



6 Reasons to Give Up Christianity
Study Guide

Notes for Group Leaders

Why are we doing this series?

These six issues are summaries of research into the main reasons that young people give when they are asked about their decision to leave the Christian Church. A description of this research can be found in a book called *You Lost Me*, by David Kinnaman. However, many people of all ages make these kind of criticisms.

We have chosen this sermon series as an opportunity for our church to think about how we engage with the genuine concerns that many people in our culture have with the church - to help them find a genuine faith, to persevere with their faith, and to grow into mature disciples.

Our hope is that this will help our church members to be more confident in their ability to share their faith with others, so that as our Parish Vision says, we can be 'actively engaged in the life of our local community and celebrating more people becoming Christians each year'.

Tips for discussions

1. These issues are a chance for us to reflect on areas in our church life and culture that might indeed be a stumbling block to some people, so it is good to approach these discussions with a non-defensive and open attitude and look for areas of agreement.
2. There may be particular experiences that back up people's complaints, and it is worth attempting to draw them out and affirming their reality.
3. There are lots of questions provided to discuss each week. Choose the ones that are most relevant for your group.
4. It might be that for particular issues you do not have good 'answers', but with this type of question just accepting that it is okay to have questions is half the battle. We can always study and learn more coming out of these sessions.
5. In the end, we believe that we can be confident that authentic Christianity is capable of dealing with these concerns and leading people on to a deeper knowledge and experience of God. Try to incorporate prayer into your discussions and acknowledge our dependence on God's grace.

Reason 1: 'It's Anti-Science'

The problem: *Many Christians have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible. Yet they see the mostly helpful role science plays in the world they inhabit – in medicine, personal technology, travel, care of the natural world, and other areas. What's more, science seems accessible in a way that the church does not; science appears to welcome questions and skepticism, while matters of faith seem impenetrable.*

Introductory Questions

1. Have you ever heard anyone make this complaint?
2. Is this a concern for you?
3. What particular issues might this concern come from?

Read Psalm 19 together.

4. What does it mean to say that 'the heavens declare the glory of God?'
5. Verses 3-4 claim that the elements of creation (particularly the stars in the 'heavens') speak without words about their creator. Have you ever experienced a sense of the presence of God in nature?
6. Why does the writer of the Psalm move from contemplating the heavens to talking about the law of God?

Further Discussion Questions

7. What answers were given in the sermon to help think about this issue? Do you agree with what was said?
8. What do you believe is the relationship between the laws of nature and human morality?
9. If Christians believe that the universe operates according to the law and word of God, what should our attitude to scientific knowledge be?
10. There are many different views within the Christian church about how to interpret the creation accounts in the book of Genesis. What views on this question are there among your group members? Is it okay for Christians to disagree about this issue? *[N.B. This is a highly controversial issue and may derail group discussion if not handled sensitively].*
11. What legitimate concerns could Christians have about the way that science is practiced in our society?
12. Do we need to change how we approach questions of science and faith, and if so, how?
13. What do you need to learn to be more informed about this topic?

Reason 2: 'It's Exclusive'

The problem: *While everyone has things that they will not accept, on the whole we are shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance, and acceptance. Thus Christianity's claims to exclusivity and truth are a hard sell. In a context where we are sensitive to ideological conflicts, many people want to find areas of common ground with other belief systems.*

Introductory Questions

1. Have you ever heard anyone make this complaint? What kinds of experiences would people who say this generally have on their minds?
2. Is this a concern for you?
3. How much of the conflict in the world today would you ascribe to people holding to exclusive religious views?

Read Acts 4:1-12 together.

4. Why were Peter and John getting into trouble?
5. What was the source of their confidence when they were brought before the court?
6. Why would they claim that there is 'no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved'? What is it about the Gospel of Jesus that makes this a natural claim for them to make?

Further Discussion Questions

7. To what extent do you believe that most religions actually teach the same things?
8. Why might we feel anxious about choosing a particular spiritual path to follow? Is it possible to grow spiritually without choosing a particular religious tradition?
9. Can the claims of the Christian faith genuinely be reconciled with other belief systems? Are there any non-negotiable differences?
10. What should our attitude be to people who hold different beliefs to our own, particularly those who may be hostile towards us?
11. How should we behave towards Christians who interpret their faith differently to the way that we do?
12. What do you need to learn to engage with this issue more effectively?

Reason 3: 'It's Over-Protective'

The problem: *Our society is characterised by a growing availability of information and connectedness based around technology. Younger people in particular value opportunity to use their knowledge in creative and entrepreneurial ways. The church is often seen as a 'ghetto' where risk-taking and being involved in the wider culture are discouraged.*

Introductory Questions

1. Have you ever heard anyone make this complaint?
2. Is this a concern for you?
3. Why do you think Christians might have a tendency to be overprotective of their children and younger believers?
4. Why might the church be resistant to change initiated by young people?

Read Isaiah 60:1-16 together.

