Christianity
EXPLORED
PRISON EDITION

One life. What's it all about?

A flexible resource for prison ministry

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Prison Edition of Christianity Explored.

The *Christianity Explored* course was first run sixteen years ago at All Souls, Langham Place in London. The aim was to "let the gospel tell the gospel" by introducing people to Jesus through the Gospel of Mark. *Christianity Explored* looks at three simple questions: Who is Jesus? Why did he come? What does it mean to follow him?

Since those early days, the course has grown and is now used in many countries around the world. *Christianity Explored* has also been translated into over 20 languages and continues to grow.

You might be wondering why there is a version of the *Christianity Explored* course that is specifically for use in the prison setting. People who had run *Christianity Explored* in prisons approached Christianity Explored Ministries asking for a version that was tailored for that context. We have been working to address this since April 2008, and have now run multiple pilot courses across the UK.

The aim of *Christianity Explored Prison Edition* is to keep things simple, yet varied, letting the gospel tell the gospel, while providing space to dive deeper into Mark's Gospel for those who are able.

There are many factors that affect learning and understanding in the prison context, and we have tried to take these into account as we have adapted *Christianity Explored*. They include the average reading age and attention span of the prison population, social background, mental/psychological vulnerability and present incarceration.

If you are running a *Christianity Explored Prison Edition* course, please consider registering it on our website: **www.ceministries.org/prisons** We'd love to pray for you and support you – and you may find there is already a kindred spirit running the course near you.

Many thanks to the chaplaincy team at HMP Cardiff, particularly Rev. Mark John, and to Daylight Christian Prison Trust for all their support as this material has been developed. And also to all the prisoners who have taken part in piloting the courses!

May God richly bless you in all you do for the honour and glory of Christ.

Stephen James, Gillian Pegler

and the Christianity Explored Team, October 2012

Stephen

Section 1: How to run the course

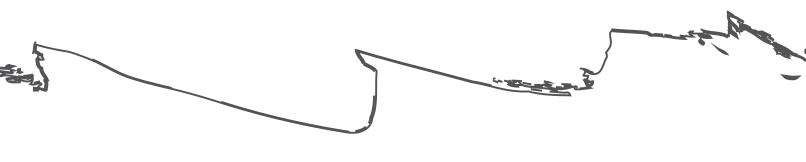
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What is Christianity?

THE BIG IDEA

The aim of this session is to help group members think about what Christianity is really about (ie: Jesus). We also explain that Jesus is "good news".

PLANNING YOUR SESSION

The following material is designed for a **two-hour** session.

- If you have more time than this, go slowly but don't get diverted off the topic.
- If you have one-and-a-half hours, don't watch the DVD or ask the DVD questions.
- If you have only an hour, do everything up to and including the self-directed learning; then give out the follow-up studies and finish with the check-out activity.

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

- It is important to prepare the flip-chart sheets in advance there will not be time during the session.

 This needs to be done at the prison (see page 10).

