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What is Religion?

Introduction: What is religion, and where does it come from?

1. **Religion is defined as a system of belief in and worship of God or gods.** It is man's efforts to invoke the pleasure – or to avert the wrath – of the divine.
2. **Religion is different from Christian faith:**
   Religion is what man does to seek relationship with God.
   Christian faith is understanding that God seeks relationship with man.
   Religion is man's efforts to appease the gods or to gain their favor.
   Christian faith is understanding that God, in His infinite grace, came to Earth to make a way for man to have peace and favor with Him.
3. In Romans 1:20 we read *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."*
4. In Ecclesiastes 3:11 we read that *"He has also set eternity in the hearts of men;"* These two passages (Rom. 1:20 and Ecc. 3:11) tell us what we also know from our own experience and observations, that all of creation is full of evidence that there is a God.
5. Blaise Pascal, the famous 17th century French philosopher, said it this way: "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."
6. God created man with a sense of eternity (as stated in Ecc. 3:11), the comprehension that there is more than the finite dimensions we can observe and discern. God's invisible qualities are clearly seen in the intricacy of a butterfly's wing, in the vibrant colors of the ostrich's feathers and in the complexity of our own DNA.
7. Every people group in the world shares this feature; they all recognize the existence of the divine. Even those who think of themselves as atheists, when they find themselves in crisis, cry out to God in their desperation.

What is meant by "Pluralistic Communities?"

1. Pluralistic communities are communities in which there are more than one group of people, or more than one system of belief practiced by the people in the community.
2. India, with its hundreds of people groups and languages, is a highly pluralistic community. India can be considered the most pluralistic nation in the world.
3. Even many small rural villages can be considered pluralistic communities when they are made up of people from more than one background.
4. Followers of Jesus who live in a region that is predominantly Hindu—or Muslim or Sikh or any other group—live in pluralistic communities, because the community is made up of both Jesus-followers and others.

God loves all people, from every community! Therefore, we—His children—must love them as well.

1. John 3:16 tells us that "God so loved <u>the world</u>…"
2. Jesus told His disciples in Mark 16:15 to *"go into <u>all</u> the world and preach the good news to <u>all</u> creation."*
3. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus commissioned His disciples to *"go and make disciples of <u>all nations</u> …"* Another term for "nations" in that passage is "ethnic people groups."
4. The last sentence in 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is *"not willing that <u>any</u> should perish."*

Though there are many communities with many different belief systems, we know from God's Word that there is only one God and only one way to experience peace with God.

1. 1 Timothy 2:5 tells us that *"there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*
2. And in Acts 4:12 we read that *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*
3. Jesus Himself said, in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

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Why do we Study Other Religions?

Why do we study religions other than the one true Gospel?

1. We study other religions so that we can understand how to best communicate God's truth with people of those belief systems.
2. We study other religions because we love—with the supernatural love of God—people who believe those systems and we want to understand what they believe. Because our love is from God it surpasses human understanding; as God's children we love even our enemies.

The Apostle Paul showed this kind of insight and sensitivity in Acts 17:16-33.

1. Paul was in Athens, waiting for his missionary colleagues (Timothy and Silas) to rejoin him from where they were ministering in Berea.
2. Paul noticed all the idols of the Athenians, including one with the inscription: "To the Unknown God." He used this as a way to introduce to them the One true God who was until that moment unknown to the Athenians.
3. Because of Paul's clear explanation of who the "Unknown God" was (and is), some there believed and became followers of Jesus (Acts 17:34).

It is helpful to know what those of other faiths believe so that we can dialogue wisely with them and explain God's truth clearly to them.

1. For example, Hindus sometimes compare the Vedas and other Hindu scriptures to the Bible, suggesting they are all of equal nature and value. A believer will be able to respond more clearly and correctly to this incorrect notion if he has some familiarity with the ancient Hindu writings.
2. Similarly, when conversing with Muslims it is helpful to know that their holy book, the Koran, calls Jesus the Messiah and acknowledges that He was resurrected.

Many cultures (possibly all) have "redemptive analogies" from their own histories that help them recognize and understand God's truth.

1. In his book entitled "Peace Child," mission scholar Don Richardson told about introducing the Sawi people of Irian Jaya to Jesus. The Sawi were a ruthless tribal group who admired Judas Iscariot for the way he had betrayed Jesus. But they had a custom that, when peace was desired between tribal groups, the king of one tribe would give his child to the king of the other. This "peace child" custom enabled the Sawi to understand how God made peace with man by offering His own child Jesus.
2. When missionaries first arrived in central West Africa they discovered a tribe named the Baoulé. The Baoulé honored the memory of their founding queen, who had offered her own child as a sacrifice to the spirits in order to save her people. The missionaries explained that this was exactly what God the Creator had done so that man could be saved.

Just as God loves every person regardless of their religion, we too are to love others regardless of their religion.

1. As God's children we must exemplify God's love for others by treating them with genuine dignity and kindness.
2. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). This does not mean we are to love the evil things that some do, nor must we admire the acts and practices of darkness of some. But we must respond to everyone, regardless of their religion, with God's love and charity, through the power of His Holy Spirit living within us.

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India – Birthplace of Four World Religions

India is the birthplace of several of the world's major religions. Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism were all founded in India.

1. These four religions are among the ten largest religions in the world.
2. The birth of these religions in India illustrates the fact that Indians are by nature a very religious people.

The world's largest religions, listed in the order of the number of their adherents:

1. Christianity – with approximately 2.2 billion, is spread throughout the world. Christianity is the world's largest religion and the only religion that is well represented on every continent and in nearly every country. Christianity is the only truly global religion.
2. Islam – with approximately 1.5 billion, mostly in the Middle East, North Africa, and in Southern Asia. There are almost no Muslims in South America and relatively few in North America.
3. Hinduism – with over one billion followers, 9,57,000 in India alone. Indonesia has approximately five million Hindus; Malaysia has 1.5 million.
4. Buddhism – with from 500 to 700 million. Whereas Buddhism originated in India, it is strongest in the countries of South Asia east of India.
5. Folk religions (also called Ethnoreligions and Animism) – with several hundred million adherents, including 100 million in India. Strongest in India and Africa, but also in Asia. (Many Indians who are officially counted as Hindus should more accurately be considered Ethnoreligionists.)
6. Chinese folk religions (including Taoism and Confucianism) – with several hundred million adherents.
7. Shinto – with approx. 40 million adherents, mostly in Japan.
8. Sikhism – with approximately 26 million, mostly in India. They are a majority in Punjab, India. Many Sikhs have migrated to the west.
9. Judaism – with approximately 16 million. Jews are a majority in Israel but many live in the USA.
10. Jainism – with from five to eight million, mostly in India. Many Jains are also counted as Hindus.

Why are there so many different religions?

1. The many different religions of the world are evidence of man's thirst for God as he has sought Him in many different ways (See Romans 1:18-20).
2. Satan has tried to turn men and women away from the true worship of God and from obedience to Him (Genesis chapter 3).
3. Different kinds of religions have been developed in different areas of the world, some many centuries ago and some more recently.
   a. The roots of Christianity are found in Judaism, which began over 4,000 years ago.
   b. Similarly, the earliest forms of Zoroastrianism and Hinduism can be traced to thousands of years ago. The *Vedas* were passed down from generation to generation for perhaps 2,000 years and were finally written down about 2,000 years ago, around the time of Christ.
   c. Buddhism and Jainism began around 500 years later. Islam didn't begin until the seventh century, AD. Sikhism is even younger, having begun in the 15th century.

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Tribal and Folk Religions and Animism

What are Tribal and Folk religions?

1. Tribal religions are the religious beliefs and practices observed by tribals. Tribal religions are typified by a belief in a supreme creator but with a greater emphasis on the appeasing of malevolent spirits.
2. It is called a folk religion when indigenous superstitions and beliefs are combined with elements from other, more generally-recognized religions.
3. For example, folk Hinduism (or "popular Hinduism") can be distinguished from orthodox Hinduism; folk Hindus greatly outnumber orthodox Hindus.
4. Islam has many folk versions. In fact, Sikhism may be considered a folk version of Islam, since it combines elements of indigenous Indian religions with Islam.
5. People who belong to tribal or folk religions are often referred to as "ethnoreligionists" (or "ethno-religionists"). An ethnoreligious group is an ethnic group of people whose members are also unified by a common religion.

What is animism, and how is it related to tribal and folk religions?

1. Animism is the name for the belief that spirits or supernatural forces "animate" (inhabit) objects and elements.
2. Animists believe that spirits inhabit different animals or trees or other living things. Some animists believe spirits live even in non-living things, such as in rocks or in a river, or even in the wind and thunder. Often animists fear the spirits of those who have died, and they expend great effort and expense to appease these spirits.
3. Hinduism, with its 330 million "gods," is similar to animism in the sense that they both believe there are uncountable spirits to be appeased. However, Hinduism differs from animism in other areas, such as in their understanding of death and the after-life.

How can we best reach folk and tribal religionists and animists with the good news?

