

Questions of Life

Introduction

When people heard that we were running an Alpha Course this autumn, a number of you said that they would like to brush up on some of the basics of the Christian faith themselves. So that is what we are going to do over the next few weeks –both on Sundays and in our home groups.

The subject for each week could easily cover an entire series or more – these are mega-themes! What’s more, many of them, such as the authority of the Bible, the meaning of the cross, or the place of belief in today’s culture have been very much hot topics this year. We will only be able to skate very briefly over the surface, and look at one or two of the many angles on these subjects, but I hope that through this time your appetite will be whetted for more and as a result your faith will be deepened.

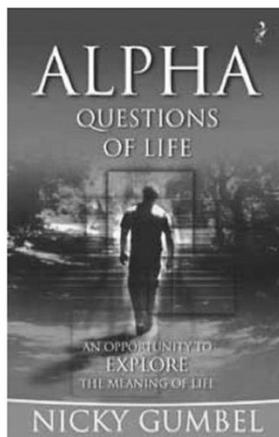
How much you choose to engage with this series is really up to you. It’s easy to feel nervous or put on a veneer of over-confidence about discussing things that we feel that we ‘should’ know –or ‘everyone else knows’. But there are no simple answers –these are subjects that great minds and people of faith have battled with over the centuries, and still do. So don’t be afraid of being open,

I would therefore encourage you to explore such issues honestly and openly - asking the tough questions and searching for answers to them together. I pray that as you do, you will grow closer together and closer to God.

A few practical notes

As you will know by now, the exact week's home group notes don't always correspond to that week's sermon, but hopefully the two will complement each other well and help you think through and apply the material.

I have drawn many of these notes from the Alpha Course material. If you want to read more, then the course book is 'Questions of Life' by Nicky Gumbel. (The 'Raising the Standard' bookshop have copies on Crewe Road or when they hold their monthly stall over coffee in the hall on Sunday mornings –please use this service, it's great to have up-to-date relevant books on sale conveniently). If



you want to look specifically at the life of Jesus in more depth, then I'd also recommend 'The Jesus I Never Knew' by Philip Yancey. Best of all, if you've never done it, I'd recommend reading through the whole of one of the gospels in one go. It doesn't take long! (Mark is the shortest!)

Do continue to take time to enjoy socials together in between your regular meetings. As you follow the themes, please also continue to pray for those on the Alpha Course.

As ever, do let me know your feedback –what you find helpful or not.

Toby

Questions of Life

1: Who is Jesus?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...

Have you grown closer to God this summer or further away? Why?

WORSHIP

This week: Please do this –either as your worship or as an extra:

Each take a piece of paper. Write on it a few short answers to the question: 'For you personally, who is Jesus?' (e.g. My saviour, the king, the bread of life, a friend etc)

Then each share something of what you've written.

Now pray as a group –taking turns to say short prayers using some of the things you've shared. E.g. 'Thank you Jesus that are my saviour.' 'I praise you Jesus, king of the universe' etc

WORD

This week, rather than one passage, here's a load!

Share the passages round & be ready to read them one after another)

Read these one after another. As you listen, ask yourself: 'What do they tell me about Jesus?'

John 1:1-2, John 1:18, Luke 1:26-35, Matt 1:18-21, Luke 1:35, Luke 2:52, Luke 4:13, Matt 13:53-55, Mark 4:41, John 11:35, John 21:27-31, John 3:16, 1 Peter 2:22, Php 2:5-11, Rom 9:5, Rev 22:12-13

Discuss your initial reactions to these passages:

- Does anything in these passages jump out at you? Why?



- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What pictures of Jesus do these passages give?
- Do you think of Jesus more as a man or more as God?
- What do these passages reveal about Jesus' humanity (as man, Son of Man)?
- What do they show about his divinity (as God, Son of God)?
- How can the Bible describe Jesus as both man and God? What significance does this have?
- Why does the virgin birth matter?
- What difference does all this make to your life?
- Do you agree with Thomas's verdict: 'My Lord and my God!' and what should this mean in practice?

WHAT NEXT?

If this is the first time you've met for a while, then share what's been going on in your lives, what's coming up, and pray for one another.

Is there anyone you feel you should invite on Alpha? Why not ask them this week?

It's good to pray as individuals, in services and in home groups, but sometimes it's good to meet as a church to pray together for something specific. Why not go along to one of the pre-Alpha prayer meetings?