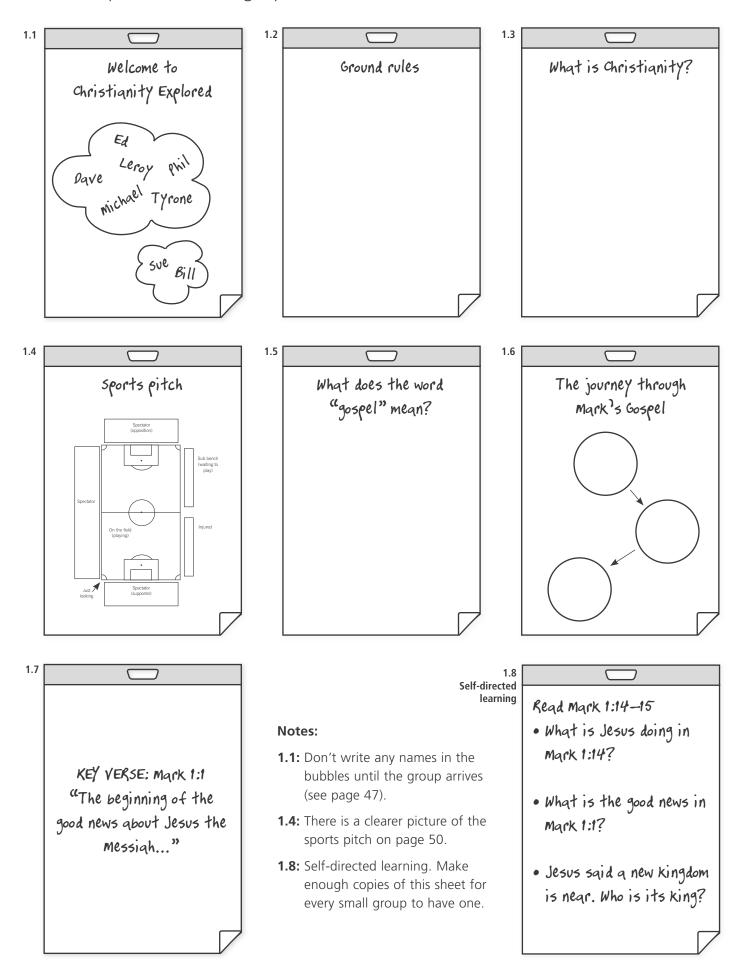
 The diagrams on page 46 show what to write on each flip-chart sheet for this session. You will need to create multiple copies of the sheet for 1.8, the self-directed learning, so that each small group has their own sheet.
- As you prepare the session, **you may find there are things you want to note down** (eg: the name of the person who will lead each section, how many discussion groups you'll split into, etc). There is space for notes in the margins alongside each section outline.
- Use the **leader's checklist** on this page to check that everything is ready for the session.

Leader's checklist

Have you...

- Made it clear to people the time and place where you will meet, and how to get there?
- Enough Gospels for everyone including leaders?
- Flip-chart with paper and at least 12 marker pens?
- Name labels, lots of ballpoint pens, and (for section 1.5) either post-it notes or sticky labels?
- Pre-prepared sheets for self-directed learning?
- Bible-study sheets and optional follow-up studies?
- The optional Christianity Explored DVD ready to play?
- Thought through your answers to each of the questions?
- Prayed for each group member and yourself as the leader?

Prepare the following flip-chart sheets for this session



1.1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

notes

AIM

To introduce everybody to everyone else.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Use the flip-chart. Give everyone, including the leaders, a name label when they come into the room, and also write everyone's names on the first flip-chart sheet – leaders in one area and group members in another. This sheet will be useful to you to help you remember names, and to make the group feel welcomed.

Then briefly explain the following points.

- Reassure the group that there will be no expectation that they will become Christians on this course the aim of the course is to give them the information that they need to make up their own mind as they explore Christianity.
- Tell them how long the course will be and when the sessions are.
- Reassure the group that there will be no praying or singing on this course. (Note: This is not because we disagree with praying/singing (!) but because it can make some people feel uncomfortable. Other groups in the prison may be happy to pray or sing, but this is not the purpose of the *Christianity Explored* course.)

The lead tutor for this session briefly introduces himself, and then passes a question round the group, such as: "What is your name and do you have any Christian background?" This will introduce the group to each other, and give the leaders some idea of where each person is coming from.

Note: This exercise will swallow time if you don't keep the responses short.

1.2 GROUND RULES

AIM

Setting ground rules gives clear boundaries and expectations to the group, and gives leaders and group members authority to bring the group back to order if the need arises. Boundaries are very important in the prison context.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Brainstorm, using the flip-chart. **Ask the group whether they know what ground rules are.** If not, explain that they are boundaries that help us to work well together as a group and know what is expected of us.

Ask the group to provide the ground rules. This is not an exercise for the leaders to enforce discipline, but for the group to decide how they want the course to be managed. They will offer rules such as "one voice at a time", "no laughing at each other", "respect", etc. Keep brainstorming until the group are satisfied with the result.

