Why isn't the idea of a forgiving God offensive?" Other cultures accept the idea of a judging God but are offended by a God who forgives. (p. 74)
 - Are you more offended by a God who judges, or by a God who forgives? Why?
 - Do you believe that there is a higher moral order given to us by God? If no, where does our sense of right and wrong come from? If no, why are there certain universal "rights and wrongs" that cut across most cultures and times? (No culture values as "good" betrayal of your own group, and few (Pol Pot Cambodia is one exception) endorse

⁸ The quotes at the beginning of each chapter are taken from an e-mail survey of young New Yorkers in their mid-twenties who were asked to articulate their main doubts and objections to Christianity. The names have been changed.

mistreatment or murder of your own people). Where does our understanding of “right and wrong” of “we ought to” come from?

B. A God of Judgment Can’t Be a God of Love

- Discuss the comment found on page. 75, “If God is loving and perfect, He should forgive and accept everyone. He shouldn’t get angry.”
 - Is it true that “all loving persons are sometimes filled with wrath, not just despite of but because of their love”? Provide examples to support your answer.
 - How do you feel when someone you love and care about makes choices that destroy themselves and others? Are you angry and try to stop/help them, or do you unconditionally support the choices they are making?
 - Do you agree with the quote on page 76, “Anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference.”
- The author quotes theologian Miroslav Volf, “the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance.” He further concludes that the lack of a belief in God’s vengeance “secretly nourishes violence” because justice would invite us to seek our own justice/vengeance. The belief that God will allow no one to escape accountability and justice brings those who are victims a measure of peace. Your thoughts on this?
- Does a loss in the belief in a God of judgment (if one believes they are not accountable to God) open the door to brutality? (p.78)

C. A Loving God Would Not Allow Hell

- How would you answer someone who said, “The Bible speaks of eternal punishment. How does that fit with the love of God? I cannot reconcile even the idea of hell with a loving God”?
- Do you think that “hell” is a real place? If yes, how would you describe hell? If no, explain what you believe happens to those who love God, and those who reject God, after death.
- Consider these passages related to “hell”:
 - **Isaiah 38:18** “For Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness.”
 - **Ecclesiastes 9:10** “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”
 - **Matthew 5:22** “... hell of fire”
 - **Matthew 5:29 & 5:30** “... your whole body thrown into hell.”
 - **Matthew 10:28** “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”
 - **Matthew 13:42** “and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

- **Matthew 18:9** “It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”
- **Matthew 25:30** “And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
- **Mark 9:43** “And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.”
- **Luke 12:5** “But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”
- **Luke 16:19-31** The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus
- **2 Peter 2:4** “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.”
- **Jude 1:13** “for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.”
- **Revelation 20:10** “and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

4. Is the author correct in stating that hell is eternal separation from the presence of God (all joy, love, goodness, light rejected and eternally gone)? Discuss

5. Who ends up in hell?

- What if we were created to live eternally. What if, after living our lives here: self-focused, self-consumed, prideful, bitter, unforgiving, angry, blaming, obsessed, addicted, opposed to God ... we keep growing in bitterness, hatred, whatever was consuming us during our earthly life, throughout eternity?
- What if we were created to live eternally and the transformation that God begins in our life during our time on earth: to love others, to offer grace, to increase in patience and kindness, to sacrifice for others, keeps growing throughout eternity? (p. 79)
- Modern people think of hell like this: 1) God gives us time, 2) if we haven't made the right choices by the end of life God casts us into hell for all eternity. “Too late now!” (p. 78)
- The author suggests this Biblical view of hell: 1) we were created to live in relationship with our Creator, 2) we reject our Creator, 3) we live forever separated from our Creator ... self-consumed. Hell is one's freely chosen identity apart from God becoming more isolated into eternity. The very idea of accepting the love and grace of God as a means to heaven is repulsive to those who reject God to the very end. Discuss.
- What do you think of C.S. Lewis' statement that, “Hell is the greatest monument to human freedom.” “There are only two kinds of people in the end, those who say, ‘Thy will be done’ to God, and those to whom God in the end says, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in hell chose it.”

- Do Christian faith claim those in hell are worth less than those, who by the grace of God, escape hell? What should be a Christian's attitude and heart toward those who reject God and are headed to hell?
6. Where does the idea of a "God of Love" come from? Is Christianity, as the author suggests, the only major faith to claim that God created the world, and us, out of love and delight? (p. 84).
- Does the world lead us to believe in a God of Love? Does history? Do other religions? Keller contends the Bible is the source of our belief that God is a God of Love.
7. Respond to the comments: Christians do not know who will, and who will not, end up in hell. We must not make settled, definitive comments about anyone's ultimate and eternal destination.

Additional Resources for Leaders

1. Alistair Begg on Sin and Hell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQjJfgdIIIA>

2. Chuck Swindoll on the reality of hell

<https://www.insight.org/resources/daily-devotional/individual/the-reality-of-hell>

3. Billy Graham on Hell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNgoD5Ekpjg>

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2-10-21 CM

Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Six: Chapter Six

Grace Community Life Group Leader Guide

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller⁹

Week 6: Chapter 6 “Science Has Disproved Christianity” (pages 87-99)

Are there any lingering questions or comments about previous weeks in this study?

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Get to Know You Questions

17. What was your first job (not working for your immediate family)? How old were you? What were you asked to do? What was your motivation for working? How much were you paid? What did you do with the money you earned?
18. If you could go back in time and visit one event recorded in the Old Testament what would it be, and why would you want to see that particular event?

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

- | | |
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Chapter 6 Opening Quotes ... Science Has Disproved Christianity

1. “My scientific training makes it difficult if not impossible to accept the teachings of Christianity” said Thomas, a young medical resident, “As a believer in evolution, I can't accept the Bible's prescientific accounts of the origins of life.”
2. “And the bible is filled with accounts of miracles,” added Michelle, a med student. “They simply could not have happened.”

Chapter 6 Questions

1. ***Has science in general, and evolutionary science in particular, made belief in God unnecessary and obsolete?***
 - Richard Dawkins wrote, “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist ... You cannot be an intelligent scientific thinker and still hold religious beliefs.”