1. God revealed Himself to numerous tribal religious groups in the 19th century in Church Planting Movements (CPMs), and we currently see the same kind of movements in different areas and among different people groups. For example, God is revealing Himself dramatically to Bhojpuri in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, to the Khui peoples of Odisha, and to tribals in Madhya Pradesh.
2. We must remember to approach folk and tribal religionist groups as a whole, not as individuals. In so doing, the Holy Spirit can and will bring whole groups to Himself, family-by-family and village-by-village.
3. There are often power encounters when dealing with animists, and with folk-religionists as well. It is important to demonstrate that our God is greater than any other force in the universe. (We will discuss power encounters further in Lesson ___.)
4. Jesus gave us an example of how to deal with folk religions when he encountered the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). The Samaritans practiced a folk-religion version of Judaism. One of their folk variations from true Judaism was that they worshipped on their local mountain, whereas the Jews worshiped in Jerusalem.
   a. When the woman asked Jesus where one should worship (vs 20), Jesus did not focus on her folk-religion argument about geography. Instead, He responded that a time would come *"when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth"* (John 4:23). Then He declared Himself to be the Messiah.
   b. Similarly, when dealing with people from folk religions, we must avoid the temptation of long arguments about their folk beliefs, and instead point them to the Messiah.
5. Animists often live in debilitating fear of death. They also fear any curses that may be cast on them by the dead or by evil spirits. Animists need to be shown and convinced that Jesus Christ is more powerful than any evil spirit, and that He has overcome even the power of death, offering us eternal life in heaven in His presence.

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Origins, Status and Beliefs of Buddhism

What is Buddhism? Buddhism is the religion of approximately from 500 to 700 million people around the world. It was founded approximately 2,500 years ago by Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha (awakened one). Gautama received his enlightenment in Buddha Gaya, in Bihar State. During the time of King Ashoka monks were sent from India to South-east Asia, where Buddhism eventually became the dominant religion.

Is Buddhism a religion? Buddhism is in fact more a philosophy or "way of life" than a religion because it doesn't include teaching about the supernatural. But it is often considered a religion because its teachings take the place of religion in the minds and hearts of its followers.

Where do Buddhists live? Buddhists are concentrated in East Asia, predominantly in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan, Korea, Japan and China.

What does Buddhism offer? Buddhism tries to offer a purpose to life and an explanation of apparent injustice and inequality around the world. Some seek to find true happiness through its way of life.

Why is Buddhism becoming popular in the West? Buddhism has some popularity in the West because it offers an alternate value system to the emptiness of modern materialism.

Who was the Buddha? Gautama was born into a royal family in 563 BC. At 29, he realized that wealth and luxury did not guarantee happiness, so he explored the different philosophies of the day to try to find the key to human happiness. After six years of study and meditation he experienced a kind of enlightenment which he called "the middle path." Thereafter, he spent the rest of his life teaching the principles of Buddhism until his death at the age of 80.

Was the Buddha a god? He was not, nor did he claim to be. He was merely a man who taught, based on his experience, a path to supposed enlightenment. However, in practice the Buddhists worship Buddha as a god, particularly in folk or popular Buddhism.

Do Buddhists worship idols? Buddhists say that they pay respect to images of the Buddha, not in worship, nor to ask for favors, but as an expression of gratitude for the teaching. But in practice, it becomes idol worship.

Why are so many Buddhist countries poor? Buddhist teaching that wealth does not guarantee happiness results in an apathy by Buddhists towards working for material advancement. Consequently, predominantly Buddhist countries tend to have many poor.

Are there different types of Buddhism? There are many different types of Buddhism, from country to country due to customs and culture.

Do Buddhists consider other religions wrong? Buddhism is tolerant of all other religions and agrees with the moral teachings of other religions.

What did the Buddha Teach? The Buddha taught many things, but the basic concepts in Buddhism can be summed up by the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

What are Buddhism's "Four Noble Truths?" The first "truth" is that life is suffering i.e., life includes pain, getting old, disease, and ultimately death. We also endure psychological suffering like loneliness frustration, fear, embarrassment, disappointment and anger.

The second "truth" is that suffering is caused by craving and aversion. Wanting deprives us of contentment. A lifetime of wanting and discontent (even the desire to continue to exist) creates a powerful energy which causes the individual to be born (a bad thing, according to Buddhists). So craving leads to physical suffering because it causes us to be reborn.

The third "truth" is that suffering can be overcome and happiness can be attained by giving up useless craving. By learning to live each day at a time (not dwelling in the past or the imagined future) we can become happy and free. This is called Nirvana.

The fourth truth is that the Noble 8-fold Path leads to the end of suffering. The 8-fold Path is: (1) being moral (through what we say, do and our livelihood), (2) focusing the mind on being fully aware of our thoughts and actions, and (3) developing wisdom by understanding the Four Noble Truths and by developing compassion for others.

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Beliefs of Buddhism, and Our Response

What are the Five Precepts of Buddhism? The 5 Precepts are their moral code: (1) not to take the life of anything living, (2) not to take anything not freely given, (3) to abstain from sexual misconduct and sensual overindulgence, (4) to refrain from untrue speech, and (5) to avoid intoxication, that is, losing mindfulness.

What is Karma? Karma is the belief that every cause has an effect – even beyond this life. Buddhists believe this simple law explains inequality in the world, why some are born handicapped and some gifted, why some live only a brief life, etc.

What is the "middle path?" Buddhism teaches that wisdom should be developed with compassion. At one extreme, you might be a goodhearted fool and at the other extreme, you might attain knowledge but without any emotion. Buddhism seeks the "middle path" to develop both. Buddhists strive to live lives of compassion, practicing generosity and a readiness to give comfort, sympathy and care.

What are the main differences between Christianity and Buddhism?

1. Christianity offers a personal, intimate relationship with the God who created the whole universe. Buddhism seeks enlightenment leading to nothingness.
2. Christianity offers salvation from sin and death – and eternal life in God's very presence – through the atoning life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Buddhism offers Nirvana, an eternal end of consciousness.
3. Christianity offers the Holy Spirit, God living in us, giving us victory over sin and freedom from its vices. Buddhism offers escape from the world's vices through willful abstention.

How is Christ viewed by Buddhists? Many Buddhists have not heard of Jesus Christ. Those who know of Jesus consider Him to be a great teacher, but they don't recognize Him as God who came to save us from our sins and give eternal life to those who believe and ask for forgiveness.

How are Christians viewed by Buddhists? Christians are viewed passively by Buddhists. Because they value compassion and morality they have respect for believers who exhibit acts of mercy and holy lives. But they don't agree with believers that Jesus Christ is the only way to peace with God.

What should believers do when sharing our faith with Buddhists?

1. We must always exercise full respect for them in every way. Buddhists place a high value on civility and decency; if we want to gain their hearing we must sincerely manifest these qualities.
2. We should seek to understand the teachings of Buddha in order to dialogue intelligently with Buddhists about matters of faith.
3. It is helpful to quote passages from the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament.
4. Create bridges of understanding with Buddhists by using aspects of the Eight Fold Path (right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration). Show fulfillment of all these in and through Jesus Christ.
5. Learn the difference between folk Buddhism (also referred to as New Buddhism) and pure Buddhism. Interact and dialogue accordingly.

What not to do when sharing the Gospel with Buddhists:

1. Don't belittle his lifestyle or faith.
2. Don't expect a simple, organized explanation of Buddhist beliefs.
3. Don't ever show an aggressive or judgmental spirit.
4. Don't be argumentative or compare religions. Instead, show Christ and His character in all you say and do.
5. Don't give quick, packaged presentations of the Gospel. Build long-term relationships.

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Neo-Buddhism

What is Neo-Buddhism, and how is it related to Buddhism?

1. "Neo" means "new-and-different." Neo-Buddhism, therefore, refers to a new, revised version of Buddhism that is similar to the old but is somewhat different.
2. Neo-Buddhism in India is different from Buddhism elsewhere in the world mostly because of its strong political and social-activist emphases.
3. Neo-Buddhists revere the Buddha as a political and social reformer, rather than merely as a spiritual leader. They point out that the Buddha required his monastic followers to ignore caste distinctions.
4. While Buddhism emphasizes right living, Neo-Buddhism's emphasis in India has been on political and social rights for the under-privileged.

How did Neo-Buddhism become so popular in India?

1. At the beginning of the 20th century, Buddhism was all but dead in India, the land of its origin. Certain tribal groups continued to follow Buddhism, but these groups were on the margins of Indian society.
2. In 1956, B. R. Ambedkar publicly converted to Buddhism at a large mass meeting of Dalits in Nagpur. A Dalit himself, he chose to become a Buddhist in order to free himself and his Dalit followers from the oppression of the Hindu caste system.
3. After he was initiated as a Buddhist by a monk, he in turn administered the ceremony to the 380,000 (some sources say as many as 600,000) of his followers that were present. Ambedkar would die less than two months later.

Neo-Buddhists in India today:

1. The Neo-Buddhist movement slowed somewhat when Ambedkar died so shortly after his conversion. It did not receive the immediate mass support from the Untouchable population that Ambedkar had hoped for. Division and lack of direction among the leaders of the movement have been an additional impediment.
2. However, Neo-Buddhism (also often referred to as New-Buddhism and as Dalit Buddhism) has continued to gain members, mostly among Dalits. According to the 2001 census, there were 7.95 million Buddhists in India, at least 5.83 million of whom were in Maharashtra.
3. In 2001 a prominent Neo-Buddhist leader named Udit Raj (formerly Ram Raj) tried to organize a large mass conversion of Dalits to Buddhism, but the event met with active opposition from the government. Other mass conversions from Hinduism to Buddhism have been attempted; these campaigns often seem to be as much or more political than spiritual.
4. Neo-Buddhists remain concentrated in two provinces: Ambedkar's native Maharashtra and in Uttar Pradesh.
5. Buddhism is the fifth-largest religion in India, with 6% of the population of Maharashtra, but with less than 1% of the overall population of India. (Neo-Buddhist leaders, however, claim that these numbers are inaccurate because of irregularities in the census and because many private Buddhists refrain from publicly converted for fear of sanctions. These leaders argue that the actual numbers are considerably higher.)

