

SOUL

Christianity
EXPLORED

Soul Leader's Guide (3rd Edition)
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www.ceministries.org

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Welcome to Soul

Welcome to *Soul*, the edition of *Christianity Explored* for older teenagers and young adults.

This seven-week course is designed to present young people with the good news about Jesus. With a creative mixture of Bible studies, talks, DVDs, activities and group discussions, *Soul* takes your 15+ group on a journey through Mark's Gospel. They'll discover the identity, mission and call of Jesus on their lives – who Jesus is, what he came to do, and how he calls us to respond.

This course, now in its third edition, has benefitted enormously from the experience of the many youth leaders in churches worldwide that have led thousands of young people through the material, and brought them face to face with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Today, as always, young people of all ages need to hear the message of forgiveness, hope, meaning and purpose that will bring a shape to their lives, and a new relationship with God that will last for eternity.

What makes this course – and the Christian gospel – distinctive is its insistence on God's remarkable grace: the clear teaching that although we human beings have rebelled against God, we are deeply loved by him. Loved with an outrageous, costly and incomprehensible love that was poured out for us on a little hill just outside Jerusalem.

It may be no easier for leaders to explain Jesus' teaching on sin, judgment, wrath and hell than it is for the young people to hear it. But, if we are prepared to trust in the Holy Spirit's power to open blind eyes, these uncomfortable truths pave the way for a faithful, fruitful life driven by God's grace.

This Leader's Guide is divided into three sections: the first will introduce you to how the *Soul* course works and train you to run it; the second will be your guide session by session as you run the course; and the third section contains session outlines and programme suggestions for the *Inside Track* weekend/day away.

If you are running a *Soul* course of any kind, please log onto **www.ceministries.org** and register it, so that others can pray for you, or even send other young people along.

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SECTION 1

How to run the course

Getting started

Telling young people about Jesus Christ is a stunning privilege and a huge responsibility. It's a stunning privilege because Almighty God is pleased to call us his "fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9) as he seeks and saves the lost. And it's a huge responsibility because it can be tempting to present a watered-down gospel that has no power to save and is "no gospel at all" (Galatians 1:7). Our evangelism, especially with impressionable young people, must always be careful, prayerful and faithful.

Soul has been developed to let the gospel tell the gospel; it takes you, and those in your care, on a seven-session journey through Mark's Gospel to discover who Jesus is, why he came and what it means to follow him.

To help your journey run smoothly, you will need to consider the following before the course begins.

WHO WILL COME?

For many churches with an existing work among teenagers *and young adults*, the first place to start is the groups that you have running week by week. Running *Soul* need not be billed as a specifically evangelistic course – it may be called a "refresher course" on the basics of the Christian message, or simply as a series that goes through Mark's Gospel. So even for those who have some kind of Christian commitment, there will be plenty of spiritual "meat" in the course, as they study the Bible together and think about the message of Christianity.

And there is great value in running this course "internally" to begin with.

- ❖ **Teaching:** The gospel is not only how you come to faith in Christ; it is also the means by which you grow in your understanding of God, and your love for him. *Soul* teaches the gospel over seven sessions in a way which will be fresh and accessible to your group, and build their understanding and faith.
- ❖ **Inreach:** Any group will have members or fringe members who are not yet Christians. *Soul* is an evangelistic tool to explain the gospel of Christ to them.
- ❖ **Training:** If you hope at some stage to use *Soul* as a specific outreach tool, then running it first with your professing Christians will train them and your other leaders in how it works, and inspire them to invite others the next time it is run.

Obviously, we hope that *Soul* goes on to be used more formally as an outreach programme, where group members are specifically invited to join in order to discover more about what it means to be a Christian today. These kinds of groups will vary enormously, depending on the age group *Soul* is used with, and the context in which it happens. So, for example, you may be running it in a home, or on school or college premises in a lunchtime, or on church premises on a weekend, or at another “neutral” venue.

