



# A GLOBAL GOSPEL IN A WORLD OF RELIGIONS

with David Platt

DISCUSSION GUIDE

**SECRET**  
**CHURCH**<sup>TM</sup>

KNOW HIS WORD. KNOW HIS PERSECUTED.

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# What's the Goal?

The goal of this Discussion Guide is simple: we want to help you teach others the truths contained in Secret Church 16.

Listening to David Platt's teaching in Secret Church has been compared to drinking out of a firehouse, and we realize that it is way too much information for one sitting. With that in mind, we've created this Discussion Guide to remind you of the main points of each session and to offer potential discussion questions as you talk about these truths with others. Only one person will need this guide for each group. Whether you're meeting one-on-one with someone, leading a small group, or speaking to a large gathering, you should find some help in the pages ahead.

# What Else Will I Need?

Since you already have this Discussion Guide, the only other things you'll need are . . .

- **A Bible:** point others to God's Word throughout the study
- **Access to David Platt's teaching in Secret Church 16:** view or download at Radical.net/SC16 (for free) or purchase a copy at Radical.net/Store.
- **A Secret Church 16 Study Guide:** download at Radical.net/SC16 (for free) or purchase hard copies at Radical.net/Store. (It will be helpful for each participant to have a Study Guide.)

# **What's in this Guide?**

We've tried to make this material less intimidating by breaking down more than four hours of in-depth teaching into eight manageable sessions. Feel free to adapt any portion of the Discussion Guide to address the needs of your group. The truths covered will make more sense if everyone watches the video and follows along in the Secret Church 16 Study Guide. We've given you an approximate length of time for the video in each session so that you can plan your time accordingly. For each of the eight sessions, you'll see . . .

1. A brief overview of the content
2. A list of key terms, concepts, and Scriptures
3. Ten discussion questions
4. Recommended resources for further study

# **What's the Point?**

Don't forget that Secret Church was never intended to be an end in itself. The goal is not simply to complete a study, but rather to hear, apply, and then spread the truths of God's Word to others. May this study spur you on to obey Christ's command to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

# SESSION 1: Introduction

## OVERVIEW

In Session 1 we are introduced to the world religions covered in this study—animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and atheism—along with projections for the future of these religions and for Christianity. These projections are made based on a number of factors, including fertility rates and conversion patterns. Islam is projected to see the largest growth, as the number of Muslims is expected to equal the number of Christians by 2050. The point of considering these statistics is to ask whether or not the gospel is worthy of our confidence in the midst of so many alternatives. As followers of Christ, we need a biblical view of making disciples and of marriage and procreation.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

### *Realities in the Present*

- Out of 10,000 distinct religions and para-religions in the world, 270 of them have followings of over 500,000 individuals. These numbers include the non-religious, like atheists, as their belief systems are very similar to recognized religions.
- In addition to covering the basics of Christianity, this study will focus on the following religions: animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and atheism.

### *Projections for the Future [by 2050]*

- While the number of Christians and Hindus is expected to increase at the rate of the world's population, the population of Muslims will grow at double that rate (73%). In fact, the number of Muslims is expected to equal the number of Christians by 2050.
- Projections for the populations of world religions are based on fertility rates, age differences, conversion patterns, and international migration.
- The greatest population growth is expected to take place in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the number of Christians in that region projected

to double by 2050. The population of Europe is expected to see the greatest decrease, and the number of Christians is expected to drop by approximately 100 million.

- If the Christian population in China continues at the current rate, over half of China's population will be Christian by 2050. India is expected to have the world's largest Muslim population by that same date.

### *Why Are We Here?*

- The goal of this study is to discern how the gospel compares and contrasts with the world's major religions and to decide whether or not the gospel is worthy of our confidence.
- As Christians we must recover a biblical view of marriage and children (Genesis 1:27-28; Ephesians 5:31-32; Psalm 127:3-5), and we must obey Christ's command to make disciples (Matthew 4:18-22; 28:18-20).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Name some followers of other religions that you know personally. Discuss any attempts you've made to share the gospel or talk about spiritual things with them.
2. Why does it feel intimidating to share the gospel with someone from another religion?
3. As you approach this study, what questions do you have about Islam? Buddhism? Hinduism? Atheism? Animism?
4. Why is it appropriate to study atheism among other religious groups?
5. What projections for religious groups in 2050 were most surprising to you?
6. What does marriage and procreation have to do with a study of world religions? In what ways has the church adopted a view of marriage and children that is cultural rather than biblical?
7. Which of the religions covered in this study do you feel least equipped to engage?