⁹ The Reason for God, Edition: 2018, Penguin books

- Do you agree with Dawkins that being an intelligent scientific thinker and being religious (or even further a Christian) is impossible? Discuss. Suggestion: read, and listen to, one or more of the additional leader resources listed below.
- Stephen Jay Gould, the late Harvard scientist and evolutionist, himself an atheist, is quoted on page 94, “Either half my colleagues are enormously stupid, or else the science of Darwinism is fully compatible with conventional religious beliefs – and equally compatible with atheism.” Discuss.
- **Problem #1** for the scientific mind: **MIRACLES:** God’s intervention & violation of laws of nature
 - What is your definition of a “miracle”? (do you agree with the author’s understanding of miracles as the “intervention of God into the natural order” on page 88)
 - Can a person be a Christian if they deny the possibility of miracles?
 - How important are miracles for Christian faith?
 - Consider the Christian faith’s belief in miracles: at the beginning of the world, at the birth of Jesus, in the healing of those sick, in the resurrection of the dead, in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, in the promise of eternal life, the existence of God.
 - Has science proven that there is no such thing as miracles?
 - What is the role of “science” in helping us understand the world in which we live?
 - What is your understanding of the “Scientific Method”?
 - Scientific Method is: “principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge involving the recognition and formulation of a problem, the collection of data through observation and experiment, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses.”¹⁰
 - Another way to understand the approach of science: “1) Observe some aspect of the universe, 2) Invent a tentative description, called a hypothesis, that is consistent with what you have observed, 3) Use the hypothesis to make predictions, 4) Test those predictions by experiments or further observations and modify the hypothesis in the light of your results, 5) Repeat steps 3 and 4 until there are no discrepancies between theory and experiment and/or observation”
 - Are there limits to what science can and cannot verify (prove)?

¹⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/scientific%20method>

- Can science answer all of our questions about: emotions, feelings, beliefs, about love, about the why, about our understanding of right and wrong? Discuss
- Is it a leap of faith to claim that science has proven there are no miracles? P.88
 - “It is one thing to say that science is only equipped to test for natural causes and cannot speak to any others. It is quite another thing to insist that science proves that no other causes could possibly exist.”
 - To be sure that miracles cannot occur you would have to be sure beyond a doubt that God didn’t exist, and that is an article of faith. The existence of God can be neither demonstrably proven or disproven.” P. 90
- Isn’t science in conflict with Christianity?
 - Can a person be a Christian and believe that God used an evolutionary process for creation?
 - **PLEASE REMEMBER TO BE GRACIOUS TO EACH OTHER AS YOU DISCUSS THESE POINTS. SOME HAVE VERY STRONG FEELINGS ABOUT HOW GOD CREATED THE WORLD. LISTEN TO EACH OTHER. BE KIND. TRUST THAT GOD, NOT YOU, WILL LEAD OTHERS TO WHAT IS TRUE.**
 - How should Christians understand Genesis 1 and 2?
 - What is the main purpose (message) of Genesis 1 and 2?
 - Do you believe Genesis 1 and 2 describe creation scientifically?
 - Do you believe Genesis 1 and 2 describe creation poetically and theologically?
 - Both of the above?
 - If it helps I will offer my perspective on this difficult topic.
From Curt: I believe the main message of Genesis 1 and 2 is that we were created intentionally by God for a God determined purpose. The God of Creation cares deeply about us (He loves us). We were created to live in relationship with each other, and with God.
 - I also believe Genesis 1 and 2 describe God’s actual creation of all that is ... but possibly over vast amounts of time (see “one day is as a 1000 years below”). God spoke and creation literally happened. Some of that unfolding of God’s creative power matches with evolutionary science, while other aspects of God’s creative power contradicts theories of evolutionary science. I do not see Genesis 1 and 2 in conflict

with the discipline of science. Those chapters primarily communicate the story of why and how God created.

- I do not believe one has to agree with a particular view of Genesis 1 and 2 in order to be a Christian. Good Christians disagree here. What all Christians agree on is that God created. He initiated. He had us in mind. We exist, all things exist, because of His power, and His decision.
- Does a person have to believe in a literal 6 (24 hour) day creation, and that the world is roughly 6000 years old, in order to be a Christian?
- Is it possible that God created, as described in Genesis 1 and 2, over an extended (long) period of time? How does Genesis 1:14-19 (the sun and moon and stars created on day 4) affect the belief in six 24 hour days of creation? What do we make of 2 Peter 3:8? “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”
- Is it possible to be a Christian and also believe in certain aspects of the evolutionary process while still maintaining God created and directed that process?
- Do you agree with the author that believing in evolution does not require you to agree that everything had a “natural” cause (meaning there was no involvement by God or by any other supernatural cause)
- Do you believe, with the author, that when evolution becomes an all-encompassing theory it moves from the realm of science to philosophy? Page 91
- Scientists like Francis Collins believes that the “fine tuning, beauty and order of nature nonetheless points to a divine creator.” P. 91
- 4 proposed models suggested (by Ian Barbour) on how to view science and religion¹¹:
 1. Conflict Model: Science and Religion are at war with each other.
 2. Dialog Model: Conversation partners in which both claim some knowledge of the truth
 3. Integration Model: The truth of science and religion can be brought into one whole truth
 4. Independence Model: Both are true as long as they are kept separate

¹¹ Ian Barbour, American Physicist and Theologian. Phd University of Chicago, Masters Yale Divinity. Focus on the relationship between science and religion.

- Which of the four models is most appealing to you? Explain.
- Which of the four models is the most helpful for public discussion on faith and science? Why?
- Let's be honest ... miracles are hard to believe ... especially the central miracle (Matthew 28:17)
 - How believable do you think the miraculous claims of Christian faith are to someone unfamiliar with Christianity? (particularly that God entered human history as a baby, and was crucified on a Roman Cross, died, was buried, but then three days later He returned to life) P. 98
 - How might this chapter help some who are currently resistant?
 - Passages in the Bible remind us of how difficult it is to believe in miracles (Matthew 28:17 "some doubted" and Luke 24:41 "while they still disbelieved" and John 20:24-29 "Unless I see ... and place my finger ... I will never believe")
 - Respond to this quote (p. 99) "Modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order."
 - Miracles give us a glimpse of the world we always wanted ... p. 99

Additional Resources for Leaders

1. Francis Collins on Science and Faith

- <https://physicstoday.scitation.org/doi/10.1063/PT.6.4.20200520a/full/>
- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/voices/collins.html>
- <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/05/francis-collins-honored-work-bridge-science-and-religion>

2. John Lennox on Science and Faith

https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Science_and_Faith_Friendly_Allies_Not_Hostile_Enemies_page1

3. C.S. Lewis Science and Faith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9-Vc964rus>

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2-18-21 CM

Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Seven: Chapter Seven

Grace Community Life Group Leader Guide

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller¹²

Week 7: Chapter 7 “You Can’t Take the Bible Literally” (pages 100 - 118)

Are there any lingering questions or comments about previous weeks in this study?

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Get to Know You Questions

19. Describe an experience you’ve had in a very loud and noisy environment? Where were you? Why were you there? How peaceful did you feel at the time? What was it like for you when you got away from the noise?
20. Who is your favorite superhero? What makes them your favorite? What is one act of their super-heroism you recall?