Believers' Response to Neo-Buddhism:

1. Indians are by nature highly religious, but most Indian Neo-Buddhists have never recognized that Neo-Buddhism is in fact not truly a religion. To compensate for the fact that Buddhism recognizes and/or worships no god, many Indian Neo-Buddhists also worship Hindu gods and/or goddesses.
2. Believers can identify with the social agendas of Dalits without becoming Neo-Buddhists. In fact, believers should be among those who contend on behalf of the underprivileged and down-trodden. (Matthew 25:31-46, 1 John 3:17-18)

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Believers' Response to Buddhism

Buddha said, *"What you are is what you have been. What you'll be is what you do now."*
The Bible says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

In developing a strategy for reaching Buddhists, it is imperative that the one doing the evangelizing approach his task with three principles in mind. First, he must assume the responsibility for building bridges to his hearers. Second, he must be prepared to modify his strategy in accordance with differences between the various schools of Buddhism. Third, in all his efforts, his ultimate dependence must be on the Holy Spirit.

A ministry called "Let the Earth Hear His Voice" has made the following recommendations regarding ministry to Buddhists:

1. In presenting Christianity, the person of Jesus Christ from the Gospels must be the main message. Gospel stories about Jesus, His life, attitudes, His love and His relationships with people are attractive to Buddhists. But in so doing, don't compare Jesus with Buddha for this provokes an unnecessary defensive reaction in the typical Buddhist.
2. Good literature and translations are needed for approaching Buddhists. Too often in the past, translations have been inadequate, sometimes to the point of being a hindrance. Attractive tracts on the person of Jesus Christ are desperately needed. Bibles need to be made more available to Buddhists. Many young Buddhists are willing to read about Jesus and have even requested Christian correspondence courses. We need to capitalize on this hunger while there is opportunity.
3. We must experiment more with indigenous forms of worship that Buddhists will easily relate to. Western forms of worship have been a hindrance.
4. We must maintain social connections with Buddhists, developing healthy friendships with them, and living our Christian faith before them. If it's necessary to abstain from a social/pagan ritual or activity for faith reasons, it must be done with the least amount of offense and it must be substituted by other means of proving greater love and loyalty.
5. Focus outreach on whole families as units rather than on individuals. Social and family ties are so strong that often an individual will revert back to Buddhism unless others in his family become believers along with him. When working with Buddhist children, make efforts to minister to the parents and the whole families of the children. Avoid leading children to the Lord without involving their parents. If the head of the house gives his heart to Jesus the whole household can be welcomed into the church.

Finally, recognize that the real barrier to Christianity for Buddhists has been a cultural, social issue. But as national churches become stronger bigger, new expressions will be discovered for former Buddhists to live out their new-found faith.

And as more Buddhists become believers, the culture itself in those countries will begin to become affected by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

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Origins, Status and Beliefs of Jainism

Introduction: Jainism is one of the world's oldest religious traditions. Originating in India, Jainism shares many similarities with Hinduism and Buddhism. With fewer than 5 million adherents and comprising less than 1% of the Indian population, Jainism has demonstrated a remarkable tenacity nonetheless and exerts an influence far beyond its small numbers.

Founder: Jainism's name derives from a Sanskrit word meaning "follower of the Jina, or Conqueror." It was established by Mahavira ("the Great Hero") in the sixth century B.C. Mahavira established a monastic community of both nuns and monks. He is considered by Jains to be only the most recent in a list of 24 such teachers who brought Jainism into the world. These teachers, or "Tirthankaras," taught a path to religious awakening based on renouncing the world by practice of strict religious austerity.

Main Tenets:

1. Jains reject belief in a creator god and seek release from endless reincarnation through a life of strict self-denial. The title of Jina is given to those who are believed to have triumphed over all material existence. As all human activity accumulates "karma," the force that perpetuates reincarnation, the only way to free one's jiva, or soul, from the bondage of material existence is by reducing this activity through ascetic practice.
2. Jains believe that every creature (even insects) has a soul. This is why they practice "ahimsa" ("non-injury") to all living beings. The concern for life is extended to all creatures, even minute invisible microbes. The Jain ideal is a mendicant ascetic who takes extreme measures to avoid injuring all creatures. Monks and nuns are sometimes seen with muslin cloths over their mouths to keep out flying insects, and they are enjoined to use small brooms to gently sweep away living creatures from their path, so as to not accidentally crush them.
3. They believe that every soul (every living being) can potentially become divine through knowledge, harmony and power. Therefore, every being should be treated with equal respect.
4. They believe in karma as a "life force" that can be earned or lost.
5. They believe that each entity—or soul—is born either human, sub-human, hellish, or celestial, as far as karma is concerned.
6. Each being is the creator of his or her life, in this life or hereafter.

Main Sacred Text: The sacred texts of the Jains are called "Agamas." The two main branches of Jainism share many of the same sacred texts in common, but since their split in the fifth century A.D., they have developed different traditions of textual transmission. Both branches claim that authority for the most ancient texts derives from Mahavira. Handed down orally in the monastic communities from generation to generation, the sacred literature was not written down until about 500 A.D.

Two traditions: There are several differences between the two traditions of Jainism, the "Shvetambaras" ("white-clad monastics") and the "Digambaras" ("sky-clad monastics"). Shvetambaras believe that monks and nuns should be permitted to wear a simple white robe. Digambaras require monks to be nude.

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Believers' Response to Jainism

Christians can agree with Jains in their belief that every living being should be treated with respect. We don't take this idea as far as the Jains do, for we don't believe that animals and insects have souls. Only Adam (and through him, all mankind) was created in God's likeness (with a soul—Gen. 1:26), and only into Adam (and thereby, into all mankind) did God breath His breath. (Gen. 2:7)

1. Nevertheless, God created this world and He instructed us to take care of it. (Genesis 1:26-30, 2:15)
2. This world was created by God. It belongs to Him and exists for His pleasure and glory. (Psalm 24; Colossians 1:16)
3. Following the great flood, God established His covenant with Noah and his descendents "and with every living creature that was with him—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with him—every living creature on earth" (Gen. 9:9-10). This doesn't mean that God put souls in the animals but it does show us the importance God places on His creation. We, likewise, ought to value the earth and all that is in it.

Does God practice karma?

1. Some might say that karma is part of Christianity because of Galatians 6:7, which says "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap*."
2. Even though the Scriptures teach us that we will reap what we sow, we must remember that Galatians 6:7 is talking about this lifetime, not the afterlife.
3. Karma and the biblical idea of reaping what you sow are not the same. The Bible teaches that we will die once and then be judged. Hebrews 9:27 says *"And inasmuch as it is appointed for me to die once and after this comes judgment."*

What about the Jains' belief (as with the Buddhists, Hindus and others) in reincarnation? What does the Bible say about reincarnation?

1. The whole thrust of the Bible opposes reincarnation. Instead, it declares that man is the special creation of God, created in God's image with both a material (physical) body and an immaterial soul.
2. Man is presented in the Bible as distinct and unique from all other creatures—different from the spirit-world being and from the animal kingdom alike.
3. The Bible teaches that at death, while man's body is mortal, decays and returns to dust, his soul continue on either in a place of torments for those who reject Christ or in paradise (heaven) in God's presence for those who have trusted in the Savior. Both categories of people will be resurrected, one to eternal judgment and the other to eternal life with a glorified body (John 5:25-29).

How can Jains be reached with the good news of Jesus' love and salvation?

1. Jains share many similarities with Buddhists, both in their beliefs and in the fact that relatively few have come to Christ out of these two systems.
2. The same principles that apply to reaching Buddhists (listed in Lesson 9) apply to reaching Jains.

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Origins, Status and Beliefs of Sikhism

Sikhism is one of the world's youngest religions, founded just over 500 years ago.

1. There are approximately 20 million Sikhs worldwide, making it the worlds 5th largest religion. Most Sikhs live in the Punjab province of India.
2. Sikhism was founded by a man known as Guru Nanak, a Punjabi. Sikhs follow his teachings and those of the nine Sikh gurus who followed him.
3. Guru Nanak lived in a time of much hostility between Hindus and Muslims. His most famous saying was, "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim, so whose path shall I follow? I shall follow the path of God."
4. The tenth guru declared that after him there would be no further human gurus, but that their holy book, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, would be their source of teaching, a "living guru."

What do Sikhs believe?