We have written the course material to include ideas for a variety of settings and groups, but you must adapt the material to suit your particular group and circumstances.

WHERE SHOULD YOU MEET?

Find somewhere where your group will be happy to invite their friends. You may like to experiment with some different locations other than church premises. Avoid using a classroom or somewhere that looks like one so that your young people don't feel they are back in school. The aim is to create a relational environment where they can listen to the Bible teaching while they enjoy the warmth of Christian fellowship and feel sufficiently relaxed to ask their questions and express their doubts and feelings.

The physical environment where you run *Soul* can have a big impact on people's willingness to get involved in activities and discussion, so be creative in the way you decorate and set up the room. It's important to choose a place where you're unlikely to be interrupted and where you will be able to meet every week at the same time.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU MEET?

As this is a seven-session course, once a week for seven weeks is the ideal. Because each week builds on the one before, try not to interrupt the regular schedule of the meetings.

There's also a weekend or day away that we suggest takes place between Weeks 6 and 7, called *Inside Track*. The material relating to this is in section 3 at the back of this Handbook. The idea of this weekend/day away material is to give group members an insight into what it means to live as a Christian – and therefore what would be involved if they decided to follow Christ themselves.

WHY SEVEN WEEKS?

In some youth evangelism there has been too much emphasis on a pre-packaged gospel presentation which aims to “get people to pray the prayer”, often with little opportunity for serious consideration of what is involved in following Jesus. This approach to evangelism can be valid when you are dealing with people who already have the building blocks for understanding the gospel in place – knowing the facts about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, understanding the Christian view of God, etc. But increasingly, young people either have no understanding of these things, or else have knowledge that is patchy or confused. That is why this course seeks to put in place the building blocks of understanding the gospel slowly, over several weeks, with plenty of room for discussion and reflection.

As Christians, our aim should be to work for “fruit that will last” (John 15:16), not a superficial religious experience that is quickly forgotten when life gets tough. With that in mind, *Soul* clearly sets out the implications of becoming a Christian, so that young people can adequately “count the cost” before making a commitment.

WHAT’S INVOLVED IN EACH SESSION?

The structure we suggest is the same for each session:

1. Group activity
2. EXPLORE (Bible study)
3. Talk or DVD
4. TALKBACK (group discussion)

When this is packaged up with some time for food or just general hanging-around time, it gives rise to a two-hour programme as below. Alternatively, a stripped-down version can be done in an hour. Below are some suggested timings in minutes for each component:

Full programme		Shorter programme	
Food	30	Introduction	5
Group activity	25	Group activity	10
Explore	20	Explore	10
Talk/DVD	15-20	Talk/DVD	15
Talkback	25	Talkback	20
-----		-----	
TOTAL	120	TOTAL	60

You should be able to complete the full programme for a session in less than two hours. This can be shortened if necessary by limiting the time taken for food, activities or discussion. It is important to watch the time used for each of these components. Over-running can cause frustration and boredom – and may make it difficult for you to communicate the gospel effectively. *Soul* has been extensively piloted with groups all over the world and the current course is the result of detailed feedback. We would urge you, when you first run the course, to try and use it as written – you may be surprised by how well your group handles the activities and questions!

FOOD

The main reason that food is suggested as part of the programme is not as a device to get young people to come (although in our experience, teenagers and students will go anywhere for a free feed!). Rather, it is because as you sit or stand around eating, you and your fellow leaders have the opportunity to interact with the young people – to discover what they are like, what interests them, and what struggles and difficulties they face.

Time is precious, so if you can, recruit outside help with the food so that you are free to spend time with the group members. Resist the temptation to make the food over-elaborate. Keep it simple to eat and clear away. (Although it's always good to make an effort, there is a danger that food can end up squeezing out time for exploring the gospel.)

GROUP ACTIVITY

This is a short, fun game, intended to introduce the theme of the session, and build relationships between people. Each time you meet, you will need to make sure you have all the equipment needed to run the activity, and have thought through how it will work for your particular group, in the place where you are running *Soul*.