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

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Chapter 7 Opening Quotes ... You Can’t Take the Bible Literally

1. “I see much of the Bible’s teaching as historically inaccurate” said Charles, an investment banker, “We can’t be sure the Bible’s account of events is what really happened.”
2. “I’m sure you’re right, Charles,” answered Jaclyn, a woman working in finance. “But my biggest problem with the Bible is that it is culturally obsolete. Much of the Bible’s social teaching (for example about women) is socially regressive, so it is impossible to accept the Bible as the complete authority Christians think it is.”¹³

Chapter 7 Questions

The author writes that many of his college professors taught that the Bible was unreliable because the stories about Jesus were shaped to support the beliefs of the early leaders of the

¹² The Reason for God, Edition: 2018, Penguin books

¹³ The quotes at the beginning of each chapter are taken from an e-mail survey of young New Yorkers in their mid-twenties who were asked to articulate their main doubts and objections to Christianity. The names have been changed.

church and “the oral traditions were then passed down over the years, evolving through the addition of various legendary material. Finally, long after the actual events, the gospels assumed written form. By then it was almost impossible to know to what degree, if any, they represented the actual historical events.” (page 101)

- *What are some of things others say about the Bible?*
- *Do most people who oppose Christian faith come to their place of opposition after taking a serious look the claims of the Christian faith, after reading the Bible? Discuss. If not where does their opposition come from?*

What is our main source of knowledge about Jesus?

- *If we do not believe the Bible is trustworthy, where can we go for information about Jesus?*

What about the other “gospels” (Barnabas, Judas and Thomas) that claim to tell us about Jesus?

Why weren’t they included in the Bible?

- *The Christian church dismissed many of the “other” gospels because: 1) the author was not connected with the actual events they were writing about, 2) they were written much later than the books that were already accepted as part of the Bible, 3) the message they contained was different than, at odds with, the central message the Christian Church already affirmed.*

Popular modern stories such as the Da Vinci code raise questions about the Bible.

- *One can accept or reject the written accounts of Christian faith from its earliest days but it is problematic, and even arrogant, to suggest you can more accurately re-write that history from today’s vantage point.*
- *Read the quote from Anne Rice on page 102. What is your response to her conclusion?*

Can we trust the Bible historically? (Refer to pages 103-113 in the book)

- Some of the reasons Christians trust the Bible:
 - The gospels were written down and distributed widely within 40-60 years of Jesus’ death. John’s Gospel is considered the latest, dated by most scholars about 80-90 AD.
 - Names, places, and other details, mentioned in the gospels and letters are so precise that those who first read the letters and gospels (many of whom were alive when the events took place) would have remembered the actual events and would have refuted the inaccuracies in the stories.
 - Paul’s letters were written within 15-25 years after the actual events ... (think about events in 2005 or 1995) ... and his letters contain the core of the Christian message as we have it today, and also include historical events in detail.

1. The content in the New Testament does not endorse the power groups of the day. Quite the opposite, it challenges those in power at most every turn.
 2. The doubts expressed by John the Baptist (Luke 7) and by the disciples themselves following the resurrection (Matthew 28:17, Luke 24:41) work against a fabricated document attempting to convince others to believe. Who would have included these kinds of doubts in a book attempting to convince the world that Jesus was much more than a prophet or great leader, but actually God Himself among us?
 3. Jesus' difficult prayer in the Garden, His cry of despair from the cross, and the disciple's numerous failures do not support a manufactured story.
- The literary form of the gospels does not fit the "fairy tales and fiction" of its day. Not until modern times does fiction include details and dialogue, as if they were eyewitness accounts.
 - The Christian message is not what anyone would have made up ... it is too fantastic. "God loves us so much that He came to rescue us by offering up His life as a sacrifice to save and redeem us ... we do not need to do anything to earn the favor of God, His mercy and grace is a gift He offers to us and the world."
- Early Christian leaders (in the 300's) came together and established the limits for the Bible. They set three main criteria on whether a book was to be accepted as part of the Bible.
 1. The book or letter had to come from an eyewitness, or a companion of an eyewitness, of the actual events recorded.
 2. The message contained in the book or letter had to agree with what the Christian community already understood to be true
 3. The book or letter had to already be widely accepted as true by Christian communities/churches across the known world.
 - The volume of manuscripts (1000's gathered over the years from all over the world), and the incredible degree of harmony that is evident when those manuscripts are compared to each other, lends support to the trustworthiness of the Bible (that we have today an accurate rendition of what the original authors wrote down).
 - Non-Christian historians (Josephus for one), and written records of that day (numerous Roman correspondences), corroborate many of the details associated with the early Christian community.
 - Modern archeology continues to uncover evidence that supports accounts contained in the Bible

The Bible claims to be God's decision to tell us about who He is, and about who we are, not our attempt to explain God and make sense of the world. What do you believe about the Bible? (refer to page 5 for some of the ways people view the Bible)

How does your view of the Bible affect your faith and life?

- EVERYONE trusts someone or something to provide them direction and an understanding of what is true. EVERYONE relies on some authority for what is right or wrong, true or false, valuable or value-less. If not the Bible, then what?

How do we respond to the claim that we can't trust the Bible culturally (refer to pages 113-117)

- The Bible supports slavery and the subjugation of women ... “slaves obey your masters” ... therefore it can't be true.
 - Instead the Bible actually gives rights and attention to slaves, to women, to the discounted that challenged the norms of its day (our day too).
 - We read the Bible through the lens of our current day and reject it from historical snobbery.
 - To reject what the Bible says about certain topics assumes God would not have any views we would disagree with today.

The Bible has faced greater scrutiny than any other book ever written (and that is reasonable because it makes incredible claims about God and about us) and it still holds against.

We accept as true many historical “facts” based on limited and questionable sources.

Do you agree that the easy answer is to reject what we don't like in the Bible and instead create a version of god that fits our own moral and cultural desires? A god that does not make us feel uncomfortable, but rather one that endorses our every whim and wish.

How do you respond to the author when he writes, “Only if your God can say things that outrage you and make you struggle (as in a real friendship or marriage!) will you know that you have gotten hold of a real God and not a figment of your imagination. So an authoritative Bible is not the enemy of a personal relationship with God. It is a precondition for it.” Page 118)

Where do you turn to discover truth about God, your future, and your place in the world?

Additional Resources for Leaders

1. The Gospel Coalition: The Bible in an age of uncertainty. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBbfb8Zbxn0>
2. Mark Driscoll: Why we can trust the Bible. <https://realfaith.com/ask-pastor-mark/why-can-we-trust-the-bible/>
3. Alistair Begg: What if it is all true! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcXSLCRaIWg>

If you have any questions or comments, if you need help with this study, with members of your group, or with technology, please call (248-7940 x114) or email (curt@yakimagrace.com)

Five General Categories of Belief about the Bible

After reading through the descriptions below, where would you place yourself on the following scale:

(Of no or little value) 1 2 3 4 5 (Not one error)

1. **The Bible is a human document of no or little importance** (similar to a book of average poetry or fiction). Jesus is an interesting, most likely fictional, figure. Bible is of no value, or little value, for my life.