8. Why is a study like this needed for every Christian (and not just missionaries)?
9. Those with a religious affiliation greatly outnumber those without a religious affiliation. Why do you think this is so?
10. How are you planning on applying the truths of this study?

## **FOR MORE ON WORLD RELIGIONS, SEE . . .**

Dean Halverson, ed. *The Compact Guide to World Religions*

Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*

Fritz Ridenour, *So What's The Difference?*

Gerald R. McDermott, *World Religions*

Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*

Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?*

# SESSION 2: The Gospel

## OVERVIEW

The gospel is the topic of Session 2. The foundational elements of the gospel are explained, including: God's character, man's sin, the sufficiency of Christ, and man's response. A right view of these truths is critical for our own faith and for the mission we've been given to take this gospel to the ends of the earth.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

### *The Gospel*

- The gospel is the good news that the only true God, the just and gracious Creator of the universe, has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and has sent His Son, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin through His substitutionary death on the cross and to show His power over sin and death in the resurrection from the grave so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever (Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 2:1-10).
- The following **GOSPEL** acrostic is a helpful reminder of the basic truths of the gospel . . .
  - **G:** God's Character (Isaiah 6:1-3; John 3:16; Psalm 5:4-7)
  - **O:** Offense of Sin (Genesis 3:1-13; Romans 3:23; Revelation 20:11-15)
  - **S:** Sufficiency of Christ (1 Timothy 2:5; John 1:1-4; Philemon 2:5-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
  - **P:** Personal Response (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:37-38; Romans 10:9)
  - **E:** Eternal Urgency (Philemon 3:20-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10)
  - **L:** Life Transformation (Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 3:1-3)
- Summaries of key points from each component of the **GOSPEL** acrostic . . .
  - **God's Character:** The gospel is good news about God, being rooted in his holiness and his righteous hatred against sin, as well as His love and His undeserved grace and mercy toward sinners.

- **Offense of Sin:** The root problem the gospel addresses is humanity's sinful rebellion against God.
- **Sufficiency of Christ:** The gospel centers around Jesus Christ—His full humanity, His full divinity, His sinless life on our behalf, His death in our place, His resurrection, His ascension, and His glorious return.
- **Personal Response:** The gospel is a call to turn from sin and self (repentance) and to embrace Jesus by faith as one's Lord.
- **Eternal Urgency:** The glorious reality of an eternal heaven awaits all those who trust in Jesus, while the dreadful reality of an eternal hell is the destiny of all those who do not believe the gospel.
- **Life Transformation:** All those who trust in Christ are freely forgiven, declared righteous, made new and indwelt by the Spirit, incorporated into the body of Christ (the church), and kept by God until they receive their eternal reward.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is making sure that we understand and articulate the gospel accurately the most important step in engaging followers of other religions? What are the dangers if we have a distorted view of the gospel?
2. Which aspects of the gospel do you feel are most often ignored in our evangelism? Why do you think that is?
3. Which aspects of the gospel do you find the most difficult to share?
4. What's the danger if we fail to mention God's holiness and righteousness in our gospel witness?
5. How would you explain grace to someone who is not familiar with this biblical concept? Can you think of a helpful illustration?
6. What does our culture identify as humanity's biggest problem(s) and how does this differ from what Scripture says?
7. What's the difference between saving faith (as the Bible describes it) and having respect for Jesus as a good teacher or spiritual guide?

8. How can you tell if your presentation of the gospel is man-centered rather than God-centered?
9. Respond to this statement: Christians don't need to mention hell or God's judgment in our evangelism because people might perceive us as unloving or harsh.
10. Explain the gospel simply and clearly in 2-3 minutes.  
(Suggestion: practice doing this with a friend who is a Christian and ask for feedback.)

#### **FOR MORE ON THE GOSPEL, SEE . . .**

Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?*

David Platt, *Follow Me*

# SESSION 3: Evangelism and Conversion

## OVERVIEW

Session 3 deals with the concepts of evangelism and conversion. Having a right view of these concepts is necessary if we want to engage peoples of other religions with the gospel. Evangelism involves persuading people to repent and believe the full gospel and it must be done in the power of the Spirit. God alone brings about conversion, giving spiritual life to those who were dead in their sins, though this reality does not cancel out man's responsibility to respond in faith. Regardless of the cost, believers should be compelled by Christ's love to take the good news of Christ to the ends of the earth.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

### *Evangelism*

- Evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit with the aim of persuading people to repent and believe in Christ (Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16-17). Implications for this definition . . .
  - We should aim to present all the basic truths of the gospel.
  - The truths of the gospel must be communicated verbally.
  - Only the Holy Spirit can bring about conversion.
  - Our goal is not merely to present truth, but to persuade people with it.