1. Sikhs believe there is only one God and that He is without form or gender.
2. Sikhs believe that everyone has access to God and that everyone is equal before God.
3. A good life is lived as part of a community, by living honestly and caring for others.
4. Sikhism stresses the importance of doing good actions rather than merely carrying out rituals. Empty rituals, they believe, are worthless.
5. Sikhs believe that the way to lead a good life is to:
   a. keep God in heart and mind at all times
   b. live honestly and work hard
   c. treat everyone equally
   d. be generous to the less fortunate
   e. serve others
6. Like Hindus and Buddhists, Sikhs believe in reincarnation and in karma. They believe that your lot in life is determined by how you lived in your previous life.
7. The only way out of life's cycle of birth and death, according to Sikhs, is to achieve a total knowledge of and union with God. Sikh spirituality is centred round this need to understand and experience God, and eventually become one with God.
8. To do this a person must switch the focus of their attention from themselves to God. They believe this state, which is called *mukti* (liberation), is attained through the grace of God. That means it's something God does to human beings, and not something that human beings can earn. However, God shows people through holy books, and by the examples of saints, the best ways to get close to him.

Sikhs strive to live a good life in this world.

1. A Sikh serves God by serving (*seva*) other people every day. They strive to rid themselves of impure ego and pride by devoting their lives to service. Sikhs think it doesn't please God when people simply devote themselves slavishly to religion but pay no attention to others.
2. Many Sikhs carry out chores in the Gurdwara as their service to the community. These range from working in the kitchen to cleaning the floor. The Langar, or free food kitchen, is a community act of service.
3. Sikhs also regard caring for the poor or sick as an important duty of service.

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Believers' Response to Sikhism

The three duties of Sikhs: Pray, Work, Give

1. Pray (Nam japna): Keeping God in mind at all times.
2. Work (Kirt Karna): Earning an honest living. Since God is truth, a Sikh seeks to live honestly. This doesn't just mean avoiding crime; Sikhs avoid gambling, begging, or working in the alcohol or tobacco industries.
3. Give (Vand Chhakna) (Literally, sharing one's earnings with others): Giving to charity and caring for others.

The five vices, according to Sikhs: Sikhs try to avoid the five vices that make people self-centered and build barriers against God in their lives:

1. Lust,
2. Covetousness / greed,
3. Attachment to things of this world,
4. Anger, and
5. Pride.

According to Sikhs, the person who overcome s these vices will be on the road to liberation.

How to reach Sikhs with God's love and salvation:

1. Just as with all others who put their faith in false gods, Sikhs have been fooled by Satan, the master of all lies, and live in bondage to him.
2. It is spiritual warfare to reach Sikhs with the love and salvation of God. As with all spiritual warfare, we must put on the full armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-18):
   a. The Belt of truth buckled around your waist. Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6) and we, His children, must always speak and act with complete truthfulness. This is so central to the children of God that it is like the belt that we wear around our waist.
   b. The Breastplate of righteousness. Being righteous means that we do what is right—in God's sight and in the sight of men—without fail. When God's children live righteously it is as if they have a breastplate of armour protecting them and the enemy's darts and attacks cannot penetrate them.
   c. Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. God's children must live lives of peace, so that no relational obstacles will obstruct them from being ready to go and share God's love and salvation with others.
   d. A Shield of faith. Faith is the recognition—both in our intellect and in our hearts (both intellectually and emotionally)—that God is in total control of every situation, no matter how discouraging or hopeless it might seem, and that He can bring victory and glory to Himself in it.
   e. A Helmet of salvation. Unless we have been saved by God's grace we will be totally vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy.
   f. The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Note that the sword is the first offensive weapon mentioned; all the above armour is defensive—for protection. The Word of God—the Bible—is the one piece of armour that is used for striking out, for winning spiritual victories. God's children must learn His Word so that they can use it like a sword to convict others of sin and to convince them of God's love.
   g. Finally, *"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."* Prayer is the fuel that unleashes God's power to work supernaturally in our lives, particularly in matters of the spiritual realm. Pray for physical healings! Pray for delivery from evil spirits—and from other tools of bondage: tobacco, alcoholism, drugs, gambling, pornography, etc!

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The Church of J.C. of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons)

Introduction: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), better known as the Mormons, is a cult that came out of Christianity. Mormons call themselves Christians but their beliefs differ from true Christianity in numerous important ways.

Mormonism was founded in the United States by Joseph Smith in the nineteenth century. Smith claimed an angel led him to a hill where he said he dug up a pair of golden plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon. (Of course, no one has ever seen these plates that Smith claims to have been given.)

What do Mormons believe?

1. Mormons believe the Bible to be the word of God, but not the whole word of God. They believe God did not stop speaking with the Bible and that he also spoke to Joseph Smith, giving him the Book of Mormon.
2. Mormons believe that a tribe of ancient Israelites came to America 600 years before Christ. After Jesus' resurrection, according to the Book of Mormon, he visited America. Mormons believe that when Jesus returns to Earth, he will first go to Jerusalem and then to America.
3. Mormonism teaches that God the Father has a body of flesh and bones.
4. While Mormonism teaches that Jesus is God in flesh, it teaches that he is "a" god in flesh, one of three gods that comprise the office of the Trinity. These three gods are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
5. Mormonism teaches that God is only one of countless gods, that he used to be a man on another planet, that he became a god by following the laws of that god on that world, and that he brought one of his wives to this world with whom he produces spirit children who then inhabit human bodies at birth. According to Mormons, Jesus was the first spirit child.
6. Mormonism teaches that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross itself (and receiving it by faith) is not sufficient to bring forgiveness of sins. It teaches that the forgiveness of sins is obtained though a cooperative effort with God; that is, we must be good and follow the laws and ordinances of the Mormon Church in order to obtain forgiveness. In other words, we must earn our salvation.
7. Mormons believe you can pray for the salvation of their ancestors. They therefore are deeply involved in genealogy studies.

Characteristics of Mormons:

1. Mormons are decent and friendly. They don't use alcohol, tobacco or other addictive products. They don't even drink tea, coffee or Coca-cola, or any other products that have caffeine, which is an addictive drug.
2. Mormons have a strong sense of community. Some are attracted to the Mormon Church because of the strong sense of belonging.
3. Mormons are to give two years of their life to missionary service. It is not uncommon to see Mormon missionaries going about two-by-two, offering their literature and seeking proselytes.
4. Mormons originally practiced polygamy and were racist toward non-Caucasians, but in recent decades they have officially reversed these two characteristics. Nevertheless, many Mormons still practice polygamy and remain racist.

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Reaching Mormons with God's Love

The following suggestions are from a web site (www.mission2mormons.org) of a ministry that strives to reach Mormons with the truth of the Gospel.

Pray - Do you want to make an eternal impact on your LDS friend, family member or missionary at the door? Then you will want to be faithful in prayer. Reaching Mormons for Christ is a spiritual battle. When you see a Mormon, pray for them. Put Mormons on your daily prayer list. Pray before and after having a meeting with LDS missionaries. Most do not join the LDS Church because of extensive religious study, but because of feelings and spiritual experiences. When Christians try to witness to Mormons with intellectual arguments alone, results are rare. What Mormons need is a miracle that removes the veil that is over the mind, opening their eyes and ears to the Holy Spirit.

Check your attitude – It is very important to have the right attitude and motive for engaging with Latter-day Saints. We should guard against getting impatient or angry at their responses. Some Mormons already know that the LDS Church has problems, but they may not be aware of a better faith! Sometimes, even while passionately defending their religion, they are secretly hoping that we have something better to offer them! Your humility and loving attitude are more important than what you actually say to them. Without love we are like a crashing cymbal that profits nothing. (I Corinthians 13:1-13) We are called to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15) We are commanded to speak out but to do it in a loving manner.

Win people, not arguments – If we go into a discussion determined to win an argument, we will probably find ourselves "locking horns" with an equally determined person. In humility admit when you don't know something, and tell them you will get an answer for them. Get back to them with an answer as quickly as possible. Remember to actively listen. Repeat their statements back to them to clarify with language such as, "do I correctly understand you to be saying that you believe…?" Good communications skills go a long way in winning people.

Know their pet arguments – A lack of knowledge of Mormonism often makes evangelical Christians insecure when witnessing to their Mormon friends & family members. Take the time to learn the basic teachings and arguments used in Mormonism. If you do not understand the fundamentals you will limit your effectiveness as a "fisher of men" among them.

Acknowledge the good – For your Mormon friend, the LDS Church represents God's Kingdom on earth. For them, the Salt Lake City-based LDS organization is the epitome of virtue and holiness. Unless we acknowledge some good in Mormonism, our friends may have an even harder time listening to what we have to share. As Christians we can commend the Latter-day Saints for having zeal for the things of God (even though it is very miss-guided) and for their strong emphasis on family & moral values. If we do not acknowledge some of these positives, we risk being seen as someone out of touch with the faith that they know and love.

Ask questions – We should not argue with Mormons (II Timothy 2:23-26). Instead of telling LDS people what they believe, begin conversations by asking questions. Mormons will appreciate the opportunity to tell you about their faith. You can ask simple things like: "What does Jesus mean to you?" or "Have you been saved by grace?" "Have you been born again? … When and how did that happen?" or "Do you believe you are a good person?" This will open up discussions in a non-threatening manner, and enable you to learn more about the person. (Are they "dyed in the wool" Mormons, or perhaps new converts that have yet to learn the Mormon doctrines?) By knowing the basic teachings of Mormon leaders, you can ask them why they follow men who teach opposing doctrines (if they expressed a Biblical view). If their beliefs contradict the Bible, ask them to consider what Scripture (the original revelation found in the Bible) has to say on that issue. Be a "curious person" and you will be planting many Gospel seeds along the way!

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Jehovah's Witnesses

Introduction: Jehovah's Witnesses, like the Mormons, are members of a cult that came out of Christianity in the United States in the 19th century.