EXPLORE

This is a Bible study from Mark's Gospel, giving the group a chance to explore Jesus' life and teaching. The skill of your fellow leaders is crucial during EXPLORE – an excellent reason for you to schedule some training time with them. You will find extensive notes on training later on in this section.

TALK OR DVD

At this point you, as the course leader, will deliver a short talk based on a passage from the Gospel of Mark. Alternatively, you can use the *Soul* DVD instead of doing a "live" talk for the seven main *Soul* sessions. There is no DVD material for the *Inside Track* sessions, so you will have to do live talks for them.

If you are using the *Soul* DVD, make sure that your leaders have watched the episode beforehand so that there will be no surprises with the content. Because the DVD features on-screen Bible text, it is inadvisable to use it with large groups unless you have access to a projection screen and projector.

TALKBACK

This is a chance to discuss the themes of the talk, and bring out the implications. TALKBACK questions are particularly designed to draw out what your group members actually believe.

HOW WILL YOU INVITE PEOPLE?

If you are running *Soul* as an outreach series, you will need to encourage your group to invite their friends. You might want to do a study with them on the importance of evangelism before you start running *Soul* – although the best way to motivate your regulars to bring others on the course is for them to experience it themselves first. "Friends bringing friends" is the main reason people come to the course.

If you are running *Soul* as part of a church youth group, you should advertise the course in your church bulletin, during the Sunday services, and at your regular youth group meetings.

Any publicity material you produce about the course needs to reassure people that no one will be expected to pray, sing or do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. It is also important to be honest about exactly what will happen, so that people don't feel duped into coming.

It is our hope that the course would not be a "one-time" event, but rather become a regular feature of your calendar. And once your youth group have experienced *Soul*, you'll find that they'll be eager to invite their friends to future courses.

WHO WILL LEAD?

We recommend that one leader is made responsible for delivering all the talks, or introducing the DVDs, and running the whole session. If the group is small, the same leader will lead the group through EXPLORE and TALKBACK.

If you have a large group, you will need to split people into smaller discussion groups and find additional leaders to lead EXPLORE and TALKBACK with each group. Group members should stay with the same leader(s) every week. We recommend a maximum of eight young people in a group, with at least two leaders per group.

All leaders should be Christians who are able to teach, encourage discussion and care for group members. They should be able to teach the Bible faithfully and clearly – and be able to deal with difficult questions on Mark's Gospel (see page 177).

The group may have questions that are not explicitly dealt with in the material, so leaders should have enough general biblical knowledge to help the young people with these questions. (For help on answering difficult questions, see the section at the back of this manual.)

Leaders should also be able to handle pastoral situations with care and sensitivity. In a mixed group, it is vital to have both male and female leaders present, in order to deal with pastoral situations appropriately. It can be very effective to ask Christian young people to help lead the course. The most important qualities of a leader are not age, but maturity in their understanding and gifting.

Asking a suitable young person to lead may encourage greater discussion and debate. If you do take this route, having an older Christian present in the group (but not leading the discussion) will be helpful in dealing with difficult situations or hard questions. It's also a good idea to choose a young leader who has already been through *Soul* as a group member.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED TO RUN SOUL?

Everyone on the course – leaders and group members – will need to be given a Bible, or the Gospel of Mark. For the sake of clarity, it is important that everyone uses the same version. The version used throughout the course material is the New International Version 1984 (NIV). If you choose to use another version, please check carefully that the wording of the questions makes sense against the Bible version you are using.

An NIV Gospel of Mark themed for the *Soul* DVD is available to buy. Your group will only need Mark during the main seven sessions, but will need full Bibles for the *Inside Track* studies during the weekend/day away.

Everyone should be given a copy of the *Soul* Handbook, which contains the EXPLORE studies, space to write their answers, talk summaries (Downloads) and room to make notes. We recommend that, for a younger group, these are kept by the leaders and handed out each week. (When you collect them after TALKBACK, you will need to promise that their Handbooks are private and that the leaders won't be reading them! Explain that you're holding on to them so that they won't be forgotten next week.)