### *Conversion*

- Conversion is the divinely enabled personal response of individuals to the gospel in which they turn from their sin and themselves (repent) and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord (believe) (Ezekiel 36:24-29; 2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:8-9). Implications of this definition . . .
  - God's undeserved, life-giving grace is required in conversion since unbelievers are unable to obey God or respond to the gospel.

- Although God must initiate conversion, man is still responsible to respond in repentance and faith.
  - Conversion requires hearing and believing the full gospel message.
  - Conversion changes our standing before God as well as our everyday lives (words, actions, etc.)
  - All those who are truly converted persevere in faith, for God keeps them eternally
- Two key conclusions emerge from this session: (1) all who believe this gospel will be saved from their sin, and (2) all who believe this gospel have been sent into the world (to share it with others) (2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Psalm 67:4).
- Taking the gospel to the world means that we are servants of others. We surrender our rights and work to contextualize the gospel (though without removing its offense) and build bridges in our conversations so that we can bear witness to who Christ is and what he has done.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What sins, fears, or obstacles keep you from evangelizing your friends and neighbors?
2. How does a distorted view of the gospel affect our evangelism?
3. Explain the difference between our role in evangelism and the Holy Spirit's role.
4. What's the difference between persuading people with the gospel and trying to manipulate them?
5. "I share the gospel with my life, but not with my words." Using Scripture, explain why this statement is a bad approach to evangelism.
6. What does it mean practically to rely on the Holy Spirit in our evangelism?
7. Conversion is ultimately God's work in a sinner's life, so does that mean people don't have to respond? Explain your answer.
8. How should the Spirit's role in conversion affect our methods and strategy in evangelism?

9. Is it legalism to expect those who profess faith in Christ to live a changed life? Explain your answer using specific Scripture passages.
10. What sacrifices do you need to make in order to share your faith? How can you make sure that such sacrifices are made out of love and not guilt?

## **FOR MORE ON EVANGELISM AND CONVERSION, SEE . . .**

Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*

John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*

David Platt, *Follow Me*

# SESSION 4: Animism

## OVERVIEW

Animism is the topic for Session 4. Although many people think of animists as uneducated tribal peoples in remote villages, animism is influential across the world, often mixing with a variety of other religions. Animists believe that God is too remote to be known, and yet the physical world is subject to impersonal spiritual forces and personal spiritual beings. While animism lacks certain characteristics of a formal religion—like sacred written texts—and has a variety of different expressions, there are some common beliefs that many animists share. For instance, ancestor worship is common, as is an emphasis on everyday needs as opposed to ultimate truth. For animists, views on God, sin, the afterlife, etc., are shaped by the belief in spiritual forces and spiritual beings that must be appeased, assuaged, and/or avoided. The last portion of this session offers suggestions for sharing the gospel with animists, including questions to ask and bridges (transitions) to the gospel.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

### *Who are Animists?*

- The term animism comes from the Latin *anima*, which means “soul” or “breath.”
- Animists believe that the physical world (including both objects and events) is heavily influenced by spiritual forces.
- Animism is more of a folk religion than a formal religion. It relies on oral traditions rather than written teachings.
- Animism can be a distinct religion, but it can also co-exist with other religions.

### *What Do Animists Believe?*

- God, or the notion of a Supreme Being, is remote from creation, too abstract to be known.
- Since the physical universe is closely connected to the spiritual realm, everything—weather, sickness, fortune, death, etc.—has a spiritual explanation.
- The world consists of personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces that need to be appeased, assuaged, or avoided.
- Animists attempt to commune with the spirits in various ways, including tarot cards, astrology, omens, etc.
- Community is a priority for animists, and respect for one's family or tribe may extend to the worship of one's ancestors.
- There is a general belief in some continued existence after death, but the focus is on immediate, everyday needs over ultimate truth.

### *How Do We Share the Gospel with Animists?*

- Remember that Christianity and the gospel are supernatural truths, so animists aren't wrong to recognize spiritual forces in the world.
- Show sensitivity and empathy in the face of beliefs that may sound bizarre.
- Demonstrate Christian community (John 13:34-35; Ephesians 2:13-22).
- Communicate the gospel clearly and with sensitivity to the context. Exalt Christ as the goal of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4-6).
- Note areas of agreement as well as differences in your beliefs.
- Show the differences in what you believe by how you live (Philippians 1:21; Galatians 5:1; Psalm 27:1).
- Reframe the overall story: Creation (Genesis 1:26-31), Fall (Genesis 3:1-7), Redemption (1 Timothy 2:5-6), and Restoration (Revelation 22:1-5).