2. **The Bible is a human document with some importance** (equal in weight to other moral and religious writings, good poetry or fiction, self-help books). The authors of the Bible were good people describing as best they were able truths they believed about life and God. Jesus, likely fictional, was a wise teacher. The Bible offers insights that may or may be helpful and meaningful. The Bible's value must be determined by each individual.

3. **The Bible consists of human writing inspired by God (equal to, or possibly greater than, the central writings of other faiths)**. God reveals His truth through the writings of all major religions. All, or most, religions and their religious texts will lead us to God. Even though the Bible is a good guide, the Bible contains the bias and errors of each of its human writers. Whether Jesus was a real historical figure doesn't matter. Whether Jesus was God, or simply a human prophet and guru, isn't important. We should take the best of the Bible, the best of modern science, the best of all religious leaders and texts, the best of culture around us, in order to gain the best understanding of God and how God intends for us to live.

4. **God inspired and directed human authors to write the Bible (The Bible is a Christian's guide and authority regarding what we know about God and how we are to live in this world)**. Using each writer's personality and experience God inspired and directed these human agents (authors of the 66 books of the Bible) to write down Truth about who God is and who we are. The Bible is our highest authority regarding faith and life. No other book (secular or sacred) communicates Truth about God and us as accurately as does the Bible. When speaking about God and God's intentions for us the Bible is without error. But, there may be insignificant errors (numbers, dates and grammatical inconsistencies ...) in the Bible. The Holy Spirit protected and preserved what was written. No other book has undergone such external rigorous scrutiny and attempts to discredit it. Christians believe the Bible has survived such attacks. If there is a difficult part to understand, scripture interprets scripture. We can only understand the truth in the Bible because God offers continuous and direct help (His Holy Spirit). The Bible is Infallible (It does not fail once in communicating God's truth about the nature of God, the plan of God, or about God's plan for our life and faith.)

5. **God dictated what was written through human agents (The Bible is the unquestioned authority regarding God and God's actions in this world)**. God used specific human individuals (authors of the 66 books) to serve as secretaries to write down exactly what God told them to write, word for word, dot for dot. The Bible is free of error. The Bible is the ultimate and trustworthy authority for faith and life. No other book (secular or sacred) communicates Truth about God and us as accurately as does the Bible. The Holy Spirit has divinely protected and preserved the Bible. No other book has undergone such external rigorous scrutiny and attempts to discredit it. The Bible holds up under any and all attacks. If there is a difficult part to understand, scripture interprets scripture. We can only understand the truth in the Bible because God offers continuous and direct help (His Holy Spirit). **The Bible is Inerrant**. (There is not one theological, factual, or grammatical error in the Bible (some reserve this claim only for the original manuscripts).

Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Eight: Chapter Eight

Grace of Christ Yakima

Leader Study Guide: Community Group Life

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller¹⁴

Week 8: Chapter 8 “The Clues of God” (pages 131-147)

Are there any lingering questions or comments about previous weeks in this study?

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Get to Know You Questions

21. What is one of your strongest “food” temptations? (Something you know you shouldn’t eat but you find hard to resist.)
22. What is a memorable commercial from when you were growing up? What were they selling? Why was that particular commercial one you remember? Was the product something you really needed, or were they trying to convince you to buy what you did not need? Were they successful?

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

Introduction

1. There Can’t be Just One Religion
2. How Could a Good God Allow Suffering
3. Christianity is a Straightjacket
4. The Church is Responsible for so Much Injustice
5. How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell
6. Science Has Disproved Christianity
7. You Can’t Take the Bible Literally

8. The Clues of God

9. The Knowledge of God
 10. The Problem of Sin
 11. Religion and the Gospel
 12. The (True) Story of the Cross
 13. The Reality of the Resurrection
 14. The Dance of God
- Epilogue: Where do We Go from Here?

Chapter 8 Opening Quotes¹⁵ ... The Clues of God

“If one puts aside the existence of God and the survival after life as too doubtful ... one has to make up one’s mind as to the use of life. If death ends all, if I have neither to hope for good nor to fear evil, I must ask myself what I am here for, and how in these circumstances I must conduct myself. Now the answer is plain, but so unpalatable that most will not face it. There is no meaning for life, and [thus] life has no meaning.” Somerset Maugham

“It was true, I had always realized it - I hadn’t any ‘right’ to exist at all. I had appeared by chance, I existed like a stone, a plant, a microbe. I could feel nothing to myself but an inconsequential

¹⁴ The Reason for God, Edition: 2018, Penguin books

¹⁵ Quotes included by the author at the beginning of each chapter

buzzing. I was thinking ... that here we are eating and drinking, to preserve our precious existence, and that there's nothing, nothing, absolutely no reason for existing." Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

Chapter 8 Questions

The author writes that "many people have found strong clues for his (God's) reality – divine fingerprints – in many places." (page 131)

- *Discuss the difference between "clues" for God's existence, and "proofs" for God's existence?*
- *Where does the "general sense" many feel regarding the existence of God come from? (page 132)*
- *Are there any "airtight" irrefutable convincing argument for the existence of God? Explain your answer*

Some Theistic (God) Clues

Clue #1: The Mysterious Bang (pages 132-133)

- *Where did we (and the universe itself) come from?*
- *Discuss the Francis Collins quote, "Fifteen billion years ago, the universe began with an unimaginably bright flash of energy from an infinitesimally small point. That implies that before that, there was nothing. I can't imagine how nature, in this case the universe, could have created itself. And the very fact that the universe had a beginning implies that someone was able to begin it. And it seems to me that had to be outside of nature." (page 133)*
- *Everything we know of has a cause that initiated it ... nothing in our experience just happened. Do you agree or disagree with this? Think of examples to support and to refute your conclusion.*
 - *Example: Why do you live in Yakima (or any community)? I was born in Yakima. What caused you to be born in Yakima? Decision of my parents (or Grandparents ...) to move to Yakima. What caused them to move to Yakima? They came here for a job. What caused the job to exist? The company they worked for made a decision to start a business in Yakima. What caused them to start a business in Yakima? The demands of the agricultural community? What caused the demands to increase for the agricultural community? ... more people moved to Yakima. What caused that? Rail Station moved from Union Gap to North Yakima ... What caused that? Pioneers came to the valley and settled and rail service needed. What caused them to come to the valley? Keep asking "why" ... until there is no longer a "because".*

- *This is not suggested as conclusive proof for the Christian understanding of God ... it doesn't take us that far. But it is a strong clue for the existence of some force and power outside of the natural world that started everything.*

Clue #2: The Cosmic Welcome Mat (pages 134-136)

- *The details necessary for life ... all of the various forces and values required for life to occur fall (Francis Collins lists 15) fall within a very narrow band. With minor changes to any of the 15 life would not have happened.*
- *How is it that all of these factors were there in the right quantity, with the right force, and in close proximity ... at the same time?*
- *Stephen Hawking Quote, "The odds against a universe like ours emerging out of something like the Big Bang are enormous. I think there are clearly religious implications." (from Hawking's conclusions in the first edition "Brief History of time".)*

Clue #3: The Regularity of Nature (pages 136-137)

- Nature happens in regularity. Nature is not random. Nature is predictable (making science possible).
- Why does the natural order operate in a consistent way ... a way that leads us to expect it will operate in the same way tomorrow and the day after? It operates in a way that gives us confidence and not chaos regarding tomorrow.