Questions of Life

2: Why did Jesus Die?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...

What's the best thing anyone has ever done for you?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God.

You could try this...

Today's passage is a moving one & you may like to spend time focussing on it in your worship time, rather than your normal pattern. You could simply listen to it and then spend time in quiet reflecting on it, perhaps with some quiet background music. You could use part of a video –Jesus of Nazareth or The Passion (although check the latter is OK with those present).

WORD

Start with this...

There are many different pictures or stories that people use to explain why Jesus died and why it matters to us (biblical and otherwise) –e.g. Jesus as a bridge to God, a debt being paid off for us, relationships restored, sacrifice, victory (D-Day) etc. As a group share any others you can think of. Now, each say: Which of do you like best and why? Are there any that you don't like?

Read Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12



Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

These words were written at least 500 years before Jesus. Although much Old Testament prophecy has a fulfilment in the short term as well as in the longer term, there had been no obvious fulfilment of this passage. It left Jewish commentators confused.

- Go through the passage. Discuss all the different ways the passage was fulfilled by Jesus.
- What do verses 4-6 tell us about the meaning of the cross for us as individuals?
- How was God present at the cross –Father, Son and Spirit? How do you think it felt for God?
- What difference does the last session's theme (that Jesus was both man and God) make to your understanding of the cross?
- In what ways do the themes of love and justice run through this passage?
- How can we respond to what Jesus has done for us?

WHAT NEXT?

Please include Alpha and the Harvest Craft Festival in your prayers – times when we are sharing Jesus' love for others.

Questions of Life

3: Why & How do I Pray?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...

Do you remember praying on a particular occasion? When & why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God.

You could try this...

- 1: Ask God to speak to you as a group.
- 2: Someone read out slowly Matt 6:9-13 verse-by-verse
- 3: In silence for a few minutes: Each listen for a verse that particularly strikes you, spend time thinking about it and talking to God about it and listening for his voice.

Afterwards, share what you felt God was saying to you, but don't feel you have to.

WORD

Read Matthew 6:5-13

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Home Group Notes

Sept-Dec 2007



Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Are verses 5-6 suggesting that it's wrong to pray in public? What is Jesus really getting at?
- What are the differences between pagan and Christian prayer (v7)?

Go through each verse of the Lord's Prayer (9-13).

- What does each verse mean?
- Why is it there?
- What would it mean to pray it and live it every day?

- When do you find it easiest/hardest to pray and why? (times of day, times of year, times of life)
- What methods of praying do you find most helpful? What ways do you find most difficult?

WHAT NEXT?

One model of prayer is 'Teaspoon Prayer' (Tsp Prayer): 'Thank you, Sorry, Please'. You could try using this as a group...

Thank you: Begin by share anything to give thanks for .

Sorry: In silence, say sorry for anything that you need to.

Please: Now share any prayer requests and pray together for them.

You could finish by praying the Lord's Prayer together (using an agreed translation!)

Questions of Life

4: Why & How Should I Read the Bible?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...

Each try drawing a picture of what the Bible means to you in your life.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God.

You could try this...

Shout out Psalm 100 together as an introduction to praising God with songs!

WORD

Read Psalm 119:97-112

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Note: The word translated 'law' (Hebrew: 'tora') can mean law or revelation –it can refer to a single command or to the whole Bible –in the Psalmist's day or ours.



- What type of book do you think of the Bible as –story-book , law, history, poetry, prophecy, fantasy... or a mixture? How accurate is this?
- How do you think people do today regard the Bible?
- Do you share the Psalmist's love of the Bible (v97, 103)? All of it, or some of it? Why?
- Why has God given us the Bible?
- How can the Bible be a 'light for our path' (v105)? Is this your experience?
- How could God's word 'preserve our life' (v107)?
- What does it mean to 'meditate on the Bible all day long' (v97)? Have you ever tried it?
- How can a collection of books as old as the Bible be relevant today?
- v111: How should we apply the Bible to our culture? To what extent should we take it all literally?

WHAT NEXT?

It may help to have gather some information beforehand...

Pray for the work of organisations or individuals seeking to make the Bible available in more parts of the world –e.g. Wycliffe Bible Translators, The Bible Society, Open Doors etc

Now pray for one another –those in the room –even if the requests or 'thank yous' seem trivial, as opposed to just praying for those with major needs outside the room!