- Tell the individual stories of Jesus' power over nature (Mark 4:35-41), demons (Mark 1:24-27), disease (Mark 1:30-34), death (Mark 5:41-42), sin (Mark 2:1-12), and Satan (Mark 3:27; Colossians 1:13-14).
- Warn against deceptive spirits (2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:14).
- Call them to a decision (Joshua 24:14-15).
- Trust God's power to save (1 John 4:4).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What were your views of animists prior to this study? Did your views change? How so?
2. Does sharing the gospel with animists sound more or less intimidating than engaging people of other religions? Why?
3. What special challenges are involved in engaging animists?
4. How are elements of animism present in our own culture?  
(Hint: superstition, etc.) What about your own Christian circles?
5. Explain why animists aren't completely wrong about the presence of supernatural forces in the world. How do most people you know think about the reality of supernatural beings?
6. Why does animism lead to perpetual fear? How could you use the truth of Christ's authority to address this fear?
7. How is an animist's view of God different from a biblical view of God?
8. Animists deal with a sense of guilt in various ways, including appeasing the spirits. How could you use this reality to point to Christ's sacrifice?
9. Since animists focus on everyday needs and issues rather than ultimate truth, should we downplay eternal realities when talking with them? Why not?
10. Animists believe that God cannot be known. Come up with a question that might help to start a conversation with an animist on this point, with

the ultimate goal of sharing the gospel. See pages 46-65 of the *Secret Church 16 Study Guide* for help, as there are several examples of a “question to ask” or a “bridge to cross” when sharing the gospel with animists.

## **FOR MORE ON ANIMISM, SEE . . .**

Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*

# SESSION 5: Hinduism

## OVERVIEW

It is estimated that over 915 million people in the world are Hindu, with 1,115 Hindu people groups classified as unreached with the gospel. Hinduism, the topic of Session 5, is actually a complex set of religions that contains a mixture of beliefs about God, including the idea that there are over 330 million gods! Hinduism contains several sacred writings, and their spiritual leaders, or gurus, guide Hindu practice. Hindu culture is communal and still heavily influenced by the caste system, yet Hindu belief and practice are largely individualistic. Samsara (reincarnation) and moksha (salvation) are two common Hindu beliefs. The last portion of this session offers suggestions for sharing the gospel with Hindus, including questions to ask and bridges (transitions) to the gospel.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

### *Who Are Hindus?*

- Hinduism is a mix of pantheism (the belief that God is everything and everything is God) and polytheism (belief in many gods).
- The Vedas are inspired Hindu sacred writings. One example of a well-known sacred writing is the Bhagavad Gita, which contains mythical stories and philosophical teachings.
- Gurus, or spiritual leaders, lead and guide in Hindu practice.
- Hindu culture is communal and based on a caste system (a hierarchy of social classes), though Hindu belief and practice are often individualistic.

### *What Do Hindus Believe?*

- There are two common Hindu beliefs: samsara (reincarnation) and moksha (salvation).

- Samsara (reincarnation): the process through which every atman (uncreated, eternal soul) must pass until one reaches moksha (salvation). Reincarnation entails a cyclical (non-linear) view of physical life, in which we're born, we live, we die, we're born again; we live again, we die again, and on and on.
  - Moksha (salvation): liberation from samsara. There are three paths to moksha: (1) the way of works (dharma), (2) the way of knowledge (jnana), and (3) the way of devotion (bhakti).
- Karma: what goes around comes around. One's actions from a previous life affect life in the present.
  - There are three major Hindu gods—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—and all gods are manifestations of Brahman, the ultimate spiritual reality.
  - Four important Hindu practices:
    - (1) yoga: a path of mental, physical, and spiritual discipline that leads to moksha (salvation).
    - (2) mantras: prayers, chants, and utterances that aid in meditation and worship.
    - (3) ritual bathing: performed daily before devotions; performed periodically in rivers with cleansing power.
    - (4) festivals: celebrating historical events and expressing devotion to gods.