1. There are about seven million Witnesses in the world.
2. The denomination was founded by Charles Taze Russell. The headquarters of the movement is in New York. Members of the movement are probably best known for their door-to-door evangelical work; witnessing from house to house, offering their literature and recruiting and converting people.
3. Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) believe that the traditional Christian Church deviated from the true teachings of the Bible, and do not work in full harmony with God.
4. JWs reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which it regards as both irrational and unbiblical.

Beliefs:

1. Jehovah's Witnesses base their beliefs only on the Bible and ignore what they call "mere human speculations or religious creeds." They believe that the Bible is the Word of God but they translate certain passages incorrectly.
2. Like Christians, JW members reject the sinful values of the secular world and maintain a degree of separation from non-believers; they are "in the world" but not "of the world".
3. JWs do not celebrate Christmas or Easter because they believe that these festivals are based on (or massively contaminated by) pagan customs and religions. They point out that Jesus did not ask his followers to mark his birthday.
4. They deny the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and His physical resurrection
5. JWs teach that Jesus returned to earth invisibly in 1914 and is now reigning in heaven. They believe that when Jesus finally returns physically to earth, which will happen at the time of the Battle of Armageddon, He will set up his earthly 1,000 year kingdom.
6. JWs believe that during this 1,000 year period, people will be resurrected and have a second chance to receive eternal salvation by following the principles of Jehovah's Organization on earth known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. After the millennium, those who reject God and His organization will be annihilated; that is, they will cease to exist. (JWs don't believe in an eternal hell.) The rest of the JWs who have faithfully followed God's organization on earth will be saved from eternal annihilation and reside forever on Paradise earth. Heaven, however, is a place for a special group of 1,44,000 JWs -- the only ones who are "born again" and who alone are allowed to take communion in their annual communion service. These are the ones who have "immortal life," all other JWs will have "everlasting life."
7. Those who study with the JWs agree to attend five meetings each week where they are taught from Watchtower literature. They may not be baptized until they have studied for at least six months and have answered numerous questions before a panel of elders.
8. JWs refuse to vote, salute the national flag, or celebrate birthdays.
9. They won't take blood transfusions, and they can't join the nation's armed forces.
10. A schedule of door-to-door canvassing is required of JWs in which they distribute the Watchtower literature and acquire donations.

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Reaching Jehovah Witnesses with God's Love

The following is gleaned from two web sites: www.4witness.org and www.christiananswers.net.

When JWs come to your door offering *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines, be aware that their only goal is to get you interested enough in their religion to consider becoming one of them. They are not visiting you to consider your spiritual beliefs as viable options for their lives. No! They believe they already possess "the Truth" and that you have nothing to offer them.

How can a Christian get through to a Jehovah's Witness who believes he or she already has all the answers? The key lies in following steps:

Step One – Share what you have to offer: We have a hope that JWs don't have! As the following illustrates, there are several spiritual benefits that true followers of Jesus can offer JWs that are in blatant contrast to what they have in the Watchtower religion:

WHAT CHRISTIANS POSSESS	WHAT JWS POSSESS
Spiritual Adoption: All Christians are "adopted" out of Satan's family into God's family, are born-again spiritually, have Jesus as their "Mediator" and receive all New Covenant privileges (Romans 8:7-9; 14-17; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6).	**Spiritual Adoption Denied**: Most JWs are told they cannot receive spiritual "adoption," be born-again, have Jesus as their Mediator, nor participate in New Covenant privileges because they are not part of a special group of 144,000 people.
Assurance of Salvation: Eternal life is Secure in Christ (1 John 5:11-13)	**No Assurance:** Constant Striving to comply with requirements with no guarantee.
Peace and Joy: A sense of God's approval, no condemnation in Christ (Rom 8:1; 8:34).	**Fear and Guilt:** Feelings of unworthiness, leaders examine and criticize followers.
Unconditional Love: No fear of rejection (John 10:28-29). Acceptance for who you are in Christ, not for what you do.	**Conditional Love:** Love is shown in direct proportion to performance within the organization.

Step Two – Point them to Jesus (who is more than an angel):
Since the Watchtower Society speaks of "Jesus Christ, whom we understand from the Scriptures to be Michael the archangel" (*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1979, p. 31), put the JW on the spot and ask him to show you "the Scriptures" that say Jesus is Michael. There are none. The Watchtower Society New World Translation (NWT) mentions Michael five times as:

1. "one of the foremost princes" (Dan. 10:13);
2. "the prince of [Daniel's] people" (Dan. 10:21);
3. "the great prince who is standing in behalf of the sons of [Daniel's] people" (Dan. 12:1);
4. "the archangel" who "had a difference with the devil and was disputing about Moses body" but "did not dare to bring a judgment against him in abusive terms" (Jude 9); and
5. a participant in heavenly conflict when "Michael and his angels battled with the dragon" (Rev. 12:7).

Ask the Jehovah's Witness which one of these verses says that Michael is Jesus Christ. Help him to see that it is necessary to read Scripture plus a complicated Watchtower argument to reach that conclusion. Rather than being merely "one of the foremost princes," Jesus Christ is "Lord of lords and King of kings" (Rev. 17:14, NWT) and is "far above every government and authority and power and lordship and every name named, not only in this system of things, but also in that to come" (Ephesians 1:21, NWT). And, unlike "Michael who did not dare condemn the Devil with insulting words, but said, The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 9, Today's English Version), Jesus Christ displayed His authority over the devil when He freely commanded him, "Go away, Satan!" (Matthew 4:10, NWT).

Step Three – Love them to Jesus: Winning a JW to Christ takes time. Study the Scriptures together; help him to see that the Holy Spirit lives in you and that you have God's love and mercy in you.

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Islam - Introduction

INTRODUCTION: The Muslim population is the largest unreached people in the world, with approximately one billion members. Their resistance to the Gospel has been strong. This course examines their origins, their beliefs, their practices, the Koran and how to reach them with Christ's salvation. It also challenges us to reach out to Muslims with the love and salvation of Jesus Christ.

The Muslim's Culture

1. Islam means "voluntary submission to God." Muslims believe that all God's creation must submit to His will.
2. Most Muslims live in the "10-40 Window," from North Africa extending east across Asia.
3. Muslims are the majority in 43 states and territories. They make up more than 10% of the population in 31 other countries, with smaller communities in 49 other countries.
4. They are generally very community-oriented.

Their religion: All Muslims do not practice their religion in the same way. Following are some general labels for different types of Muslim.

1. **Orthodox**: They take the Koran literally and follow its traditions.
2. **Conservative**: They follow orthodox Islam, but adapt it to their life.
3. **Mystical**: They emphasize the supernatural and seek a relationship with God.
4. **Liberal**: They keep certain Islamic beliefs, but are also quite secular.
5. **Syncretist**: They mix Muslim elements with local superstitions and religions.
6. **Secular**: These are Muslims culturally, but they do not really practice the religion.

We must be attentive to the different types of Muslims and to their various forms of faith, in order to communicate accordingly with them.

There are three major Muslim groups:

1. **Shiites** reject the first three caliphs and insist that the son-in-law of Mohammed, Ali, was his rightful successor and not Abu Bakr.
2. **Sunnis**, the most numerous of the groups, consider the first four caliphs from Abu Bakr and on as the authentic successors of Mohammed.
3. **Soufis** are philosophic mystics who have adapted and reinterpreted Islam for their own interests.

Islamic books – Muslims believe that there are 1,24,000 sacred books, but that only four sacred books have survived, given to the prophets by Gabriel. The four books are:

1. The Torah - The Pentateuque given to Moses.
2. The Zabur - The Psalms given to David.
3. The Injil - The four Gospels given to Jesus.
4. The Koran – Considered the complete and final revelation, given to Mohammed.

Muslim believe that Jews and Christians twisted the meaning of the biblical books (the Torah, the Zabur and the Injil).

The Koran

1. "Qur'an" means "oral recitation." It is considered by Muslims to be the very words of God, transmitted by the Archangel Gabriel (Jibrail) to Mohammed, containing the final message of God.
2. The Koran is considered the most sacred book by Muslims.
   a. Mohammed claimed to receive the messages from 610 to 632.
   b. While Mohammed was alive, the Koran was partially written on sheets of camel skin, in an archaic alphabet which allowed for a variety of different readings.

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Mohammed, Founder of Islam

Mohammed was born June 8, 570 AD, at Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, of the family of Hâshim, from the tribe of Quraysh. The Hâshim family—and therefore Mohammed as well—traced their lineage back to Abraham.

An orphan at six years of age, he was adopted by his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib and was raised by his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, a caravan businessman.

At a young age, he was made to be a shepherd.

Khadija, a rich widow, hired him to manage her caravans. Through his association with her he became an eminent member of the Business Corporation of Mecca and was known by the name, "Al Amin," meaning "he who is worthy of trust."

At the age of 25, he married Khadija, and from that marriage six children were born. Three of the children died at early ages.

After Khadija's death, Mohammed adopted the practice of polygamy and had 14 wives.

At the age of 40, he was very concerned by the fate of his fellow citizens, and he spent most of his time in religious meditation.

He became a hermit and lived in a mountain cave near Mecca, where he reportedly received his first revelation in 610. According to tradition, he saw the archangel Gabriel (Jibrail, in Arabic) who communicated God's words to him, that which became the basis of Islam.