Clue #4: Beauty (pages 137-139)

- Why do certain pieces of music and art, and occasions when we encounter beauty in nature, inspire us to hope about our life and the world in which we live?
- Does the unfulfilled longings within us, when we encounter beauty, point to something beyond our natural existence? Have we been created to long for beauty in nature and in each other (character, mind, creativity)?
- Do you agree or disagree with the author when he writes, "We want something that nothing in this world can fulfill." (page 139)

Clue #5: The Clue-Killer (pages 140-144)

- There are those who claim all of the supposed "clues for God" are nothing more than a function of evolutionary biology.
- If we have religious feelings it is because we were biologically programmed for those feelings. Religious feelings helped us survive. Those who did survive passed on the genetic code for religiousness. How do you respond to this argument?
- But if we are merely a product of evolutionary biology, natural selection, how can we trust our own senses and our understanding in determining what is rational or irrational? Rationality for us may be false if it is purely the result of our instinct for survival. How can

we trust our arguments and conclusions unless we are judging what is right or good against an outside objective standard?

- Evolutionary biology may help explain why we survived, but it cannot give us assurance that we are viewing the world accurately. Evolutionary biology cannot make definitive statements about God. If we are nothing more than the product of a random evolutionary process how can truth claims that are the result of evolutionary biology be trusted?

Clue #6: The Clue Killer is Really a Clue (pages 144 - 147)

- If there is no God, we should not trust our cognitive faculties at all (page 145). But we do!
- We use our cognitive faculties to explore and explain the natural world. We defend the conclusions we arrive at as “factual, true, dependable, and rational”. But what is “rational”?
- C.S. Lewis quote, “You can’t go on getting very serious pleasure from music if you know and remember that its air of significance is a pure illusion, that you like it only because your nervous system is irrationally conditioned to like it.” (page 146). Quote taken from his article “On Living in an Atomic Age.”

What is your response to the author’s conclusion that, “of course none of the clues we have been looking for actually proves God. Every one of them is rationally avoidable. **However, their cumulative effect is, I think, provocative and potent** ... the theory that there is a God who made the world accounts for the evidence we see better than the theory that there is no God ... **even when we believe with all our minds that life is meaningless, we simply cannot live that way.** We know better.” *my emphasis added.* (page 146)

DVD to compliment your group’s study

I have available for you, and your group, several copies of a DVD that compliments this Reason for God study. This DVD contains six sessions in which Timothy Keller (the author of the Reason for God book) dialogs with a group of skeptics on several of topics found in the book. It is wonderfully done and would be a great addition to your group’s study. Contact me (curt@yakimagrace.com, 509-248-7940 x114) if you’d like to view this DVD personally, or use it with your Community Life Group.

Additional Resources for Leaders

1. Gospel Coalition: Why we can believe in Jesus. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/video/tim-keller-why-we-can-believe-in-jesus/>
2. Billy Graham on Faith and Reason. <https://orbitermag.com/billy-graham-faith-science/>
3. Lee Strobel: Evidence for Faith. <https://www.ccu.edu/strobelcenter/>

If you have any questions or comments, if you need help with this study, with members of your group, or with technology, please call (248-7940 x114) or email (curt@yakimagrace.com)

Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Nine: Chapter Nine

Grace of Christ Yakima

Leader Study Guide: Community Group Life

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller¹⁶

Week 9: Chapter 9 “The Knowledge of God” (pages 148-164)

Are there any lingering questions or comments about previous weeks in this study?

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Get to Know You Questions

23. Share a time when you felt a genuine moral outrage? What was it that made you feel that way? What did you do in response to your feelings?
24. How far back are you able to go in your family genealogy? Were there any surprises in your family tree you are willing to talk about? What countries did your ancestors come from before arriving in the United States?

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Introduction | 8. The Clues of God |
| 1. There Can't be Just One Religion | 9. The Knowledge of God |
| 2. How Could a Good God Allow Suffering | 10. The Problem of Sin |
| 3. Christianity is a Straightjacket | 11. Religion and the Gospel |
| 4. The Church is Responsible for so Much Injustice | 12. The (True) Story of the Cross |
| 5. How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell | 13. The Reality of the Resurrection |
| 6. Science Has Disproved Christianity | 14. The Dance of God |
| 7. You Can't Take the Bible Literally | Epilogue: Where do We Go from Here? |

Chapter 9 Opening Quotes¹⁷ ... The Knowledge of God

Charlie: Of course there's a God! We all basically know there is.

Cynthia: I know no such thing.

Charlie: Of course you do! When you think to yourself – and most of our waking life is taken up thinking to ourself – you must have this feeling that your thoughts aren't entirely wasted, that in some sense they are being heard. I think it's this sensation of silently being listened to with total comprehension that represents our innate belief in a supreme being, an all-comprehending intelligence. What it shows is that some kind of belief is innate in all of us. At some point most of us lose that, after which it can only be regained by a conscious act of faith.

Cynthia: And you've experienced that?

¹⁶ The Reason for God, Edition: 2018, Penguin books

¹⁷ Quotes included by the author at the beginning of each chapter

Charlie: No, I haven't. I hope to someday.¹⁸

Chapter 9 Questions

Respond to each of the following:

- *Is the murder of an innocent person who has done you no harm, wrong?*
 - *Is betrayal of someone you love wrong at all times for all people?*
 - *Is taking something that does not belong to you, and that another person needs in order to survive, wrong at all times for all people?*
 - *Is it wrong, at all times for all people, to abuse and mistreat someone solely because of their outward physical appearance?*
 - *Is treating someone as less than human, and therefore justifying taking advantage of them, not paying them fairly, assaulting them, belittling them, solely because of their gender or nationality or religious convictions wrong at all times for all people?*
 - *Is it wrong to buy and sell people?*
 - *Is it wrong to attack, mistreat, experiment on, treat as an animal, and then gas and dismember someone because they do not belong to your group or tribe, wrong?*
 - *Is there any conceivable time or situation when it would be acceptable to violently mistreat infants and children?*
 - *Is the abuse of the disabled or the elderly ever a virtue?*
 - *Is lying, for the sole purpose of gaining a personal advantage at the expense of another, a good thing?*
 - *Is abandoning someone who needs you, depends on you, and you have promised to care for, ever good?*
 - *Is it ever acceptable and right for the majority group in a community to oppress and commit atrocities against a minority group in that same community?*
 - *Is killing another person for your own pleasure ever the right and acceptable thing to do?*
 - *Is sexual abuse and mistreatment morally acceptable?*
 - *Is cheating someone who is on a limited fixed income a good thing?*
 - *Is it ever OK to unexpectedly and without provocation hit another person?*
 - *Is it morally acceptable to commit treason against your country, leading to the death of others, purely for your own financial gain?*
 - *Are pride and arrogance good?*
-
- Do you agree with this quote from page 149? "Everyone knows it is wrong to violate the rights of someone."

