

THE AIR WE BREATHE



DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- How do you respond to the thought: “Everyone is a believer”?
- Do you think these seven values are widely believed in today? (Equality, Compassion, Consent, Enlightenment, Science, Freedom and Progress)
- How might it be helpful in your conversations with “unbelievers” to point out their beliefs?

READ TITUS 3:3-8

- How is life described before and after Jesus Christ’s appearing?
- How is Jesus described?
- How do “hope”, “trust” and “doing good” relate to each other?

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SESSION 1: THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

- What stood out to you most from this chapter?
- How would you characterise the ancient world, as described here?
- What beliefs about the gods, the world and humanity were taken for granted?
- In this context, how was the crucifixion of Christ “a moral earthquake”?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

- How did the message of the cross interact with the Jewish and Gentile world of the 1st century?
- How did this message (and its messengers) prove to have a greater power and wisdom than the Gentile world of the 1st century?

SESSION 2: EQUALITY

- What stood out to you most from this chapter?
- How does our belief in equality (and our objection to inequality) show itself today?
- If someone claimed that certain kinds of people are more valuable than others, how would you argue against them?
- How does the Bible make the argument for equality?

READ GENESIS 1:1-31

- How does the Genesis account of creation differ from other creation stories? (These were described in chapter 1 of the book.)
- From Genesis 1, how would you describe God, the world and humanity?
- How would you describe the relationships between (a) God, (b) the world and (c) humanity?
- How does Genesis 1 contribute to the idea of equality? How does it set the scene for the rest of the story of the Bible's story?

SESSION 3: COMPASSION

- What stood out to you most from this chapter?
- How does our belief in compassion (and our objection to cruelty) show itself today?
- How did Jesus and his followers pioneer the way of kindness? (Give examples from the chapter, and add some from your own experience.)
- The way of *nature* is “survival of the fittest”. In what ways does Jesus bring the *supernatural* to the world?

READ LUKE 10:25-37

- How do the robbers and priests show the way of nature?
- How does the good Samaritan show the supernatural way of Jesus?
- Most of us spend our lives trying not to be the man beaten by robbers. What would it look like to emulate the good Samaritan instead?

SESSION 4: CONSENT

- What stood out to you from this chapter?
- What was the sexual morality of the Roman Empire?
- How was the way of Jesus the original “sexual revolution”?
- How does the sexual revolution of the 1960s relate to Jesus’ sexual revolution of the 1st century? What can we learn from this?

READ MATTHEW 19:4-12

- What is Jesus’ vision for marriage, sex, gender and singleness?
- Sometimes people say we’ve moved on from biblical times and so our sexual ethic should also evolve. Given how Jesus’ teaching was received at the time, how would you respond?

SESSION 5: ENLIGHTENMENT

- What stood out to you from this chapter?

- How do you normally think about medieval times? Was that view challenged in this chapter?

- The medieval period saw Christians wrestling with the right way to spread their influence: through force or persuasion? What were examples of each kind of “empire building”?

- What have “the Dark Ages” given us?

EPHESIANS 6:10-20

- These verses speak of armour, weapons and enemies, but what kind of armour, weapons and enemies are spoken of?

- What is the true way for a “soldier of Christ” to advance Christ’s kingdom?

SESSION 6: SCIENCE

- What stood out to you from this chapter?
- Some speak of a “scientific revolution” in the 16th-18th centuries. Why might it be more accurate to speak of a “scientific evolution”?
- What needs to be believed about laws of nature, the world and the abilities of humans in order to do science? How is this supported by Christian assumptions?
- The modern scientific method emerged in Christian contexts. How might the last 500 years of scientific advance also speak of the truth of Christian assumptions?

JOHN 1:1-18

- What is the relationship between the world, the Word (Jesus Christ) and us?
- How do these relationships help us to know both God and the world?

SESSION 7: FREEDOM

- What stood out to you from this chapter?
- Prior to the abolition of the slave trade, what were general attitudes towards slavery in the church and in the world?
- How do you make sense of the centuries that it took for abolition to happen and the church's very mixed record on the issue?
- What drove abolition, and what has been the significance of it for the moral assumptions of the world?

GALATIANS 3:26-4:7

- According to these verses, what kinds of things keep people enslaved and unequal and how does Christ address this?
- What are the implications of these verses for equality and freedom in the church, and in the world?

SESSION 8: PROGRESS

- What stood out to you from this chapter?
- Why was the 19th century a time when the idea of “progress” became popular?
- How did the 20th century demonstrate some of the dangers of “progress”?
- What do you think is a biblical and healthy view of progress?

ISAIAH 9:1-7

- What does Isaiah teach about the times in which he lived, the incarnation and the far-distant future?
- How are these verses both realistic and optimistic?

SESSION 9: THE KINGDOM WITHOUT THE KING

- What stood out to you from this chapter?
- How have the values of the kingdom persisted, and how have they become detached from the King and distorted?
- How has Christianity (including the distorted kind) shaped our culture wars?
- “Be half a Christian and you’ll have enough religion to make you miserable.” How have you seen Spurgeon’s comment play out—in individuals and in society?

MATTHEW 13:1-34

- If the seed is the word of God, what effects does the spreading of God’s word have?
- What stands against the growth of God’s kingdom, and what tactics are advised to combat this?

SESSION 10: CHOOSE YOUR MIRACLE

- What stood out to you from this chapter?
- What are the miracles which this chapter urges us to choose between? Might there be other explanations for the modern world?
- In what ways has the triumph of the Jesus revolution been peculiar? In what ways has it been predicted?
- At the end of the book, what conclusions do you draw from all that has been argued? What are the implications for the church and the world?

MATTHEW 16:13-28

- How do Christ, the church and the world interrelate in these verses?
- What kind of future is Jesus predicting?