### *How Do We Share the Gospel with Hindus?*

- Listen carefully to them, look expectantly to God, and pray boldly for their salvation.
- Point continually to Jesus—His unique nature (John 1:1-4, 14), exclusive claims (John 14:6), and comforting promise (Matthew 11:28-30).
- Proclaim the bad news clearly (Romans 3:23; Ezekiel 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:20).
- Proclaim the good news joyfully (Romans 6:23; Psalm 96:1-6)—you can know God now (Jeremiah 9:23-24), God is personal (Exodus 3:15), and you can know God forever (1 John 5:13).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. When you hear about Hinduism, what's the first image or thought that comes into your mind? What wrong notions have you had about Hindus?
2. In terms of sharing the gospel, how does it help you to know that Hindus worship a variety of gods?
3. Explain why the Hindu belief in samsara (reincarnation) doesn't fit with the Bible's teaching on salvation and final judgment.
4. What makes karma (what goes around comes around) a form of works-righteousness?
5. How does the hope found in the gospel contrast with Hinduism's teaching on reincarnation? How would you highlight this hope in sharing the gospel?
6. Hindus believe in three paths to moksha (salvation)—works, knowledge, and devotion. How does the gospel speak to these false paths to salvation?
7. When witnessing to Hindus, what's the danger if we fail to listen to them? What are some practical ways you can improve in this area?
8. What specific truths about Jesus should we be intentional about mentioning to Hindus (as well as other unbelievers)?
9. What are some practical ways to engage Hindus in your community? In the world?
10. Hindus believe that salvation comes through following paths of works, knowledge, and devotion. Come up with a question that might help to start a conversation with a Hindu on this point, with the ultimate goal of sharing the gospel. See *pages 71-77 of the Secret Church 16 Study Guide for help, as there are several examples of a "question to ask" or a "bridge to cross" when sharing the gospel with Hindus.*

## **FOR MORE ON HINDUISM, SEE . . .**

Ravi Zacharias, *New Birth or Rebirth?*

# SESSION 6: Buddhism

## OVERVIEW

Session 6 deals with Buddhism, a religion with over 250 million people from 62 countries. Of the 354 people groups that are Buddhist, 296 of them are labeled as unreached with the gospel. In response to sin and suffering, Siddhartha Gautama, Buddhism's founder, claimed to find Enlightenment while meditating, and he taught others this path until his death. The two primary schools of Buddhism are Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, and Buddhists have a variety of sacred texts. In fact, Buddhism is often mixed with atheism or animism. Buddhists believe that suffering is the main problem for man and that it can only be overcome by getting rid of selfish desire through the Eight-Fold Path. Salvation for Buddhists is a matter of self-effort. The last portion of this session offers suggestions for sharing the gospel with Buddhists, including questions to ask and bridges (transitions) to the gospel.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

*Who are Buddhists?*

- Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BC) as a response to the suffering he saw around him. After finding what he called the path to Enlightenment, he taught others to do the same.
- The two primary schools of Buddhism are Theravada (Enlightenment available to the few; Buddha as earthly sage) and Mahayana (Enlightenment available to the many; Buddha as an eternal savior). Other schools of Buddhism include Vajrayana, Tibetan, Zen, and New Age.
- Buddhist sacred texts include:
  - (1) Pali Canon: compilation of Buddhist teachings
  - (2) Mahavastu: collection of Buddha's life story
  - (3) Sutras: sayings of Buddha
  - (4) Tantras: advanced practices based upon the Sutras

## *What do Buddhists Believe?*

- Buddhists believe in Four Noble Truths:
  - (1) Dukkha: all of life is suffering
  - (2) Samudaya: the cause of suffering is selfish desire
  - (3) Nirodha: the cure for suffering is overcoming selfish desire
  - (4) Eight-Fold Path: right views, right intent, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
- Enlightenment (Nirvana) is the liberation from all suffering.
- Salvation comes through self-effort.
- Buddhism is often mixed with atheism or animism.