HOW SHOULD YOU PRAY FOR SOUL?

Nothing happens unless God is at work, so make sure that you give plenty of time to prayer. Try to recruit prayer partners among your Christian friends, or from your church congregation, who will commit themselves to praying before (and during) the course.

- ▶ **Pray for the preparation of the talks** – that they would be faithful to God's word, passionate, challenging and clear.
- ▶ **Pray for the leaders** – that they would be well prepared and that they would “watch [their] life and doctrine closely” (1 Timothy 4:16).
- ▶ **Pray for the young people themselves** – that many would attend; that by his Spirit, God would open their eyes to see who Jesus is, and by his Spirit give them the desire to turn and follow him.

Please let us know when and where your course is running! The Christianity Explored team would love to pray for you. Please register your course at www.ceministries.org

SECTION 2

Soul Study Guide



AS YOU START THE COURSE

Before we begin

This section contains the studies to work through over the seven-week *Soul* course. It includes all the material in the group member's *Soul Handbook*, together with a range of activities, and answers to the questions.

The *Soul* course has been written with 15-18s and young adults in mind. The sessions work alongside the *Soul DVD*, and the activities and questions are designed to stretch and challenge older teenagers and young adults.

However, you know your group best. You may decide that replacing some or all of the episodes from the *Soul DVD* with live talks will suit your particular group better. If so, talk outlines for the seven sessions can be found in the appendices on page 121.

We have aimed to keep the material as flexible as possible to allow you to make these adjustments easily if they would help your group.

1 Christianity is Christ

If you could ask God one question, and you knew it would be answered, what would it be?



4

READ MARK 1:1

1 What does Mark say Christianity is all about in the first sentence of his book?

2 How is that different from some of the pictures we've drawn?

5

Note: In the notes that follow, the **bold text** shown in the light grey boxes (like this one) is the material that appears in the *Soul Handbook* used by group members.

Christianity is Christ

▶ *Welcome the group and thank them for coming. Introduce yourself if necessary, letting them know that you are there to help and answer any questions they might have.*

▶ *Explain how the session will work and what time it will finish. Let the group know what kinds of things they will be doing, eg: We'll be doing some warm-up activities to get to know each other a little, having a brief discussion, watching a DVD, and then looking together at a bit of the Bible. There will be plenty of time and opportunity for you to ask any question you want to.*

▶ *Explain that no one will be asked to read out loud, pray, or answer any question they don't want to. This group is about trying to look at the answers to the big questions of life in a relaxed way.*

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY

▶ *If it is appropriate for your group, start the session with an icebreaker activity.*

2-MINUTE MIXER

Aim: To get everyone to know each other and to “break the ice”.

Equipment: CD/MP3 player; timer; whistle, gong or car horn.

▶ *This is essentially “speed dating”, but where the aim is to share a few bits of information with each other, so that everyone meets each other.*

- ① Tell the group that they must talk to five different people for two minutes each, and share the following information with them: Full name (including middle names!); where they were born; their most precious possession; their closest friend; the reason they decided to come to this *Soul* group; an unusual fact about themselves; what is the first

Leader's checklist

Have you...

- Made it clear to people the time and place where you will meet?
- Collected any items needed for the activities?
- Enough Bibles or Mark's Gospels for the group?
- Soul Handbooks and a pen or pencil for each group member?
- Set up the Soul DVD ready to play? (Or prepared the optional talk and added any personal illustrations.)
- Thought through your answers to each of the questions?
- Prayed for each group member and yourself as the leader?

thing they would buy if they were given loads of money, etc. Choose a short list of questions that is suitable for your group. You may want to put the questions up on a flipchart or powerpoint slide where people can see them.

- ▶ Play music during this time, and blow a whistle or bang a gong (or just shout) when the two minutes is up.

