

LIFEGROUP STUDY
REAL GOOD QUESTIONS:
AREN'T WE BETTER OFF WITHOUT RELIGION?
20210409

LEADER NOTES

OVERVIEW

Welcome to our series, Real Good Questions. Over the weeks of this series, we'll explore six common challenges to Christianity and how Christ followers can respond. This series is a great opportunity for you to understand Christianity's position on these challenges, to become better equipped in your faith and to speak to the doubts and challenges you or those close to you may have. For today's study, your LifeGroup will review 5 reasons why our world is not better off without Christianity. Then, we'll focus in on the truth that we are better off when we follow the teachings of the Bible. Christianity has brought blessings into our world that come from the teachings and example of Jesus.

ICEBREAKER I Wish I'd Kept It!

When I was a kid, my parents sold (for cheap) a beautiful antique pump organ we had in our basement. Over the years my dad has recounted how he wishes he wouldn't have sold it – especially not for so little! Is there something you threw away, or practically gave away, that you wish you could have back? Share your story with the group!

STUDY

In his teaching on Sunday, Ken said we aren't better off without religion because . . .

1. We Have Tried It And It Has Failed Miserably.
 2. We Have Bigger Problems Than Religion
 3. Blaming Religion For Our Problems Is Naïve And Simplistic
 4. Christianity Has Brought Us Many Great Blessings
 5. The Problem Isn't Religion The Problem Is People
- **Look back at these reasons. Can your group can give a short explanation of each one?**
 - **Which of these reasons do you find most compelling? Why?**

Let's hone in on reason # 4 - Christianity has brought us many great blessings. These 7 principles, taught and modelled by Jesus, bring great blessings to those who live by them.

We are actually better off when we follow the instructions in the Bible. The teachings are good for us. This is a powerful reason why it is not true that we are better off without religion.

Note: The following principles and some of the quotations are from chapter 1 of Rebecca McLaughlin's book, Confronting Christianity.

I. It really is more blessed to give than to receive.

READ: Acts 20:32-35

³² "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

1. Paul writes that an important reason to give is "we must help the weak". **What might that look like in our day?**

LEADER NOTE: Jesus taught things like, "give to the poor" (Matthew 19:21) and help those in need (Luke 10:30-37). Through his teachings and example, Jesus showed us what it looks like to help the weak. Today, we can be on the lookout for how we can help those around us in need. This can be a spontaneous response to a need that someone has in your neighbourhood, an expression of care to someone going through a difficult season or an ongoing commitment to serve at your local homeless shelter. In Jesus' day and in our day there are those among us who are "weak" (in need). As we come alongside to help, we discover this truth – it is more blessed to give than to receive.

READ Luke 6:48

³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

2. **Why is the act of giving such an important part of our faith?**

LEADER NOTE: Our God gives. God gave us His Son. As we give, we become more like Him and can grow closer to Him. Our generosity in giving is a demonstration of God's character and a response to what He has done for us.

"Surveys have long shown that religious believers in the United States are happier, healthier, longer-lived, and more generous to charity and to each other than are secular people ... Religious believers give more money than secular folk to secular charities, and to their neighbours. They give more of their time too and of their blood." Jonathan Haidt

3. What do you think of Jonathan Haidt's conclusion about religion being a motivator for giving? Do you think the same holds true in Canada?

LEADER NOTE: This quote is not saying that irreligious people never give or can't be generous. There are many who do and are. Jonathan Haidt's point is that there is a link between faith and generosity that has been borne out in the way many religious believers give.

4. How has God used the habit of giving to grow your faith?

II. Love of money disappoints

READ: 1 Timothy 6:6-10

5. What does Paul say true wealth is? (see vs. 6)

LEADER NOTE: Paul says that "true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth." (vs. 6)

6. How does contentment help us have a right perspective on money?

LEADER NOTE: Paul reminds us we brought nothing into the world and we'll take nothing with us. Contentment gives us the right perspective that money is temporary and not able to give us true fulfillment.

7. Why does the love of money ultimately disappoint us?

LEADER NOTE: The love of money ultimately disappoints us because money was never designed to bring us what our souls most long for – love, community, faith.

“Income per capita has more than doubled since 1972 while happiness (or subjective well-being) has remained roughly unchanged or has even declined.”

Jeffrey Sachs – World Happiness Report

8. How does this World Happiness Report confirm what we read in Scripture about the love of money ultimately disappointing us?