## *How Do We Share the Gospel with Buddhists?*

- Recognize there are superficial similarities (suffering, ethics, compassion, etc.).
- Realize there are substantial differences (God, man, Jesus, sin, salvation, etc.).
- Be wise with your language (Proverbs 15:2), winsome with your life (Matthew 5:13-16), and sensitive to culture (Colossians 3:12).
- Use varied means of communication (stories, videos, art, music, etc.).
- Given the importance of family and community for Buddhists, focus on the family (Philippians 16:30-34) and point to the church as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27).
- Be patient (2 Peter 3:9) and prayerful (Daniel 9:3-4, 17-23).
- Appeal to the heart (Genesis 4:7; Psalm 37:4; Acts 2:38; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).
- Hold out (talk about) the hope of Christ (Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What did you know about Buddhism before this study? How has your view of Buddhism changed as a result of this session?
2. Talk about any similarities between Buddhism and beliefs that are popular in our culture.
3. Why do you think the similarities between Buddhism and Christianity are called “superficial” in this study?
4. What do Buddhists believe about God? What about Christ?
5. What are the most important differences between Christianity and Buddhism when it comes to the topics of sin and salvation?
6. Christians believe that the self is not an illusion, but that individuals are important. So how is this different from pride or self-centeredness?
7. How would you respond to a Buddhist who said that we should eliminate our desires? What Scripture passages could you point to?
8. What's wrong with the way Buddhists seek to overcome suffering and selfishness?
9. Explain the Bible's teaching on the final (bodily) resurrection.  
*(Hint: see 1 Corinthians 15)*
10. Buddhists seek to eliminate suffering. Come up with a question that might help to start a conversation with a Buddhist on this point, with the ultimate goal of sharing the gospel. *See pages 82-95 of the Secret Church 16 Study Guide for help, as there are several examples of a “question to ask” or a “bridge to cross” when sharing the gospel with Buddhists.*

## **FOR MORE ON BUDDHISM, SEE . . .**

Ravi Zacharias, *The Lotus and the Cross*

# SESSION 7: Islam

## OVERVIEW

We learn in Session 7 that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world today. The number of Muslims, which is currently 1.7 billion, is projected to equal the number of Christians by 2050. There are many common misconceptions about Muslims, including the idea that all Muslims are Arabs. A Muslim is someone who submits to God based on the teaching of Muhammad, Islam's founder. Muslims follow the Qur'an, Islam's most revered holy book, and they confess that Allah is the only God and that Muhammad is his prophet. This session also gives an overview of Islam's five pillars, or foundational tenets, as well as its six basic beliefs. Finally, the urgent task of engaging Muslims with the gospel is discussed. Of the 2,317 Muslim people groups, a staggering 2,121 of them are unreached with the gospel. Suggestions are offered for sharing the gospel with Muslims, including questions to ask and bridges (transitions) to the gospel.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

### *Who are Muslims?*

- Not all Muslims are Arabs, nor do all Muslims hate Americans.
- Though Muslims don't believe that Jesus was divine or that He was crucified, He is a respected prophet according to the Qur'an.
- A Muslim is someone who submits to God based on the teaching of Muhammad, Islam's founder. Muslims do not worship Muhammad.
- Muhammad was a prophet who had a vision of the archangel Gabriel (610 A.D.) and then began to preach that there is only one God, Allah, and that we are obligated to submit to his will.
- Muslims were divided over who should succeed Muhammad. Sunni Muslims believed successors should be chosen by consensus/election, while Shiite Muslims believed successors should be from Muhammad's descendants.

- Islam has (and continues to) spread through personal conversion and military coercion.
- Muhammad's recitations were recorded in Islam's most holy book, the Qur'an. Supplemental teachings can be found in Hadiths, which inform and prescribe Islamic belief and practice, and in Shariah, which are legal interpretations of Muslim teachings that prescribe duties, laws, and penalties for breaking laws.

### *What Do Muslims Believe?*

- The Five Pillars of Muslim belief are . . .
  - (1) Shahada: The Confession (There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet)
  - (2) Salat: The Prayers (five times daily facing Mecca)
  - (3) Zakat: The Giving of Alms (at least 2.5% of income to the poor)
  - (4) Sawm: The Fast (takes place during month of Ramadan)
  - (5) Hajj: The Pilgrimage (those who are able must go to Mecca)
- The Six Basic Beliefs of Islam are . . .
  - (1) Belief in God: Allah is the only God, and idolatry (*shirk*) is the primary sin.
  - (2) Belief in Angels: angels worship and serve Allah.
  - (3) Belief in the Prophets: out of twenty-five main prophets, Muhammed is the last and most significant.
  - (4) Belief in the Holy Books: the four most holy books were brought about by four prophets—Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammed. The Qur'an is the supreme holy book.
  - (5) Belief in Divine Decree: God is all-knowing and whatever he wills happens.
  - (6) Belief in Final Judgment: a day of final reward is coming when all people will go to either Paradise (Jannah) or Hellfire (Jahannam).

### *How Do We Share the Gospel with Muslims?*

- Know (and understand) what they believe . . .
  - “The Bible is not reliable.”
  - “It has been changed.”
  - “It has been corrupted.”