¹⁸ Metropolitan (1990, USA, Whit Stillman)

- Are there some things that are definitely wrong and others definitely right? Does your understanding on those things apply to you alone or to all people?
- Where does our sense of “ought” come from? We ought to this and we ought not to do that.
- The author writes, “All human beings have moral feelings¹⁹. We call it a conscience. When considering doing something that we feel would be wrong, we tend to refrain.”
 - Where does our conscience come from?
 - Why do people in different cultures all around the world have an inner sense of conscience?
- The Evolutionary theory of Moral obligation claims that our conscience and sense of what is “right and wrong” developed in the human species as a survival mechanism. Doing what was right instead of wrong proved to be a benefit for humanity. Acting cooperatively instead of selfishly was an advantage for the individual and family groupings. Therefore, the biological urge to do the right thing was passed on genetically by our stronger (more fit) forbearers who obeyed their developing conscience as a means of survival. (summary pages 153-154)
 - Is this a reasonable explanation of where our sense of conscience came from?
 - What about the feeling we have that we should do the right thing when even when no one is watching, or when the person needing help is not part of our family or tribe, or even when they are an enemy? We sense we should do what is right. Whether we actually do what is right in those situations is another question.
- The secular understanding of the world leads to the belief that morality is relative: meaning everyone decides for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Specific groups (societies) may create laws to maintain a sense of order but these laws are not “right” or “wrong” just convenient and beneficial for the life of the community.
 - If this secular understanding of morality is correct, what happens when one society creates laws that a neighboring society disagrees with? What if one society allows the majority in their society to exterminate the minority? Should a neighboring society intervene to prevent the killings? How could they justify intruding on their neighbor’s decisions?

¹⁹ “A key difference between a psychopath and a sociopath is whether he has a conscience, the little voice inside that lets us know when we’re doing something wrong, says L. Michael Tompkins, EdD. He’s a psychologist at the Sacramento County Mental Health Treatment Center.

A psychopath doesn’t have a conscience. If he lies to you so he can steal your money, he won’t feel any moral qualms, though he may pretend to. He may observe others and then act the way they do so he’s not “found out,” Tompkins says. A sociopath typically has a conscience, but it’s weak. They may know that taking your money is wrong, and they might feel some guilt or remorse, but that won’t stop their behavior.” <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/sociopath-psychopath-difference>

- On page 158-160 the author discusses an essay by Yale law Professor Arthur Leff. In the article Leff uses the term “the great Sez Who” and states, “In the absence of God ... each ... ethical and legal system ... will be differentiated by the answer it chooses to give to one key question: who among us ... ought to be able to declare “law” that ought to be obeyed ... Either God exists or He does not, but if He does not, nothing and no one else can take His place ... as things are now, everything is up for grabs. Nevertheless: napalming babies is bad. Starving the poor is wicked. Buying and selling each other is depraved ... there is such a thing as evil. All together now: Sez who? God help us.”
- How do you respond to the quote (page 149) “If there is no God ... and everyone just evolved from animals, why would it be wrong to trample on someone’s rights?”
 - What is the “law” or “moral code” of the animal world? Do animals naturally treat each other the way we would want others to treat us? (see video links below)
 - What do you make of Anne Dillard’s quote, “There is not a person in the world that behaves as badly as praying Mantises”?
- Has Timothy Keller (the author) succeeded in proving that all of us already know God exists? Are you convinced by the moral argument for the existence of God? Discuss
 - The moral argument does not take us all the way to the Christian understanding of God ... but it makes a compelling argument for the existence of God. Discuss
- On page 164: “You can accept the fact that you live as if beauty and love have meaning, as if there is meaning in life, as if human beings have inherent dignity – all because you know God exists. It is dishonest to live as if He is there and yet fail to acknowledge the One who has given you all these gifts.” Discuss the chapter’s final conclusion.

From Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis

“EVERY ONE HAS HEARD people quarreling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kinds of things they say. They say things like this: “How’d you like it if anyone did the same to you?”--“That’s my seat, I was there first”--“Leave him alone, he isn’t doing you any harm”--“Why should you shove in first?”--“Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine”--“Come on, you promised.” People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.

Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man’s behavior does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior which he expects the other man to know about. And the other man very seldom replies: “To hell with your standard.” Nearly always he tries to make out that what he has been doing

does not really go against the standard, or that if it does there is some special excuse. He pretends there is some special reason in this particular case why the person who took the seat first should not keep it, or that things were quite different when he was given the bit of orange, or that some thing has turned up which lets him off keeping his promise. It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behavior or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed. And they have. If they had not, they might, of course, fight like animals, but they could not quarrel in the human sense of the word. Quarreling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.²⁰

DVD to compliment your group's study

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Additional Resources for Leaders

1. Animal Morality: <https://youtu.be/A-8l-7guF84> and <https://youtu.be/hXpOoC2GBvc>
2. The Moral Argument for God: <https://apologetics.org/videos/what-is-the-moral-argument-for-the-existence-of-god/>
3. The strongest arguments for the existence of God (C.S. Lewis Institute): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-zWCd6Dndw>

If you have any questions or comments, if you need help with this study, with members of your group, or with technology, please call (248-7940 x114) or email (curt@yakimagrace.com)

3-11-2021 CM

²⁰ Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis, Harper One, 1980 edition. Pages 3-4.

Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Ten: Chapter Ten

Grace of Christ Yakima

Leader Study Guide: Community Group Life

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller²¹

Week 10: Chapter 10 “The Problem of Sin” (pages 165-179)

***** This is the Final Week in our 10-week Grace of Christ Winter 2021 Community Life Series *****

Our next 10-week supported Community Life series will begin the week of April 18 and continue through the week of June 20

Are there any lingering questions or comments about previous weeks in this study?