Note: If you have a larger group, you could do this in one minute, so that people get to speak to more people. It will create a more energetic activity.

TRUE OR FALSE?

Aim: To get everyone to know each other and to “break the ice”.

Equipment: None.

- ▶ Ask a group member to give three “facts” about him/herself – two of which are true and one made up.
- ▶ The rest of the group then votes on which “fact” is the made-up one.
- ▶ Repeat until every group member has had a turn at giving their three “facts”.

Note: Do this as one group if possible, to help you get to know each other – but if you have a larger group, divide into small groups with a leader in each one to run the game.

▶ *If neither of these activities will work for your group or for yourself, there are more ideas online at www.ceministries.org/soul. Or feel free not to use any!*

EXPLORE

▶ Give a *Soul Handbook* to each participant. Ask them to turn to page 4 and to write down their answer to this question:

If you could ask God one question, and you knew it would be answered, what would it be?

▶ Ask the group to share their answers. Note down what they are so that you can deal with them at some point during the course. Don't attempt to answer all the questions at this time, but do acknowledge every question and assure the group that they will be covered during *Soul*. (Some questions will be answered by the talks and some – like questions about suffering – are best dealt with after the talks on the cross / grace.) However, you may want to answer one or two short questions at this point, if they are simple to deal with and not contentious. You might also want to write your own question and share it with the group. **Note:** If your group members would be embarrassed to say their questions, ask them to write them on a piece of paper and put them in a “question box”. You can then collect all the questions from the box and read them to the group.

➤ Reassure the group that the questions they are asking are perfectly normal – and they are questions that many people have about life and God. You may even say that this is a question that you have struggled with. This is to help people see that the things they may feel very intensely about are things that others struggle to understand too.

➤ Either here, or after the talk, the group may ask questions on science/evolution/creation. Make sure you plan a time to talk about this – probably during a later session, using the notes on page 185. It may be enough at this point to say that the course is not making any particular point about evolution or creation. We're simply showing that we are either the result of an accident or we have been made by someone – and that this makes a difference to how we see "the meaning of life".

GROUP ACTIVITY: POSTER

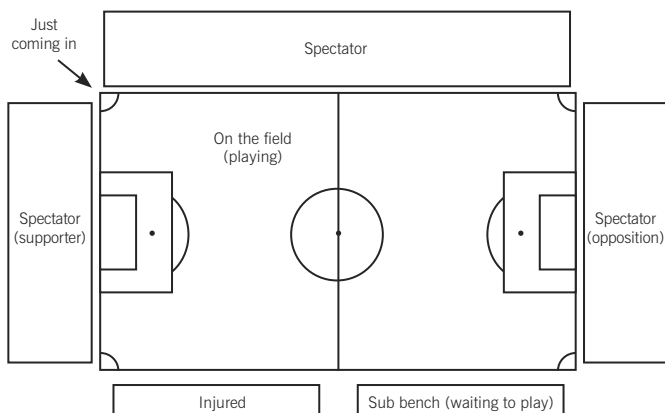
- Give the group one large piece of paper and some pens. Ask them to draw a poster of things that come into their minds when they think of Christianity. For example, they might draw a large cathedral or church building. If some of the group prefer not to draw, they can write single words on the poster instead.

Note: Leaders need to allow the group to draw what they want. If they want to draw something that is theologically problematic, allow them to do it because there will be an opportunity later to correct misunderstandings.

Note: It is important to do this activity as it is referred to in the study questions.

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY: FOOTBALL PITCH

- Give the group one large piece of paper and some pens. On it draw a football pitch or soccer field with areas marked like the diagram below: supporters, opposition, entrance, injury bench etc. Ask group members to mark with a cross where they think they are at the moment, ie: a player would be someone who thinks they are already a Christian; coming in the entrance would be someone who doesn't know much about the Christian faith, and is just starting to look it over; injured – has been a Christian, but is now not sure; opposition – hostile to Christianity for some reason; supporters – have always been to church (from a Christian family perhaps) but starting to ask if this is the team they want to support for the rest of their lives.