The leaders need to **make sure**, **however**, **that certain rules are included**. These are:

- Confidentiality all parties will keep information that they hear on this course confidential, ie: it will not be repeated on the wings or to other prisoners. (It's fine to talk about what we've learned about the Bible on the wings, but not about what we've learned about each other.) However, if leaders become privy to information (revealed or suspected) that a prisoner is a danger to himself (suicidal, planning suicide or self harm) or to others (intending to harm another in the prison, or after release), then the leaders are obliged to pass this information on to the chaplains for further action.
- Security if prisoners reveal details of past crimes for which they have not been convicted (ie: that the police do not know about), or planned future crimes, the leader is obliged to inform security.

Prisoners need to know and agree to these two rules, or withdraw from the course. **Everybody (including the leaders) initials the sheet.** You may like to put this sheet on the wall before each session so that everyone can see it during the course.

We suggest that the whole area, including kitchen facilities, open space etc, is subject to the ground rules, so that they apply to any situation that can arise while the group is with you.

notes

1.3 WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

AIM

To think about what we understand Christianity to be.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Brainstorm shout-out, using the flip-chart. **Invite the group to shout out their answers to the question** (remembering the ground rules of one voice at a time, no laughing at other people etc). Write all the answers up, whether they are "right" or "wrong".

The other leaders should not offer answers unless the room has gone silent. This is about what the group members understand Christianity to be, not about what the leaders think!

Don't answer the question for the group – just let their answers hang in the air.

1.4 SPORTS PITCH

AIM

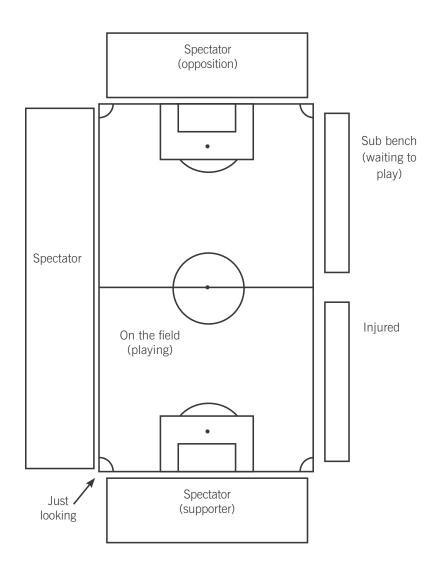
To find out gently where participants feel they stand with Christianity.

Note: if you have a small group of two or three, this exercise may be too revealing. Anonymity will be lost, so you may like to skip it.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Show the picture of a sports pitch on the flip-chart. Choose a sport your group will be familiar with, eg: for football, the pitch could look like the picture on page 50.

Ties .



Explain that the exercise is to help us to think about where we stand with Christianity. The pitch represents Christianity. Do we feel that we are playing on the pitch and part of the team, just coming into the ground to have a look, sitting on the injured bench (ie: part of the team, but injured), on the subs bench (part of the team but not playing at the moment), or a spectator – supporter, neutral or opposition?

Explain that this exercise will be done anonymously. Turn the chart around so that it is facing away from the group, and ask everyone (including leaders) to put a cross on the picture to show where they feel they are with respect to Christianity. A leader should go first. Then make sure that only one person goes up at a time, all using the same pen (so you can't identify someone's position by the colour of the pen they used).

Turn the chart around again, and draw general conclusions, not aiming to identify anyone, eg: "There are some players on the field, and a few on the subs bench, and one on the injured bench. That's interesting."

Explain that you will look at the diagram again at the end of the course. (So make sure you don't lose it!)

1.5 WHAT DOES THE WORD "GOSPEL" MEAN?

minutes

AIM

To explain what the word "gospel" means.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Brainstorm with stickers, using the flip-chart. Give out a ball-point pen and a sticky label to each group member (or a post-it note – but not whole pads to individuals; you'll never see them again!). Ask the group to work on their own and write down what they think the word "gospel" means. Ask them to stick their answers on the flip-chart. Make sure anyone who has trouble with reading/writing has support from a tutor or peer mentor.

When everyone has finished, **the leader reads out the answers**, without commenting on whether they are right or wrong.

At the end, **explain that the word "gospel" means GOOD NEWS**. So the Gospel of Mark is GOOD NEWS about something. Draw attention to the fact that this may be very different to our earlier answers about what Christianity is. Actually, **Christianity is GOOD NEWS!** And in this course we are going to find out what that good news is.