5. What is the overall vision that Isaiah is giving to the people of Israel in this prophecy?
6. What is the basis for his hope that the peoples of the world will be drawn to worship God in Jerusalem?
7. What particular things do these people bring? Look through the passage and identify everyone that comes and everything that is brought as a gift.
8. What does God's attitude seem to be toward creativity and cultural expression?

Further Discussion Questions

9. What are some of the great cultural and social achievements that Christians have produced over the past two thousand years? Do you have any creative or inspiring heroes of the faith that you look up to?
10. What attitude should Christians have to the products of our wider culture (eg. films, TV, art)? Think of particular areas where this is a difficult decision to make.
11. How can we deal positively with the fear that we and others might be negatively impacted by engagement with our culture?
12. What opportunities can you see that God might be calling Christians to take up, to be creative and entrepreneurial members of Australian society, and to have a positive impact on the lives of those around us?
13. What do you need to learn about to engage with this issue more effectively?

Reason 4: 'It's Shallow'

The problem: *One of the most common perceptions of churches is that they are boring. Easy platitudes, proof-texting, and formulaic slogans make it hard for many people to experience the gravity and power of following Christ. Only a small percentage of Christians can coherently connect their faith with their gifts, abilities, and passions. In other words, the Christianity they received does not give them a sense of calling.*

Introductory Questions

1. Have you ever heard anyone make this complaint?
2. Is this a concern for you?
3. Why is it easy for the church to fall into the practice of encouraging only shallow commitment and growth?

Read 2 Peter 1:2-11 together.

4. What is the goal of the Christian life according to Peter (vv3-4, 10-11)?
5. What qualities of character and action are Christians called to grow in (vv5-9)? Discuss how they build upon each other as the list goes on.
6. What are the results and benefits of this way of life?

Further Discussion Questions

7. What is your 'calling'? How do you know?
8. Why do we 'stumble' in putting into practice the call for Christian disciples to live a life of deep holiness and purpose?
9. What activities do we use to substitute for an authentic Christian life?
10. Can you think of any examples of Christian people you know who are living a deep life of faith? What can you learn from them?
11. Is it possible for 'boring' things to be beneficial for us? Why and when?
12. How can we encourage each other to grow into a deeper faith, both individually and as a church?

Reason 5: 'It's Repressive'

The problem: *Religious rules – particularly sexual mores – can feel stifling to our individualist mindset. Consequently the church can be viewed as repressive, and counter to the value of human flourishing in loving relationships.*

Introductory Questions

1. Have you ever heard anyone make this complaint?
2. Is this a concern for you?
3. What are the main issues where the Church is perceived as being out of step with the sexual standards of the wider society?

Read Song of Songs chapter 2 together.

4. Are you surprised to find that there is a part of the Bible that so obviously celebrates sexual love? Why or why not?
5. What imagery do the woman and the man in this poem use to describe each other? What does this say about the nature of their relationship?
6. Verse 7 charges the 'Daughters of Jerusalem' that they should 'not arouse or awaken love until it so desires'. In the context of the rest of the poem, what does this suggest about the purpose of 'waiting' for sexual intimacy?

Further Discussion Questions

7. What do you think sex is for?
8. What standards of sexual behaviour would most people be able to agree on? What principles are behind those standards?
9. What do you understand as the purpose of Christian standards of sexual behaviour?
10. Is it possible to move beyond 'rules' in how we think about our sexual practices?
11. What are some of the down-sides of free sexual expression that you can see in your own life or the lives of people you know?
12. Viewing pornography is an extremely common practice, particularly among young men, given its ready availability on the Internet. Is this a healthy trend, and what perspective might Christians offer on it?
13. Do you know any examples of Christian people who have lived a life of chastity in singleness or faithfulness in marriage? Do they think it has been worth it?
14. What more do you need to learn to engage with this question more deeply?

Reason 6 – ‘It’s Doubt-less’

The problem: *Many people say that the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. They do not feel safe admitting that faith doesn’t always make sense. In addition, many feel that the church’s response to doubt is trivial and fact-focussed, as if people can be talked out of doubting.*

Introductory Questions

1. Have you ever heard anyone make this complaint?
2. What are the major areas where people tend to express doubts about the Christian faith?
3. Do you feel comfortable expressing your doubts to people and groups in the church?

Read John 20:24-29 together.

4. Why did Thomas doubt the story of Jesus’s resurrection? What were his demands in order to believe?
5. What was Jesus’s response to Thomas’s doubts?
6. Why does Jesus say that those who have not seen and yet have believed (v29) more blessed than those who have?

Further Discussion Questions

7. What room is there for doubt and uncertainty in your own faith? Do you feel that you have to have everything sorted out in order to believe?
8. Why might we feel threatened by other people expressing their doubts to us?
9. Is God angry when we doubt him?
10. What response should we make to people who express their doubts?
11. Are there some doubts that are more serious than others? What is central to our faith and what is peripheral?
12. What resources are you aware of that can help people find answers to their questions?
13. What more do you have to learn about this topic in order to engage with it more deeply?