Explain that this is to help them, not for others to judge them. Allow people to think it over and put a cross where they think they are, and give them the chance to explain why they put their mark where they did. **Do not force anyone to make a mark if they don't want to.**

Note: This activity is optional. If you think it will be unhelpful for your group, or you are concerned that it may “pigeonhole” them right at the beginning of the course, then don't use it.

You can download a sheet with this illustration on it at www.ceministries.org/soul.

▶ Give each person a Bible. Show them where they can find Mark's Gospel. Explain how chapters and verses work.

▶ Ask everyone to turn to **Mark 1:1**.

▶ One of the leaders should read **Mark 1:1** aloud; then the group should work through the questions below. The answers are given here for your reference.

Note: The questions and quotes in *Soul* are based on the 1984 edition of the New International Version (NIV). If you are using the 2011 revised NIV, you will find that “Jesus Christ” in Mark 1:1 has been changed to “Jesus the Messiah”. The change from “Christ” to “Messiah” does not change the meaning of the verse, since the terms mean the same. They speak of the King who God promised to send into the world. “Christ” is from the Greek word; “Messiah” comes from the Hebrew.

What does Mark say Christianity is all about in the first sentence of his book?

- ▶ He says that it is “good news”. (Explain that the word “gospel” means “good news”.)
- ▶ He says it's about Jesus.
- ▶ He says it's about Jesus being the Son of God. (*see note on this below)

***Note:** Some eagle-eyed participants may notice a footnote in the NIV that says: “Some ancient manuscripts do not have the words ‘the Son of God’”, and ask you about it. This may, in turn, raise all kinds of issues about the reliability of the Bible, and the trustworthiness of Mark. If this is an issue for your group, or for an individual, plan to include some input on the reliability of the Bible. See notes on page 185.

How is that different from some of the pictures we've drawn?

This question is designed to tackle some of the common misconceptions about the Christian faith that may have come up in the poster-drawing exercise.

- ▶ He says that it is “good news”. In other words it's not bad news; it's great, brilliant and exciting news – far from boring! If you think Christianity is boring, then you've not really understood what it's all about.

- ② He says it's about Jesus. It's not about buildings, or services, or "religion" – it's about a man who lived and walked and breathed in history, called Jesus.
- ③ He says it's about Jesus being the Son of God. It's about God making himself known to us through Jesus.

DVD PRESENTATION

▶ *Watch Episode 1 of the Soul DVD, or deliver Talk 1 using the notes on page 121. The notes for this talk can also be downloaded from www.ceministries.org/soul to enable you to adapt them for your group and add your own illustrations.*

▶ *There is a recap (called DOWNLOAD) in the group member's Soul Handbook for their reference. Encourage people to write notes on the Download page as they listen to the talk. The recap is also printed below.*

DOWNLOAD

- ② Christianity is not about rules or ceremonies. It's all about Jesus Christ.
- ② If we're here by chance, we have no real significance or value. But God created us – so we matter enormously.
- ② We all face death sooner or later. Since we all have to die, what's the point of living?
- ② The Bible says we don't really start living until we know the one who made us, and live as he made us to live.
- ② But how can we get to know God? We need him to reveal himself to us. Mark says he's done that for us by sending Jesus Christ. If we want to know what God is like, we must look at Jesus.
- ② That's why "the gospel about Jesus Christ" is good news.

TALKBACK

▶ *Use the questions below to encourage discussion (they are also printed in the group member's Soul Handbook).*

▶ *Remember that this is the first session, and the aim here is not to explain the whole gospel, challenge them to become Christians, or start an argument about what they currently believe. It is simply to open up the themes that will be covered in subsequent weeks.*

▶ *Be careful that TALKBACK does not run over time. It is much better to stop a good discussion, leaving them hungry for more, than to talk everything out in detail with the risk of boring some of the group, or putting them off coming back next time.*

If you asked a group of people in the street: “What’s the point of life?”, what kind of answers would you get?