In 613, the revelations came again, and he told his closest friends of their contents: the religion began with this first converts to Islam.

When the group of members began to grow, Mohammed began to criticize the religions commonly accepted in Mecca, especially the polytheistic religion of those who worshiped the Kaaba. (Kaaba is the name of both the Muslim cubical mosque in Mecca and of the black stone inside. Muslims believe that Abraham built the original Kaaba. Some believe that the black stone is a meteorite that fell from space.)

The people of Mecca reacted against this criticism, particularly to preserve its economic interest from the pilgrimages made by worshipers to the Kabbah in Mecca.

In 615, the first Muslims were persecuted. Some fled to Ethiopia, to seek protection from the Christian government there, and many of them eventually became Christians themselves.

Mohammed had to flee also and sought refuge at Yathrib (the ancient Arabic name for Medina), an oasis located 350 kms to the northwest of Mecca.

In Medina, he was well received by those who resented Mecca's economic power. As a neutral outsider in Medina, he was able to broker a truce between warring factions there, and soon became a politician, legislator, and military leader.

He guaranteed the wealthy Jews of Medina freedom in order to win their favor, while he introduced his new religion, Islam. Two years later, he broke with the Jews because they would not recognize him as a prophet. It was at this time that he changed his prayer posture from kneeling in the direction of Jerusalem to the direction of Mecca.

He also encouraged all those who had come to believe in him as a prophet to move from Mecca to Medina. Within a year there were an estimated 10,000 Muslims in the Medina area.

As his followers left Mecca, their possessions were plundered by the people of Mecca. Mohammed responded by encouraging Muslims to plunder the trade caravans from Mecca.

In 624, Mohammed led 300 followers in an attack on a caravan from Mecca. The Muslims engaged a force from Mecca sent to defend the caravan and experienced their first great victory over the troops from Mecca. This battle is commemorated each year by ramadhân, the month-long fast observed by Muslims.

Hostilities continued until Mohammed's forces took Mecca in 628. They exiled the Jews from Medina and Mecca.

After a short illness, Mohammed died June 8, 632.

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The Growth of Islam

Introduction: The leaders of Islam believe it is their mission to install Islamic law (Sharia) over the whole world.

The Growth of Islam

1. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, growing faster than Christianity (when Catholics and Orthodox, etc. are included. However, Evangelical Christian groups are growing faster than Islam.)
2. Its rate of growth is 2.94% per year, greater than that of the world's population.
3. In 1900, Muslims made up 12% of the population; today, they make up 20% of it. (Christians make up 33%.)
4. Their growth is due primarily to biological growth (Muslim families tend to have many children), but there is also a lot of growth by conversion in Africa and Indonesia.
5. Muslim growth in America and Europe is almost entirely due to immigration.

Six Powers behind Islamic Growth:

1. Economic power
   a. Muslims have a lot of petroleum money which they use to gain converts.
   b. They are multiplying the number of humanitarian organizations, and they give scholarships to anyone interested in studying the Koran for a year in Saudi Arabia.
2. Political power
   a. Muslims use political power and strive to gain enough political control to eventually establish Sharia.
   b. They offer Islamic studies in every university, in order to influence the future leaders of the country.
3. Media power
   a. Muslims strive to establish a radio station in every country of the world.
   b. They stage scenes showing pastors on television, accusing them of being drug addicts, adulterers, and drunks, to discourage others from following Christianity.
4. Violence
   a. Muslims use violence and war to win countries to Islam.
   b. Muslim nations host and sometimes finance Islamist terrorism.
5. Maternal power –
   a. Muslims have many children. A Muslim may have four wives, so one family can produce twenty or more children.
   b. Muslims from the developing world are flocking to the West in search of jobs, taking Islam with them. With so many Muslim children being born in countries such as England and France, Muslims are quickly gaining influence there.
6. Spiritual power – Never forget that Islam is a religion whose god is Satan, the deceiver.

Islam's Arrival and Growth in India:

1. Arab traders brought their Islamic faith with them to India in the early seventh century, making converts in the Malabar region. The first mosque may have been built as early as 629.
2. In the eighth century, a Muslim army conquered large areas in what is now Pakistan. Over the ensuing centuries, Muslim armies continued moving south into India, eventually establishing the Delhi Sultanate around 1206. They spoke Persian.
3. Mughal conquerors, descendents of Genghis Khan, gained power in the sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century Akbar and others had conquered almost all of present day India.
4. The Muslim rulers gave tax advantages to Muslims, so many Indians converted to Islam for practical and financial gain.
5. By the time the first Protestant missionaries arrived from Europe, Islam was firmly established throughout India, especially in the north.

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The Five Pillars of Islam

Introduction: There are five major requirements for Muslims, the "Five Pillars of Islam A Muslim must practice these five rites to be considered a good Muslim. Although faith is necessary, the Muslim's first concern is that his good deeds outweigh his bad deeds.

The first Pillar: The Shahada (Recitation)

1. Muslims must daily recite an affirmation of what they believe about God.
2. Muslims express their faith in Arabic with the following phrase:
   a. "Lai La Ha Illah Llah, Muhummad Ur-Rusul Allah."
   b. It means, "There is only one God, and Mohammed is God's prophet."

The Second Pillar: Salat (Prayer)

1. There are two aspects to their prayer, (1) Words of praise to God and (2) Requests for personal blessing.
2. The Koran clearly says that they must pray three times a day. But very early in Muslim history, they prayed five times a day: morning, noon, afternoon, sunset, and bedtime.
3. Muslims like to have their prayer rug turned toward Mecca so they can bow down after having knelt on it, touching their forehead to the ground to show submission to God.
4. The place must be clean, and the Muslim must ceremoniously wash (ablution) and take off his shoes. Some Muslims cover their head during the prayer.
5. It has been calculated that on the average, the Muslim's forehead touches the ground 87 times a day to show his submission to Allah.

The Third Pillar: Zakat (Charity)

1. Muslims must give an offering which goes to the poor and for the expansion of Islam in the world. The sum to give depends on each one's situation.
2. Each one must give the tithe of his harvest, 2.5% of his money, and of his possessions.
3. Muslims believe they will receive special rewards if they give to God's work.

The Fourth Pillar: Saum (Fasting) 2:183-185, 187 (Saoum, Siyaum)

1. Muslims believe that God gave the Koran during the period of Ramadan (Ramzan). Because Islam uses a lunar calendar Ramadan comes 11 days earlier each year.
2. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast all day to deprive the body of what it desires and to think more about God and the teachings in the Koran.
   a. From sunrise to sunset, nothing must enter the mouth. Some will not even swallow their saliva.
   b. Muslims visit each other and celebrate in the evening.
   c. They spend the month reciting the Koran to keep themselves from evil.
3. They recite special prayers. They believe that if the Koran is recited during the "night of power," when God supposedly gave the Koran, then God will forgive their sins.
4. Fasting is accompanied by acts of charity.
5. There are exceptions to fasting, but exempted people must fast later, as in the case of very small children, sick people, women who have just had a child, men who do hard work, and travelers.

The Fifth Pillar: The Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca) 2:196-197

1. Long before Mohammed came, Arabs made pilgrimages to the Kaaba in Mecca.
2. Mecca is important to Muslims because it is where Mohammed began to preach.
3. Islam teaches that a Muslim must make this pilgrimage once in his lifetime.
   a. It is not mandatory for those who do not have the means.
   b. The government of Saudi Arabia financially subsidizes those in need.
4. Muslims offer up an animal in sacrifice during the pilgrimage to remind themselves that God gave Abraham a ram to kill instead of his son, Isaac.

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What Muslims Believe about God, Etc.

What Muslims believe about Allah (God):

1. Allah is their name for God. Their understanding of God has many similarities with the God of the Bible, but there are some important differences as well.
2. In their credo, called the "shahada, "Muslims recite: "There is no other God, and Mohammed is his messenger."
   a. There is no God but Allah, "Laill All Ilallah," the supreme being.
   b. It is before him alone that we should bow as a sign of worship and submission.
   c. He alone possesses all powers which man needs.
   d. He has no equal. There is no other like him. He is the creator who maintains creation.
3. The Koran says that Allah is unique, and consequently, man cannot know him.
4. It also says that God is sovereign, and he is responsible for all that happens.
   a. He is responsible for all good and bad on earth (except for the Mu'tazilites).
   b. He is therefore the author of evil ("Sufi"- "God is closer than your jugular vein.")
5. There are contradictions within the Koran and other Muslim traditional writings about the nature and character of Allah (God): An Nissa 4:17, Surat Sad 38:5, Al-Jinn 13-15.)

What Muslims believe about Angels, Satan and Demons:

1. They are Allah's messengers and the guardians of mankind.
2. Gabriel is the head of the angels, the right hand of Allah, and his spokesman.
3. The "jinn" (demons) are made from fire; they are capricious evil-doers.
4. Iblis (Satan) is the head of the demons, and he leads people into error, away from the Muslim road.
5. Demons are spiritual, immortal beings, but they can take on a human form. They are bad angels.

What Muslims believe about the Prophets:

1. Islam declares that all humanity, since the beginning of time, had prophets who announced to people that they must submit to God.
2. They believe God gave prophets to call on people to return to God, including Adam, Noah, Abram, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Job, David, and others from the Old Testament.
3. According to the Koran, Jesus was a prophet, but not greater than Mohammed.
4. Mohammed is believed to be the last and greatest of the prophets.