If it's a one-hour session, the leader can state from the front what the word "gospel" means, and then give out the Gospels.

Give out copies of Mark's Gospel to everyone (whatever their literacy level) and explain that this is a copy of Mark's Gospel, which is part of the Bible. Explain that they can keep this book, and write notes in it.

notes

Explain that on this course we are only using this version of Mark's Gospel, so please don't bring your own Bible. This is in order to make it easier for everyone to find the passages – the page numbers will all be the same.

1.6 INTRODUCE WHO? WHY? WHAT?

minutes

AIM

To introduce three questions that cut to the heart of Christianity and reveal what the good news is.

HOW TO RUN THIS

■ The initial diagram needs to be on the flip-chart before the session – see page 46. You will add some extra words as you lead the group (in **grey** in the picture opposite), so don't put them into the diagram when you are preparing.

Work from the flip-chart. Explain that: "There are three questions that cut to the heart of Christianity and reveal what the gospel is all about. They are: Who is Jesus? Why did he come? So what?" As you speak, write these three questions in the circles (see page 53).

Note: You may be familiar with the structure of "Identity, Mission, Call" from other editions of Christianity Explored. However, don't use the words Identity, Mission, Call in your explanation – keep it simple.

Explain that the disciples – Jesus' followers – were described by Jesus as blind, deaf and lacking understanding (Mark 8:18). **Write** "Blindness" at the top of the page, under the title. Explain that people will be starting this course from different stages of spiritual sight and understanding.

Now ask the group what the word "gospel" means, and when they tell you, write "good news" underneath it. Explain that this means that we are taking a journey through Mark's good news. Explain that we are going to use Mark's Gospel to find out who Jesus is, why he came, and what it means to follow him.



Note: This is how the diagram should now look. It will be drawn in every recap, to help the group remember what they have already learned, and to see where they are going. You may like to colour code the circles, eg: red for who? blue for why? green for what? If you do this, keep the colours consistent throughout the course.

1.7 KEY VERSE: Mark 1:1

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah..."

ninutes

AIM

To begin to discover what the good news is.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Read out the key verse. **Ask the group: "What stands out for you?"** This question should highlight: "The **beginning** of the **good news** about **Jesus the Messiah**..." Underline these words as they pick them out.

Make it clear that Jesus the Messiah is a real historical figure.

You may like to get a low-denomination coin, such as a penny, and show the date on it. Explain that our dating system is calculated from the birth of Jesus – that's good additional evidence (ie: not from the Bible) that he is real!

Explain that "the Messiah" is not a second name but a title, meaning that Jesus is God's chosen one – it means the same as "the Christ". In other words, Jesus is God come to earth in human form.

Note: Messiah is the Hebrew word; Christ is the Greek word. They both mean the same thing — "the anointed one", which means Jesus is God's chosen one. This leader's guide is based on the 2011 edition of the New International Version (NIV). NIV 2011 uses "Messiah" in Mark 1:1. NIV 1984 uses "Christ". This isn't a problem — they mean the same thing.

Explain that it doesn't matter whether the group believes that Jesus is the Messiah at the moment. The point is that the person who wrote Mark's Gospel took it as a fact. That is where he is starting from. So this book (and therefore this course) is going to explain to us how Mark is able to open his book with such a staggering statement.

Mark says that this is good news about Jesus the Messiah. It's not about smells and bells, or rules and religion. It's about Jesus.

Ask: How can you find out more about the good news?

• By reading Mark's Gospel!

1.8 SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING: Mark 1:1, 14-15

ninutes

AIM

For the group to use the Bible to start to discover for themselves the significance of Jesus' coming.

HOW TO RUN THIS

■ You need to understand the meaning of these verses yourself before running the study. In verse 15a, "the time" refers to God's chosen time – the day of God's salvation. John the Baptist had been preparing the people for this day, and now it had come. Each prisoner and leader should already have been given a copy of Mark's Gospel in section 1.5. (Everyone needs to use the same version, so the page numbers are the same!)

notes

Tell the group what page to turn to to find Mark 1:14. Show them how chapter and verse work, using Mark 1:14 and Mark 2:14 as examples. Make sure they all understand.