- “Christians are immoral.”
  - “Just look at Western culture.”
  - “Christianity is an easy way out.”
- “Christians worship three gods.”
  - “God the Father.”
  - “Mary the Mother.”
  - “Jesus the Son.”
- “Jesus did not die on the cross.”
  - Some Muslims believe Allah took Jesus to heaven before crucifixion because it was unthinkable for an approved prophet to face such a humiliating defeat.
  - Other Muslims believe Jesus was taken down from the cross in a coma and that he later revived.
- In light of what Muslims believe, we need to know what we believe about:
  - God (the Trinity)
  - Jesus (fully man, fully God)
  - The cross (sinless life, substitutionary death)
  - Salvation (by grace, through faith, in Christ)
  - The Bible (historical accuracy, manuscript reliability, fulfilled prophecy, clear unity, internal testimony)
- On areas of disagreement, do less debate and more dialogue
  - Utilize questions.
  - Use illustrations.
- Trust in God’s Word.
- Point to God’s love (1 John 3:1).
- Pray in Jesus’ name (John 14:13-14; 1 John 5:13-15).
- Be holy in your lifestyle (Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Peter 2:16-17).
- Be hospitable and loving (John 13:34-35; Romans 12:13).
- Be patient as you share (1 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Peter 3:9).
- Be cognizant of suffering (Matthew 10:16-22).
- Get to the gospel (Romans 6:23).
- Trust in God (John 5:17-21).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ...**

1. What was your impression of Muslims prior to this study? What misconceptions did you have?
2. How is being a Muslim different than being an Arab?
3. What factors make it likely that Islam will continue to grow in the near future?
4. Both Muslims and Christians believe there is one God, so how do their conceptions of God differ?
5. Respond to the following statement and include relevant Scripture passages: Christians worship three gods.
6. What do Muslims believe about Jesus? How is this different from Scripture's view of Christ?
7. Muslims believe that man's great need is instruction. What does Scripture identify as our greatest need?
8. What would you say to a Muslim who claims that the Bible has been corrupted?
9. How might you use the truth of God's grace and of the Christian's assurance of salvation in evangelizing Muslims?
10. Muslims don't believe that God would debase himself in order to take on flesh and be crucified. Come up with a question that might help to start a conversation with a Muslim on this point, with the ultimate goal of sharing the gospel. *See pages 102-125 of the Secret Church 16 Study Guide for help, as there are several examples of a "question to ask" or a "bridge to cross" when sharing the gospel with Muslims.*

## **FOR MORE ON ISLAM, SEE . . .**

Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*

Thabiti Anyabwile, *The Gospel for Muslims*

# SESSION 8: Atheism

## OVERVIEW

Session 8 covers atheism, and while most people don't think of atheists or agnostics as religious, the belief systems of such people are, in fact, a religion. Secular humanism applies the beliefs of atheists and agnostics to a formal ideological system. Secular humanists, for example, have their own system of philosophy (philosophical naturalism) and ethics (consequential ethicism). Amazingly, over 287 atheistic people groups are currently identified as unreached. The last portion of this session offers suggestions for sharing the gospel with atheists (and others who doubt God's existence), including questions to ask and bridges (transitions) to the gospel.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

### *Who are Atheists and What Do They Believe?*

- Atheists do not believe in the existence of God; agnostics believe it is impossible to know if God exists.
- The fact that atheists don't believe in God does not mean they believe in nothing or that they have no moral values.
- Secular humanism applies the beliefs of atheists and agnostics to a formal belief system.
- Two tenets of secular humanism are philosophical naturalism and consequential ethicism.
  - (1) Philosophical naturalism denies the supernatural while affirming the natural and accepting the authority of scientific inquiry.
  - (2) Consequential ethicism is a system of ethics and values based on results over time in culture. It is based on human discovery and achievement.
- People become atheists for a variety of reasons, including the idea that science disproves God's existence, the belief that Christianity

brainwashes its followers to follow a man-made morality, and the idea that we outgrow childish notions of God as we mature in knowledge and in life.

### *How Do We Share the Gospel with Atheists?*

- Create humble dialogue and cause them to honestly question their beliefs.
- Realize that objections are not only in a person's head, but also in a person's heart (Psalm 14:1).
- Remember that the gospel proclaimed and portrayed has power to save (Colossians 1:10).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Do you personally know any atheists? How would you describe them—their lifestyle, their attitude toward Christians, their values, etc.?
2. Are you intimidated at the thought of sharing the gospel with atheists? Why or why not?
3. Why does it make sense to study atheism as a religion? What similarities and differences are there between atheism and the other religions in this study?
4. Give your response to the following statement: “I’m an agnostic, because it shows a lack of humility to claim that you *know* God exists.”
5. What evidence do you see in our culture that secular humanism is becoming more vocal, and even aggressive?
6. Is it accurate to say that Christians are opposed to science? Why not?
7. Why is it wrong to say that secular humanists are fair and objective in determining their views of right and wrong?
8. Respond to this statement from an atheist: “I don’t believe in God because all the Christians I know are hypocrites.”
9. Why do you think some atheists claim to have outgrown their beliefs in Christianity?