What Muslims believe about Predestination:

1. Muslims believe strongly that God decides our fate in advance.
2. They believe one must practice the rites of the five pillars of Islam in order to receive God's approval, but that one's destiny ultimately depends on the will of Allah.

What Muslims believe about Life after death:

1. No Muslim is sure of eternal life with God after he dies. He leaves his fate in God's hands
2. Muslims believe that a guardian angel for each individual holds a register of his good and bad works, which will be weighed on resurrection day to decide his or her final destiny.

Questions:

1. How are Muslim beliefs similar to those of the Bible?
2. How are Muslim beliefs different than those in the Bible?
3. Can we use these doctrines do speak about Christian faith? If we can, then how?

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What Muslims Believe about Jesus and the Holy Spirit

The Koran has many names for Jesus:

NAME:	Where Found:
Jesus, son of Mary	Aali Imran 3:45
The Messiah	Aali Imran 3:45
The Word of God	Aali Imran 3:39; An Nisaa 4:171
The Spirit of God	An Nisaa 4:171
A prophet	Aali-Imran 3:39
The closest to God	Aali Imran 3:55
The second Adam	Aali Imran 3:59-60

Some other names: The righteous, The light, The right way, A sign, A witness, The truth.

The Koran reports many Miracles of Jesus: Aali Imran 3:45; Al Maidah 5:109-114

He created, He healed lepers, He healed the blind, He raised the dead, He gave food to the crowd, He made inanimate things alive

What the Koran says about the Teachings of Jesus

The Koran says that Jesus Christ reveals the truth so that men can go to heaven.

It also says Jesus Christ revealed the kingdom of God. 3:50; 4:170; 5:46

The Koran reports Jesus' Birth, Death, Resurrection, judgment

1. His virgin birth Al'Imran 3:37-47; Maryam 19:16-21
2. His death 19:33-34; 3:48,55
3. His resurrection 3:48,55; 4:156-157; 19:33
4. His judgment (Jesus will reign. He will judge. He will reward.)

Problems in what the Koran reports about Jesus, the Son of God

1. The Koran says that God did not engender His Son.
2. Jesus was not added to God as a Son. 4:169

Muslims believe that the Holy Spirit is the Angel Gabriel

1. The Angel Gabriel announced to Mary the news of Jesus' birth. 3:45
2. Muslims attribute the force to announce that news to the Holy Spirit. 2:253

Muslims believe that the Holy Spirit is God and Jesus at work.

1. The Koran tells of the work of the Holy Spirit, but does not say who it is.
2. The Koran says the Holy Spirit gives the force to do the work of God. Albaquaram 2:253
3. The Koran calls Jesus the "Spirit of God." 4:171

Muslims believe that the Holy Spirit is Mohammed.

1. According to the Koran, the Holy Spirit speaks and is different than the angel.Al Maidah 5:110
2. Muslims say that Mohammed is the Counselor about whom Jesus spoke in John 14.
3. Christians and Muslims both teach that Jesus said that someone would come after Him. The Koran says that Jesus was speaking about Mohammed. The Bible says that Jesus was speaking about the Holy Spirit. (Jesus said that a Counselor would remain with his disciples forever. Jesus was not speaking of an earthly counselor.)

Questions

1. What teachings in the Koran support what the Bible teaches with regard to Jesus Christ?
2. What teachings in the Koran contradict what the Bible teaches with regard to Jesus Christ? 61:6
3. What doctrines on the subject of Jesus are difficult for Muslims?

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What Muslims Believe, and our Response

What Muslims think about Christians:

1. Muslims think that Christians are lost. (Surah 61:6) They believe that we commit blasphemy when we say that Jesus is the Son of God. (Surah 19:88-89)
2. They think that Christians lie because we say that Christ died, whereas the Koran denies the death of Christ. (Surah 4:157)
3. They believe that we are deceitful because we are accused of having changed the original Bible, which is justified by the Koran. (Surah 2:79)
4. They consider us as idolaters in their sayings because we worship the Father, Son, and mother (Mary). (Surah 5:116-117)

What should Our Attitude be toward Muslims? Love

1. Jesus said in Matthew 5:43-48: "You have heard it said: Love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I tell you: Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you in order to be true sons of your Father who is in heaven, for he makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, he sends rain on the just and the unjust."
2. Even the Koran recognizes Christians as men who love them. (Surah 5:82):
   "Those who have the closest thing to the active friendship of those who have seen (Muslims) are those who say, 'We are Christians.'"

When we approach Muslims, we must do so with an attitude of Prayer.

1. Presenting the good news of Jesus to Muslims is a spiritual exercise. Our efforts must be covered by a blanket of prayer for God's supernatural work in the heart of the Muslim so that he might see the truth.
2. Prayer is a testimony, and its divine effectiveness can mark the Muslim.

When we approach Muslims, it is helpful to be familiar with the Koran and to use it as a bridge to their understanding.

1. The Koran encourages Muslims to study "the book," which is the Bible.
2. There is truth about Jesus and God in the Koran that can provide a bridge of agreement with a Muslim and create in the Muslim a degree of trust.
3. Certain Koranic surahs, such as *Surah 2:136* and *4:136*, can help to open the spiritual eyes of a Muslim to Jesus.
4. Knowledge of the Koran can help in understanding the differences and similarities between the Bible and the Koran. For example, the Koran emphasizes the importance of belief in one God. *(4:136)* "Oh believers! Be firm in your faith in Allah, and his messenger, in the book which he sent down to his messenger, and in the book which he sent down beforehand."
5. The Koran doesn't present the whole Gospel, but there is limited truth in the Koran that elevates Jesus as more than a mere prophet. For example, *Surah al-Imran 3:42-55* attests to divine attributions of Jesus (Isa) that no Muslim can deny (according to Kevin Greeson). This passage declares that Isa is holy and all powerful, and can show us the way to heaven.

We must bear Christ's Humility in order to better approach Muslims

1. We must recognize that we need God and His Word. John 15:5, 2 Timothy 3:16-17
2. We must follow Paul's example.
   a. Paul said in 1 Cor. 9:20-23, "*to a Jew, I became a Jew to win other Jews, to those who are under the law I became as one under the law. To those who are without the law I became as one who is without the law.*"
   b. Paul accepted to be everything for the cause of the Gospel of Christ, to save some. The truth of the Gospel is simple: God, to save humanity, became flesh in Jesus Christ.

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Sharing Christ's Salvation with Muslims – Part 1

When reaching out to Muslims, be attentive to where the Spirit of God is at work (Eph. 1:18).

1. Keven Greeson, in his book, *The Camel – How Muslims are Coming to Faith in Christ*, suggests that God is at work when a Muslim says something similar to one of the following statements:
   a. "I am ashamed of the way we Muslims have been acting." (See John 16:8-11.)
   b. "I had a dream in which a prophet spoke to me." (See Acts 10:30-33.)
   c. "I want to know what the truth is." (See John 16:13, 17:17.)
   d. "I want to understand what the Bible is saying." (See Matthew 13:10-11.)
   e. "I think that Allah is speaking to me." (See John 10:26-27.)
   f. "I want to know more about Isa." (See John 6:44.)
   g. "What will happen to me when I die?" (See Hebrews 2:15.)
2. When we perceive that the Spirit of God is at work in a Muslim, we should stop whatever we're doing and focus on responding to this open door.

Seek a "Man of Peace" among them who will offer you hospitality and consider your message.

1. In Luke 10:1-20 Jesus taught us, by His example, how we are to approach a group that is generally unreceptive to the Gospel.
2. It isn't wise or biblical to insist on sharing the good news of God's salvation with those who are antagonistic. But look for a "man of peace" (see Luke 10:6), a person whom the Spirit of God has prepared to receive your witness.
3. Focus on the man of peace and his family and not on the community. In time, he (they) will be the best witnesses to the rest of the community.

Use terms and names that are understandable to Muslims.

1. Why should we use our name for Jesus and for God when talking with Muslims? That makes as much sense as if an American missionary would insist on using the English name for Jesus (which is very different from the way His name was pronounced in Jesus' day) in a country where English isn't spoken. (In fact, many people groups don't even have the "J" sound in "Jesus" that is used in English-language countries.)
2. Use their pronunciations for the patriarchs, etc. Abraham to them is Ibrahim. Moses is Musa.
3. Whatever you do, don't impose Western or foreign modes of worship upon him. For example, don't require new Muslim-background believers (MBBs) to sing Christian hymns that came from Europe or America. They will seem alien and unnatural to him.

Use Stories of the Patriarchs (found both in the Bible and Koran) to explain God's Truths to Muslims, such as the following.

1. For example, the story of Adam and Eve can teach about Satan's disobedience and God's total intolerance of sin.
2. The story of God's provision of a ram to Abraham for sacrifice can lead to an explanation of Jesus as the perfect, eternal sacrifice.

We must exercise wisdom until the right time to present Christ to a Muslim.

1. Even Christ was required to wait patiently for the right time. John 2:3-4
2. The conversation with Muslims about the Gospel is also in God's hands. He will help you know when the time has come.

Help Muslims to understand that because God is perfectly righteous, even just one sin can prevent us from entering His presence. The following can help:

1. "Would you accept to drink a glass of water if there was but a drop of poison in it?"
2. "Can you swallow ten peanuts when one of the ten is rotten? If not, why not?"
3. "A good marriage can be destroyed by one act of adultery by one of the partners."