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Get to Know You Questions

25. What would you prefer to receive: 1) an email from a friend, 2) a Facebook post from a friend, 3) a phone call from a friend, 4) a letter from a friend? Why?
26. When did you first learn to pray? Where were you? How old were you? How were you taught to pray? Has your understanding of prayer changed since your first prayers? Discuss

Overview of the book (This ten-week study will focus on the first 10 chapters)

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Introduction | 8. The Clues of God |
| 1. There Can't be Just One Religion | 9. The Knowledge of God |
| 2. How Could a Good God Allow Suffering | 10. The Problem of Sin |
| 3. Christianity is a Straightjacket | 11. Religion and the Gospel |
| 4. The Church is Responsible for so Much Injustice | 12. The (True) Story of the Cross |
| 5. How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell | 13. The Reality of the Resurrection |
| 6. Science Has Disproved Christianity | 14. The Dance of God |
| 7. You Can't Take the Bible Literally | Epilogue: Where do We Go from Here? |

Chapter 10 Opening Quotes²² ... The Problem of Sin

Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace. And that our children will live in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength to strength in an ever-widening circle of achievement? What man has done, the little triumphs of his present state ... form but the prelude to the things that man has yet to do. (H.G. Wells, A Short History of the World (1937))

²¹ The Reason for God, Edition: 2018, Penguin books

²² Quotes included by the author at the beginning of each chapter

The cold blooded massacres of the defenseless, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment, and fear to a world from which such things had seemed well nigh banished – has come near to breaking my spirit altogether ... “Homo Sapiens,” as he has been pleased to call himself, is played out. (H.G. Wells, *A Mind at the End of its Tether* (1946))

Chapter 10 Questions

1. What are your thoughts on the above quotes by H.G. Wells (the first before WW2, the second after).
2. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the current state of the world, and the future of the world?
 - What are the reasons for your optimism or pessimism?
3. A friend asks you to explain what Christians mean when they talk about “sin”, what do you tell them?
 - The author writes (page 166), “the concept of “sin” is offensive or ludicrous to many.”
 - How might some of your friends and acquaintances define the word “sin”?
 - Do most people think of themselves as “sinners”? Explain
 - Do you think of yourself as a “sinner”?
 - What makes a person a “sinner”?
4. What does the Bible say about sin?
 - Consider the following passages:
 - **Genesis 4:7** *God speaking to Cain before he murdered his brother Abel*, “Sin is crouching at the door ...”
 - **Psalms 51:3** *King David talking about his own sins*, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”
 - **Jeremiah 3:25** “Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us. For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.”
 - **Mark 2:17** *Jesus responding to those who questioned his friendship with “sinners”*, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”
 - **John 8:1-11** *To a woman caught in the very act of adultery and brought before a crowd who wanted her killed for her sin*, ‘Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, ‘Woman,

where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.’”

- **John 8:24** *Jesus said, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins”*
- **Romans 3:12** *“All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*
- **Romans 3:22-23**: *“For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*
- **1 Timothy 1:15** *“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”*
- **James 1:13-15** *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”*

5. How can the Christian message that we are “all” sinners be good news? (see page 166)
 - Do you agree with the quote from Barbara Brown Taylor, “the essence of sin is not [primarily] the violation of laws but a wrecked relationship with God, one another, and the whole created order. ‘All sins are an attempt to fill voids’”? Discuss.
6. Is the author correct when he writes, “the primary way to define sin is not just the doing of bad things, but the making of good things into ultimate things”? (page 168) And, “Our need of worth is so powerful that whatever we base our identity and value on we essentially ‘deify.’” (page 169)
 - Does this agree or disagree with the first great commandment (Exodus 20:3) “You shall have no other gods before (besides) me”?
 - What is your response to the idea that if we place good things like family, or love, or patriotism above God those things become the god of our life. We look to those good things to give us purpose, meaning, and to love us unconditionally. Those good things slowly but surely become a demon and will destroy us and all those around us.
 - Patriotism, when it is our ultimate purpose, will cause us to treat other nations, and those not of our tribe or party, cruelly.
 - Love of family, if it is our main priority, will cause us to destroy other families in an attempt to do whatever it takes for our family.
 - Love of another, when that becomes the main focus of our life, will place a burden on our loved one that they cannot carry and that will ultimately destroy them and us.
7. What are other examples of how even good things can become destructive, sin?

8. Do you agree with the author that when our identity rests on anything but God our life will become inherently unstable (page 170)?
 - The author states that if our identity rests on anything but God, and when what we are placing at the center of our life is challenged, or when it begins to fail us, we will become bitter, defensive, angry, and paralyzed with fear (page 171).
 - Can you think of examples that support or challenge this?
9. Comment on the quote by Augustine (Christian leader from the 300's), "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." (page 172)
10. The author makes an interesting point on page 173. For those whose ultimate pursuit is anything but God; when they **don't** get the desires of their heart they are unhappy and unfulfilled, but those who **do** get the desires of their heart also find they are unhappy and unfulfilled.
 - "When they became successful, every one of them became more angry, manic, unhappy, and unstable than they had been when they were working hard to get to the top." (Page 173)
 - "The next day they woke up and they were still there. The disillusionment turned them howling and insufferable."²³
11. The author includes the idea of Jonathan Edwards (1700's) that human society is deeply fragmented when anything but God is our highest love. "Only if God is our summum bonum, our ultimate good and life center, will we find our heart drawn out not only to people of all families, races, and classes, but to the whole world in general." (page 175)
 - Do you agree that it is only when God is at the center of our life that we are led to genuinely love others regardless of who they are or where they are, even those not of our tribe, family or nation? If you do not agree, what other ideal, center, or focus will lead us to such a generous love for others?
12. The author points us to Romans 8 where we are told that the entire created order is subject to decay because of human sin. "Disease, genetic disorders, famine, natural disasters, aging, and death itself are as much the result of sin as are oppression, war, crime, and violence. We have lost God's Shalom (absolute wholeness) – physically, spiritually, socially, psychologically, culturally. Things now fall apart." Discuss.
13. On page 178 the author states that the solution to the problem of sin in our life is not simply changing our behavior, but a complete change of our heart and life by the work of God. He quotes C.S. Lewis, "The almost impossibly hard thing is to hand over your whole self to Christ ...

²³ Cynthia Heimel, Village Voice Column, January 2, 1990.

if I am a grass field – all the cutting will keep the grass less but won't produce wheat. If I want wheat ... I must be plowed up and re-sown."

- Can you think of any other solution to the problem of sin? Discuss.

14. Respond to the quote, "if you don't live for Jesus you will live for something else."

- How have you seen this lived out in lives around you?

C.S. Lewis Quote

"'Niceness'-wholesome, integrated personality-is an excellent thing. We must try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power, to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up "nice"; just as we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat. **But we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls.** A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world-and might even be more difficult to save.

For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it cannot do so: and at that stage the lumps on the shoulders-no one could tell by looking at them that they are going to be wings-may even give it an awkward appearance.²⁴

DVD to compliment your group's study

I have available for you, and your group, several copies of a DVD that compliments this Reason for God study. This DVD contains six sessions in which Timothy Keller (the author of the Reason for God book) dialogs with a group of skeptics on several of topics found in the book. It is wonderfully done and would be a great addition to your group's study. Contact me (curt@yakimagrace.com, 509-248-7940 x114) if you'd like to view this DVD personally, or use it with your Community Life Group.