Pair the group members, making sure that at least one in each pair is confident with reading and writing. Give each pair a marker pen and a pre-prepared piece of flip-chart paper with the following on it:

Read Mark 1:14-15

- What is Jesus doing in Mark 1:14?
- What is the good news in Mark 1:1?
- Jesus said a new kingdom is near. Who is its king?

Leaders need to circulate around the room, making sure the group understand the questions and are on the right track. Bring the group back together when they are finished.

FEEDBACK

Now go through the answers as a group. Make sure each pair has a chance to contribute. The answers are:

- Jesus is proclaiming (telling people) the good news of God.
- Jesus himself is the good news.
- God/Jesus is the King of this kingdom.

BREAK

(If your session is less than two hours, you will need to drop some of the following sections. See page 45 for details.)

1.9 BIBLE STUDY: Mark 1:1-8

AIM

To open the Bible and begin to look at what it says and means. We are starting by looking at what John the Baptist had to say about Jesus.

HOW TO RUN THIS

If you have a large group and plenty of space, split into smaller groups (three or four prisoners maximum per leader), with a leader in each group. **Each person should have a copy of Mark's Gospel and a copy of the Bible-study sheet.** (Give these out to everyone, whether or not they can read. Don't highlight people's illiteracy by not giving them resources. They can put them down if they want, but they need to receive them.)

Ask for a volunteer to read the passage. Read it yourself if no one volunteers quickly. Try to encourage everyone to join in, without directly aiming a question at an individual. Some people will just want to sit and listen, especially as this is only the first session.

You need to watch the clock, as you'll need 25 minutes left to watch the DVD and discuss it.

BIBLE STUDY 1

(available to download from www.ceministries.org/prisons)

Isaiah was a prophet, a messenger from God, who lived 740 years before Jesus was born.

- Read Mark 1:1-8
- 1. In verse 2, what does Isaiah say will happen before the Lord comes?

A messenger will come.

2. Who is the messenger? (See verse 4.)

John the Baptist.

3. What will the messenger do (verse 2)?

notes

Prepare the way for the Lord.

4. What did John teach the people (verse 4)?

About repentance and forgiveness for their sins

- Note: Don't unpack this any further; it is the content of later course sessions. If anyone asks what baptism is, explain that John lowered people under the water and brought them up again. This was a picture of repentance and forgiveness.
 - 5. How did John describe Jesus? (See verses 7-8.)
- Coming after John.
- More powerful than John.
- More important than John.
- Will baptize people with the Holy Spirit.
 - 6. How do you feel about starting to discover the good news about Jesus the Messiah?

Give everyone the chance to answer this question. Some of your group may be unsure or worried about reading Mark's Gospel or understanding the things you cover in the course. Reassure them that you will help with any questions they have.

1.10 DVD EPISODE 1

minutes

AIM

To consider what Christianity is really about. To encourage us to read Mark's Gospel.

Note: It is a primary aim of Christianity Explored that group members actively study Mark's Gospel by reading it themselves and doing short exercises which help them find answers from the text, rather than passively listening to teaching. The DVD reinforces the teaching from the session, and is used as another style of presenting the same material. Therefore, it is possible to drop the DVD without losing the core teaching of Mark in the session. Please either watch it in every session, or not at all, so that the sessions have a familiar pattern each time.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Watch Episode 1 (Good News) of the *Christianity Explored DVD* together.

Note: The leaders need to have watched Episode 1 before they run the session. Even if you're very familiar with the DVD, you'll still need to watch attentively during the session. If the group think leaders have disengaged, they will stop listening too.

1.11 DVD QUESTIONS

AIM

To pick up on the points made in the DVD.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Discuss the following questions with your group.

- Rico said: "God has actually revealed himself to us in human history through Jesus Christ." What do you think about that?
- Rico said: "When we look at Jesus, all the guessing games about God stop." What do you think about that?

• If Mark's Gospel contains the most remarkable news in the world, how do you feel about reading it?

notes

1.12 RECAP THE SESSION

AIM

To recap and bring the main points of the session back to mind before the session ends.