10. Although atheists don't believe that God exists, most atheists agree that certain actions—like murder—are sinful. Come up with a question that might help to start a conversation with an atheist on this point, with the ultimate goal of sharing the gospel. See pages 128-134 of the *Secret Church 16 Study Guide* for help, as there are several examples of a “question to ask” or a “bridge to cross” when sharing the gospel with atheists.

## **FOR MORE ON ATHEISM, SEE . . .**

Albert Mohler, *Atheism Remix*

# SESSION 9: Conclusions

## OVERVIEW

In Session 9, the final session, three concluding realities are highlighted in this study: the reality of hell, the promise of heaven, and the means through which the saving message of the gospel spreads—our mouths. These truths must stick in our minds as we think about engaging people from other religions. This study closes with three exhortations in light of the great needs of the world—pray, give, and go. There is often risk when we spread this gospel to the ends of the earth, but the reward is worth it.

## KEY TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND SCRIPTURES

### *Three Conclusions*

- (1) An eternal hell awaits those who do not believe the gospel (Acts 4:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Revelation 20:11-15).
- (2) An eternal heaven awaits those who believe the gospel (John 3:16; Revelation 21:1-4).
- (3) God has ordained our mouths to be the means through which the gospel spreads (Romans 10:12-17).

### *Three Exhortations*

- (1) Let's pray passionately (Matthew 9:37-38; Ephesians 6:10-20).
- (1) Let's give sacrificially (Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:48).
- (3) Let's go confidently (Acts 20:24) . . .
  - to people right around us (1 Peter 3:13-17).
  - to peoples around the world (Matthew 28:18-20) . . .
  - knowing there will be risk (Matthew 24:9-13; Revelation 6:9-11).
  - looking to our reward (Hebrews 12:1-2; Revelation 12:7-12).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. After completing this study, what worries do you still have about sharing the gospel with people of other religions? What steps can you take to address those worries? What promises in Scripture could you memorize to help?
2. Which world religion in this study most surprised you in terms of its actual beliefs? Did you have any misconceptions exposed?
3. The consequences of getting the gospel right (or wrong) are eternal. How might you communicate this fact in a way that is both loving and candid?
4. Why isn't it arrogant to tell followers of other religions that the gospel is the only way to be saved?
5. Respond to this statement: Peace-loving followers of other religions will likely embrace the gospel on their own, so we don't have to call them to repentance.
6. What role does prayer play in your efforts to spread the gospel? What are some practical ways you might remind yourself to pray for the nations?
7. Explain why sacrificial giving is an act of faith? What does your current attitude toward giving say about your priorities?
8. Reaching those of other religions with the gospel can be costly. What motivations does Scripture give us to take those risks?
9. Where do you come into contact with people of other religions? How might you intentionally try to form relationships with such individuals?
10. What steps might your church take to engage unreached people groups?

## **FOR MORE ON THE GOSPEL, EVANGELISM, AND MISSION . . .**

Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?*

Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*

John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*

David Platt, *Follow Me*

*The resources recommended in this Discussion Guide are intended to help you dig deeper into the truths of this study. However, neither Radical nor David Platt endorses everything contained in these resources. We encourage you to measure everything you read in light of the truth of God's Word.*

# A GLOBAL GOSPEL IN A WORLD OF RELIGIONS

A multiplicity of religions exists in the world, all claiming to hold to (at least) some portion of the truth about who we are, how we got here, what we should be doing, and where we're going. Billions of people believe in Christianity, while others embrace Islam. Some are Hindu and others are Buddhist. Amidst it all, many are atheist, or at the very least agnostic. In light of these realities, certain questions come to mind . . .

- How should we think about this massive marketplace of religious ideas?
- Is there one way to God or are there many ways?
- How does the gospel compare and contrast with other world religions?
- How should we share the gospel with people of other faiths?

In this Secret Church study, David Platt compares the foundational truths of the gospel with the beliefs of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Animism, and Atheism. The goal is to make sure that we hold fast to the gospel in a world filled with religious options, and that we know how to share this good news with people of other faiths.

For more resources from David Platt, visit  
[radical.net](http://radical.net).

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