Additional Resources for Leaders

4. Billy Graham on Sin: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLYMCuCdJIQ>
5. Charles Spurgeon on Sin: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXWCwaMe1ho>

²⁴ Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis

6. Alistair Begg on Sin and Hell: <https://youtu.be/bQjJfgdIIIa>

If you have any questions or comments, if you need help with this study, with members of your group, or with technology, please call (248-7940 x114) or email (curt@yakimagrace.com)

3-18-2021 CM

Spring 2021 Community Life Group Leader Guide

Timothy Keller's "The Reason for God"
Week Eleven: Chapter Eleven

Grace of Christ Yakima

Leader Study Guide: Community Group Life

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, Timothy Keller¹

Spring Series 2021: Week 1 (Chapter 11) "Religion and the Gospel" (pages 180-192)

This is the First Week in our new 10-week Grace of Christ Spring 2021 Community Life Series *(begins the week of April 18 and continues through the week of June 20)*

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Get to Know You Questions

1. What was your favorite thing to do as a kid (Painting, music, homework, sports, scouts, hiking, reading ...)? When was the last time you did "your favorite kid thing?"
2. What is something you realize is absolutely, completely, beyond question, out of your control? When did you first realize it was beyond your control? How do you feel about not being in control on this, or on many, aspects of your life?

Overview of the book (The Spring 2021 study of this book will focus on the final 4 chapters and then shift to a 6 week DVD study addressing questions from the book, led by the author)

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Introduction | 8. The Clues of God |
| 1. There Can't be Just One Religion | 9. The Knowledge of God |
| 2. How Could a Good God Allow Suffering | 10. The Problem of Sin |
| 3. Christianity is a Straightjacket | 11. Religion and the Gospel |
| 4. The Church is Responsible for so Much Injustice | 12. The (True) Story of the Cross |
| 5. How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell | 13. The Reality of the Resurrection |
| 6. Science Has Disproved Christianity | 14. The Dance of God |
| 7. You Can't Take the Bible Literally | Epilogue: Where do We Go from Here? |

Chapter 11 Opening Quote² ... Religion and the Gospel

"At the very moment of that vain-glorious thought, a qualm came over me, a horrid nausea and the most dreadful shuddering ... I looked down ... I was once more Edward Hyde."

Robert Louis Stevenson, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Chapter 11 Questions

1. What is the Christian understanding of human sin? (Read Romans 3:9-23, and Romans 6:15-23)
 - *What solution to human sin does Christian faith offer?*
 - *What do other faiths and philosophies offer as solutions to human sin?*
2. A friend asks you why Christians think sin is such a big deal. How would you respond?

¹ The Reason for God, Edition: 2018, Penguin books

² Quotes included by the author at the beginning of each chapter

- *Does the Christian understanding that Jesus is the only solution to the problem of human sin provide you comfort or does it cause you problems? (refer to chapter 1 in this book for an in depth look at this question)*
3. Jesus does not claim to be “a way, a truth, a life” but “The Way, The Truth, and The life” ... and then He adds that No One comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).
 - *If this is true, how does it change how we, and everyone else, relates to God?*
 - *How does this claim by Jesus compare to what you know about the leaders and voices of other faiths (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism ...)? Do they point to truth, or claim to be The Truth?*
 4. Christian faith focuses on internal motivations and the desires of the heart rather than on external good moral behavior.
 - *Is cleaning up your outward behavior easier or harder for you than cleaning up your inner motivations and desires? Explain your answer.*
 5. Do you agree or disagree with the quote on page 181, “even the best of people hide from themselves what is within.”
 - *When was the last time you took a close look at what lives inside you (the good and the bad)?*
 - *Take 3-5 minutes now to look inside once again. Ask God to help you to take an honest look.*
 - *What did you find when you looked inside? List the good things, and list the not so good, bad, things.*
 - *What were you glad to find within? What were you surprised to find within? What were you ashamed to find within? What are your true passions, honest motives, what is the source of any hidden anger, who are you not yet willing to forgive, what hurts have you been unable to let go of? What fears, if any, did you uncover?*
 6. The author writes (page 183) that evil and selfishness reveal themselves in two ways: 1) being very bad and breaking all rules, 2) being very good and keeping every rule and becoming self-righteous?
 - *Do you agree or disagree with this? Explain your answer.*
 7. Do you agree that you can avoid Jesus by keeping all the rules as much as by breaking all the rules? Discuss.
 8. What do you know about the Pharisee religious group? Read pages 184-186
 - *Do you identify with any of the characteristics of the Pharisees?*
 - *What is appealing about what they were known for, and what was dangerous about them?*
 9. When those inside the church come across as judgmental of others it can be a huge negative and often turns people away from the church. Have you ever felt this yourself, or have you known those who have rejected Christian faith because of the judgmentalism of church people?

10. Some people try to obey God out of fear. They fear God's punishment, they fear going to hell. Others try to obey God out of gratitude, because they are overwhelmed with the love and grace God offers them. While outwardly these two may look the same, inwardly something quite different is taking place.
- *Describe how these two individuals are different, and the affect those differences will have on their life and relationships.*
 - *What is your motivation for doing what you believe is right, and if a Christian, for doing what you believe pleases God?*
11. How might a person who sees their relationship with God as a contract (if I'm a good and nice person then God owes me a good life) react when they come face to face with suffering and difficult times?
12. How might a person who believes they are accepted by God solely because of God's mercy and grace react when they come face to face with suffering and difficult times?
- *How do you understand your relationship with God when you face hard times?*
13. On page 189 the author includes this quote from a woman who stated that the concept of grace was scary, "If I was saved by my good works then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through. I would be like a taxpayer with "rights" – I would have done my duty and now I would deserve a certain quality of life. But if I am a sinner saved by sheer grace – then there's nothing he cannot ask of me."
- *Do you agree with this or disagree? Explain your answer.*
14. Who do you know that lives their life in gratitude to God?

I'm including again this quote from C.S. Lewis

"'Niceness'-wholesome, integrated personality-is an excellent thing. We must try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power, to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up "nice"; just as we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat. **But we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls.** A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world-and might even be more difficult to save. **For mere improvement is not redemption,** though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it cannot do so: and at that stage the lumps on the shoulders-no one could tell by looking at them that they are going to be wings-may even give it an awkward appearance."³

³ Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis

- *How does this understanding of God's intentions for us differ from what many, inside and outside the church, believe is God's intention for those who follow Him?*
- *Do you agree with this quote? Discuss your answer.*

Additional Resources for Leaders

1. Timothy Keller "Peace in times of suffering and uncertainty":
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/video/keller-peace-uncertainty/>
2. John Ortberg and Focus on the Family on "being a Christian":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9Ng-BtHjRw>
3. Dennis Keating "The sufficiency of Christ": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1RyLULAx_4

If you have any questions or comments, if you need help with this study, with members of your group, or with technology, please call (248-7940 x114) or email (curt@yakimagrace.com)

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