HOW TO RUN THIS

Use the flip-chart sheet from 1.6. **Ask the group what they** have learned about Christianity in this session, and give suggestions if they are stuck, eg: "What is a gospel?" (*The good news about Jesus*), "What three things is Mark's Gospel about?" (*Who? Why? What?*), etc.

Write their answers on the flip chart, near the top circle (Who is Jesus?).

Note: The position of the writing is important, as in later recaps you need to be able to put the lessons learned in the right place for Who? Why? What?. This will help the group to remember what they have learned in answer to each question.

Look again at the answers to "What is Christianity?" in section 1.3.

Mark tells us that Christianity is about Jesus. It's not about church attendance, religious observance, being baptized or being born into a Christian family/country etc.

1.13 GIVE OUT FOLLOW-UP STUDY

AIM

To give the group the opportunity to study a passage in their own time. To encourage them to pick up Mark's Gospel and read it before the next session.

■ Don't do this in a five-day course – the group have done enough work in the session. They won't want to do follow-up work as well!

HOW TO RUN THIS

Give out the follow-up studies. They are not compulsory, but give one to each person anyway. If you are prepared to take these in for marking, let the group know. (If you don't want to mark them, that's OK. Just make sure the group know that you are not going to do this.) Make sure the group know they can still come back next time even if they don't do the follow-up study. People who have difficulty reading and writing may want to consider doing this work with someone else in the group who is on their wing.

Note: Some prisons (especially Young Offender Institutions) give a financial or other reward for completed homework. Make sure you know the policy in your prison, and discuss this with the chaplain before you give out follow-up studies. If a reward is expected, either make sure the chaplaincy is able to give it, or explain clearly that there is none. NEVER give money or anything else to prisoners. Only the chaplaincy department can do this, through official channels.

Encourage everyone to make some time to read Mark's Gospel. (In our experience it is unlikely that many will, but they definitely won't if you don't suggest it!)

Note: If you take the follow-up studies in for marking, you need to do this at the prison. Don't take the studies home to mark.

FOLLOW UP STUDY 1

(available to download from www.ceministries.org/prisons)

Read Mark 1:9-11

1. Mark 1:9 says Jesus came from a town called Nazareth in Galilee. What did you learn about in the Christianity Explored session that also happened in Galilee? (See Mark 1:14.)

Jesus was proclaiming the "good news of God" (the gospel).

2. What happens in verse 9?

Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan river.

3. What two things happen as Jesus comes up out of the water in verse 10?

Heaven is torn open and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove.

4. Whose is the voice from heaven in verse 11 and what does he say?

It is God the Father's voice. God says Jesus is his Son, and that he loves Jesus, and is pleased with him.

5. Do you believe that the gospel (the good news) could make a difference to your life?

This question will help group members begin to think about the possible impact of the good news about Jesus on their own lives. notes

And if you want to do some more and read through Mark's Gospel in six weeks...

■ Read Mark 1v1 – 3v6

What stands out to you about Jesus?

- Mark 1v1 says that Jesus is the Son of God a big statement to open with.
- When Jesus was baptized, God spoke to him.
- He was tempted by Satan (but didn't sin).
- He had good news to share.
- People followed Jesus.
- He showed he is a teacher, a healer, he can forgive sins etc.
- The authorities plotted to kill him.

1.14 CHECK OUT

AIM

To make sure everyone is OK before they leave, and get some feedback on how they feel the course is going.

HOW TO RUN THIS

The lead tutor passes this question around the group: "How did you find the course and are you feeling safe to go back to your cell?" Make sure you have allowed time for everyone to give an answer, including all the leaders.

If anyone expresses concern about their safety going back to their cell, you must contact the wing and inform them of that prisoner's concerns.

Encourage the group to come back to the next session, and make sure they know where it will be and at what time.

minutes

1.15 DEBRIEF THE LEADERS

no no

AIM

To make sure your leaders are OK. To see what could be done better next time.

HOW TO RUN THIS

This section must not happen until AFTER the prisoners have left. All the leaders need to be present and engage in this exercise.

The lead tutor asks:

- "How did you find this session?"
- "Are there any prisoners you have particular concerns about?"
- "Would you do anything differently next time?" (Write any suggestions down, so that you can use them next time and let us know if you think we need to know them too!)

notes