- › Answers might include: making lots of money; having a good time; having good friends; finding love.
- › You might ask them why they think different people think different things are important.
- › The aim here is not to criticize these views, but to get the group thinking about the meaning of life. There is no pressing need to comment on them now, unless the discussion naturally heads that way.

What do most people think about God and Christianity? Why do you think that is?

- › This is to recap the EXPLORE questions, without getting too personal. Answers may include: boring, irrelevant, outdated, full of rules etc.
- › Explain that churches can very easily forget that Christianity is all about Jesus – and the resulting religion can become any or all of those things. But this is not real Christianity.
- › If necessary, sympathize with anyone in the group who may have had a bad experience of religion – an unhelpful minister, boring services etc.

What about Jesus? Do people think he matters? What do you think?

- › At this stage don’t press anyone to give an answer for what they think, but if they do, it may be appropriate to ask them why.
- › Remind them that, according to Mark 1:1, Jesus is “good news”.

CONCLUSION

Finish by encouraging your group members to come back next time. Tell them: “We’ve seen that Mark says that Christianity is all about one man, Jesus. Next time we’ll find out about some of the things Jesus did and said, and why Mark says that Jesus is ‘good news’.”

AFTERWARDS

- › Write down the questions that people have come up with, so that you can be sure to address them in the coming weeks. It may be helpful at this point to prepare a plan of which question you deal with each session.
- › Think about the people who came. Make a list so that you can pray for them.
- › Think about what contact you may want to make during the week to encourage them to come next time.

Christianity is Christ

▶ Deliver Talk 1 using the notes below. The notes for this talk can also be downloaded from www.ceministries.org/soul to enable you to adapt them for your group and add your own illustrations. Alternatively, you could show Episode 1 from the Soul DVD if this would be appropriate for your group.

▶ There is a recap (called **DOWNLOAD**) in the group member's Soul Handbook. Encourage people to write notes on the Download page as they listen to the talk.

Aim

- ▶ To welcome people to the course.
- ▶ To make the point that many people have the wrong impression of Christianity.
- ▶ To explain that Christianity is not about rules or ceremonies. It's all about Jesus Christ.
- ▶ To explain that we can only find true significance and real meaning in our lives once we realize that there's a God who created us and who wants us to know him.
- ▶ To explain that we can only get to know God through Jesus, and that we're going to find out about him during *Soul*.

Introductory illustration

▶ Tell the group a funny/interesting example of what you used to think about Christianity. Use a personal example if you can, but if you don't have one (perhaps because you have been a Christian from a young age), interview another leader or talk about someone you know. Keep the illustration short. Alternatively, show a short clip from a film (eg: *Mr Bean in church*) or cartoon (eg: *The Simpsons in church*) – check that you can do this legally.

Opening

- ▶ Loads of people have different ideas about Christianity. It often depends on whether they know any Christians, or have had experience of being in a church.
- ▶ Your poster lists some of those ideas.

▶ *Talk about some of the pictures drawn on the poster. Be careful not to make any negative comments – the aim is just to discover the range of ideas your group members currently have. There will be opportunity later in the course to discuss some of these views, so do keep the poster, or make a note of what was drawn, so that you can be sure to address these issues at some point.*

1. What is Christianity about?

- ▶ Many people think that Christianity is about religious ceremonies, or keeping a set of rules. Mark says something very different from that. As we saw in the very first sentence of Mark's book, Christianity is all about a person, Jesus Christ.

▶ *Explain that the Bibles you're using have extra bits added to help you find the section you want. These extras include the chapter and verse numbers, and also the headings. So Mark didn't write the heading above verse 1 – the publishers added it.*

- ▶ Mark's own heading is really verse 1, where he tells us exactly what his book is about.