LEADER NOTE: Studies have shown that money only increases our happiness to a point when our basic needs for living are met. Beyond that mark, money cannot grow our happiness. This World Happiness Report verifies what we read in Scripture about the love of money ultimately disappointing us.

III. Work works when it's a calling

READ: Colossians 3:23-24

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

9. How does these verses speak to you about how your work and your walk with God are tied together?

LEADER NOTE: In these verses Paul gives us the perspective we should have about our work. We should see our work as an expression of worship to God. God has given us the ability to work. He provides work so we have the means to live. Our attitude about work and our work ethic should reflect our appreciation of these gifts from God.

“Three bricklayers are asked, ‘What are you doing?’ The first says, ‘I am laying bricks.’ The second says, ‘I am building a church.’ The third says, ‘I am building the house of God.’ The first bricklayer has a job. The second has a career. The third has a calling.”

Angela Duckworth

10. What do you think of this idea that “work works if it’s a calling?”

LEADER NOTE: Some of your group members may have tough work situations where they are treated unfairly or find their tasks unfulfilling. Scripture challenges us that even in these kinds of situations, we can trust God and work as an expression of worship and thankfulness to Him. And, we can trust Him to help us find a suitable place of work when needed.

IV. We really can be happy in all circumstances.

READ: Philippians 4:12-13

“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through him who gives me strength.”

11. Think about Paul’s statement, “I have learned the secret of being content ...” **What did he mean by that?**

LEADER NOTE: Paul learned through his life experiences what it means to be content. He had times of plenty and times of lack. The secret for Paul was dependence on God’s strength, rather than depending on things to sustain his sense of well-being.

12. **Where have you seen someone who is “happy” in spite of less than ideal circumstances? How has their example helped you understand what happiness is?**

V. Gratitude is good for us

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

13. **What does it mean to “give thanks in all circumstances”. Is this possible?**

LEADER NOTE: It is important to note that Paul is not telling us we need to give thanks *for* all circumstances. “In all circumstances” means that regardless of the circumstance, we can thank God that He loves us, that He is with us and that He will see us through. This is possible by God’s power at work in us, giving us the strength and faith to see beyond our circumstances and look to Him.

14. What has helped you to have a regular habit of being thankful?

“For the Christian, thankfulness is not just a positivity technique: it is a deep disposition toward a life-giving and life-saving God.” Rebecca McLaughlin

15. How have you seen gratitude shape your faith in a good way?

VI. Self-Control and perseverance help us thrive

READ: 2 Peter 1:5-7 and Hebrews 12:1-2

16. Using these two passages, how would you define self-control? How would you define perseverance?

LEADER NOTE: Self-control involves saying “no” to our carnal desire to live for ourselves and saying “yes” to living for God. Perseverance is “persistence in well-doing, fruit bearing and running the appointed race despite trials and distractions of life.” (Vines Expository Dictionary)

Angela Duckworth suggests that the quality of *grit*, which she defines as “passion and perseverance for very long-term goals,” can be more predictive of a person’s success than social intelligence, good looks, health or IQ.

17. How have you seen your perseverance strengthened by your faith in God?

VII. Forgiveness is foundational

READ: Matthew 18:21-22, Luke 11:4

18. Forgiveness is not linked to the actions of the offender, but to the character of God.

How do you see this principle in these passages?

LEADER NOTE: In Matthew 18, Jesus taught us there should be no limit to our forgiveness. In Luke 14 Jesus' prayer ties God's forgiveness of us to our forgiveness of others. Our forgiveness of others can point others to our God who freely and generously forgives those who ask.

"Forgiveness is God's invention for coming to terms with a world in which, despite their best intentions, people are unfair to each other and hurt each other deeply. He began by forgiving us. And he invites us all to forgive each other."
Lewis B. Smedes

19. **How has God's forgiveness encouraged you to forgive others who have offended you?**

20. **Of the seven principles we've looked at, which do you find to be the most compelling argument that Christianity brings good to our world?**

PRAYER

This week, let's pray for our technical support ministries at Creekside. This ministry area includes the audio visual of our Sunday services as well as other events at Creekside requiring technical support.

- Please pray for more tech volunteers to become involved. Ask God to prompt people with audio visual skills and/or the willingness to learn, to connect with us to let us know.
- Pray that as tech support people serve, that they would be drawn closer to God, that they would feel His pleasure at the good work they are doing for Him.