▶ *Read **Mark 1:1** aloud.*

- ▶ Mark's entire book is about:
 - ▶ a man called **Jesus**
 - ▶ whose title is the "**Christ**" (which means "God's chosen King")
 - ▶ who is the **Son of God**.
- ▶ The rest of Mark's book shows us what these things mean, and why he believes they are true. So as we do *Soul* together, we will be looking at Jesus Christ and finding out what Mark tells us about him.
- ▶ We'll also be thinking about some of the big questions people ask about life – questions like "Where did life come from?" and "What's the purpose of life?"

2. Where did life come from?

▶ *You may want to include a funny illustration here – maybe display a cartoon picture about where life came from. Alternatively, show or read out the following: "One bucket of water, eight bars of soap, one nail and the head of a matchstick". Ask your group if they know what this makes? (Answer: These sum up the chemical contents of a human body!)*

- ▶ Scientists spend billions every year trying to work out exactly how the earth began and where life came from. You've probably learned about some of their ideas in school or from books and television programmes.
- ▶ There are two possible answers to this question. Either we are here by chance, or someone made us.

- ② If we are here by chance, it means we have no real significance or value. We're just a bunch of chemicals who wander around the earth meeting other bunches of chemicals. We have no value; we don't matter; because we're just a splodge of atoms in a body!
- ② If we have been made by someone, if we have been created, that makes a huge difference. The Bible says that God created us, that we are his workmanship. This means that we matter enormously. God says so.
- ② We don't matter because of having the best gadgets or wearing the latest fashion. We don't matter because of where we come from or what we're good at. Instead, we matter – and matter enormously – because God created us. He made us, he loves us, and he has a purpose for our lives. Our lives mean something.

3. What's the point of life?

- ② Where life comes from makes a huge difference when we start thinking about death. Most people don't like talking about death, even though every one of us will face death sooner or later. But since we all have to die, what's the point of living?
 - ② Lots of people have tried to work out what the point of life is. If we had drawn a poster about that, I'm sure we would have come up with loads of different ideas. TV, magazines and the internet often give the impression that the answer is to be rich, famous and good looking. But they're also quick to tell us stories of celebrities who haven't found happiness as a result.
- ▶ *Include an illustration here of someone who has been in the news recently because their success has left them depressed, suicidal or turning to drugs or alcohol.*
- ② You would think that fame and money would lead to happiness, but plenty of celebrities find that it doesn't. So they turn to drugs, drinking or even suicide. Why?
 - ② Well, the Bible says that we don't really start living until we know the one who made us, and live as he made us to live. So the question is, how can we know God?

4. Getting to know God

- ▶ *Choose a popular celebrity for this illustration. What would you do if you really wanted to get to know _____? (Fill in the name of a suitable celebrity for your group.) Maybe you could go to where they live and call out their name as they leave the house. Or you could try to find their phone number, email or Twitter address. But they probably wouldn't reply. The only way you're going to be able to get to know _____ is if they want to know you. It would have to be him/her who contacted you and arranged to meet up.*

- ▶ The same is true if we want to know the one who made us. People have tried knowing God by thinking deeply about him, or using their imagination to find out what he's like, but we can't get to know God that way. We can't get to know God by ourselves at all.
- ▶ We need God to reveal himself to us. Mark says that God has done that by sending Jesus Christ. That's why Mark's book is all about Jesus. If we want to know what God is like, we must look at Jesus.

Conclusion

- ▶ There's a word in Mark's first sentence that tells us why looking at Jesus is such a good idea. The word is "gospel", and it means "good news". The news about Jesus isn't bad or boring – it's good news.
- ▶ During *Soul* we're going to explore what Mark tells us about who Jesus is, and about why he came. We're also going to think about what it means to live as a Christian – what it means to follow Jesus.
- ▶ So is this course worth sticking with for seven weeks? The reason I think you'll find it's worth doing is because Jesus is the only way we can know the one who made us, and the only way we can understand the point of life. Jesus answers those big questions we've been thinking about: "Where did life come from?" and "What's the point of living?"
- ▶ That's why "the gospel about Jesus Christ" is good news.