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Sharing Christ's Salvation with Muslims – Part 2 *

Muslims have No Assurance of salvation in the Koran

1. *Surah 3:131-132* "Fear the fire which has been prepared for those who deny the faith. Obey God and his messengers; maybe you will be spared by grace."
2. *Sur. 6:165* "Behold a book which we have sent down; it is blessed. Follow its teachings and be pious. Maybe you will be touched by my grace."
3. We see that in these two verses the Koran uses the expression, "maybe" which interjects doubt as to whether the Muslim will be saved, even if he follows Mohammed's precepts, God, and the Koran. (See also *Sur. 2:183*)
4. This fact gives us an opening to testify about the wonderful assurance of eternal life we have in Christ Jesus.

Muslims hope to gain Salvation by doing good deeds that will outweigh their bad deeds.

1. *Sur. 7:8-9* "The scale will measure out justice on that day. He whose good works tip the scale, he will reap success. He whose works do not come up to weight will have caused their own condemnation." (See also *Sur. 101:6-7*.)
2. These verses do not talk of assurance of salvation because the Muslim does not know how much good or bad he has done nor if his works have pleased God. He believes his deeds must be weighed before he can know if he will be saved or not.

Explain that no one can be saved without the grace of God.

1. Show *Sur. 24:14* "If it were not for the generosity you owe to God as well as His mercy to us in this world and the next, you would be struck by huge torments for the idle conversation which you so readily accept."
2. If the Muslim recognizes that it is by God's grace that we are saved, ask him what the grace of God has prepared for us so that we would be saved. (Be vigilant: so as not to be distracted by answers which the Muslim might offer to avoid the point of your question.) Help him see that God in His infinite grace offers us unmerited salvation, eternal life through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
3. If he does not understand God's grace, show it to him through Christ Jesus.

In all your conversations with Muslims, lift up Jesus. *

1. Jesus said, "… if I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32).
2. Reading *surah al-Imran 3:42-55* with a Muslim provides us with an excellent opportunity to lift up Jesus in the eyes of Muslims, elevating Him from the status of a prophet to much, much more.
3. Offering this kind of spiritual food to a Muslim who is genuinely spiritually hungry will whet his appetite for more truth.

Use leading questions when interacting with a Muslim.

1. When dealing with Muslims you will be far more effective if you ask leading questions and draw the truth out of them rather than preaching the truth to them.
2. Jesus asked leading questions to draw the truth out of others, as when He asked Peter " who do you say that I am" (Matthew 16:15)?
3. While you are seeking a man of peace, as long as you stay within the Koran and ask your questions respectfully Muslims cannot blame or attack you for proselytizing about Isa. However, once you have discovered the man (or person) of peace, you will be able to leave the Koran behind and teach him exclusively from the Bible.

* This and many other thoughts in lessons 25-27 are derived from Kevin Greeson's book, *The Camel – How Muslims are Coming to Faith in Christ.*

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Sharing Christ's Salvation with Muslims – Part 3

When dialoging with Muslims, use passages and ideas that they can easily understand.

1. Bible verses to use: 1 Peter 3:18, John 5:24.
2. Avoid John 3:16 because it says, "Son of God." (Most Muslims believe that this term is saying God fathered a son sexually. Of course Christians don't believe this, but it's better to avoid this title for Jesus until later in your conversations.)
3. Use the Koran: *Surah 19:21* "He said, 'Your Lord has spoken in this manner: that is not easy, but so that we can give a sign to humans and a result of our mercy. And it was done.'" This verse explains that Christ is a sign for humans.
4. Explain that Jesus came into the world to die for us and to draw us to God. This was freely done through the grace and mercy of God.
5. Use *Sur. 3:55-57* "When God said: 'Jesus! I am going to put an end to your earthly life, in order to lift you up to me and to purify you from those who denied. I am going to exalt your followers above those who denied me up to resurrection day. Afterwards, you will return to me, and I will arbitrate between you and your diverging points. Those who will have denied, I will submit them to harsh torture in this world and in the next, and they will have no one to support them. Those who will have believed and done good works, they will also receive their wages. God does not like the unjust.'"
6. *Sur. 3:59* distorts Jesus' role as Savior. "For God, the image of Jesus is like that of Adam. He created him from the earth, and said, 'So be it,' and it came to be."
7. *Sur. 37:102-107* speaks of sacrifice of Abraham's son: "When he was old enough to accompany his father, (Abraham) said: 'Oh my son, I saw in a dream that I was sacrificing you as a burnt offering. What do you think?' (Ismael) said: 'Oh my dear father, do what has been commanded. You will find me, if it pleases Allah, among the faithful.' After the two had submitted to Allah's command, and Ismael was thrown before him, behold, we called to him, 'Abraham! You have obeyed the vision, and we reward those who do well.'"
8. The idea of sacrifice produces in the Muslim an appreciation for the sacrifice of sheep at the Tabaski Feast. Teach him the reasons for which God asked Abraham to make that sacrifice:
   a. To try his faith, that is, to see if Abraham would accept to offer God his son.
   b. To show his love, because in sending him a ram, God showed Abraham that he loved him and his son.
   c. To prepare for the coming of the final sacrifice.

Make an analogy with the death of Christ.

1. Help the Muslim understand that God sent Jesus to become the lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).
2. Just as God allowed—through the lamb—that Abraham's child would recover his life, God also allows us to have eternal life through Jesus Christ.
3. Through Christ's crucifixion, God allows us to have eternal life if we accept his sacrifice. For just as God placed a ram as a substitute for Abraham's son, He allows us to accept Jesus as the eternal, perfect Lamb of God.
4. If Abraham had refused God's provision, who would have died? (His son would have died.) Likewise, if we refuse Jesus who is the Lamb of God, who will die? (We will die if we don not accept His sacrificial Lamb.)

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Muslims are Coming to Christ

*"Look at the nations and watch – **and be utterly amazed**. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told"* Habakkuk 1:5.

The Holy Spirit is doing something in our days that is utterly amazing! Muslims are turning to Christ in places and in numbers that could not have been imagined a few years ago. There are around 200 "Church Planting Movements" around the world today – movements of the Spirit of God within different people groups, bringing massive harvests of souls into God's kingdom. Many of these are among Muslim people groups.

There are absolutely thrilling reports about thousands, and tens of thousands, coming to Christ in the most unlikely places. For example, in his book *Church Planting Movements*, David Garrison writes that from 1991 to 2001 more than 150,000 Muslims came to faith in Christ and nearly four thousand churches were planted in a predominantly Muslim nation of south Asia. For security reasons the book doesn't report where this is, but we can conclude from other sources that he is writing about Indonesia. Praise the Lord!

Reports of dramatic, historic spiritual harvests among Muslims are coming from elsewhere as well. For example:

1. In Bangladesh, there are 1,000 villages where Muslim-background believers (MBBs) say their daily prayers to Isa (the Muslim name for Jesus).
2. In Algeria, it is reported that as many as 50,000 MBB Berbers (the mostly-nomadic original inhabitants of North Africa) have accepted Christianity.
3. In Morocco, a Muslim nation where citizens are legally required to be Muslim, it is estimated that the number of Jesus followers has doubled in the last five years from around 1,500 believers to approximately 3,000.
4. At the time of Iran's 1979 revolution, there were fewer than 500 known Muslim-background believers. Today, conservative estimates put the number over 100,000.
5. Jerry Trousdale, in his book "Miraculous Movements," reports that more than 6,000 new churches have been planted among Muslims in 18 different countries, and that hundreds of former sheikhs and imams, now Christ followers, are boldly leading great movements of Muslims out of Islam.
6. In India thousands of new house-church groups are starting up, many of them in Muslim villages and homes.

There are three leading means by which Muslims are coming to Christ:

1. First, by person-to-person contact; a person who trusts in Jesus tells his Muslim friend the good news of Christ's salvation and leads him to Christ. This process can take many years, but Muslims are becoming more open to the Gospel and more responsive.
2. The second most frequent means by which Muslims are coming to Christ is through dreams of Jesus. Thousands of Muslims around the world are dreaming about Jesus. Some are having more than one dream. Sometimes it takes a year or more before the Muslim who has these dreams finally seeks out a believer to ask about their meaning.
3. The third most frequent means by which Muslims are coming to Christ is through the internet and satellite television programs. Christian ministries are beaming the Gospel across the Middle East and North Africa via multiple television programs.

There are many Muslims who are secret believers.

1. Because of the threat of persecution, there are countless Muslims who have secretly asked Jesus Christ to forgive them of their sins and to come into their hearts. It's impossible to even estimate how many such believers there may be.
2. As the number of these secret believers increases, they occasionally discover each other, providing each other with comfort, encouragement and mutual support.

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Hinduism - Introduction

Wikipedia (on the internet) defines Hinduism as follows: **Hinduism** is the predominant religion of the Indian subcontinent, with 950 million estimated in India, and one billion followers worldwide. Hinduism includes a wide spectrum of laws and prescriptions of "daily morality" based on karma, dharma, and societal norms. Hinduism is a conglomeration of distinct intellectual or philosophical points of view, rather than a rigid common set of beliefs.

Hinduism is formed of diverse traditions and has no single founder. Among its direct roots is the historical Vedic religion of Iron Age India and, as such, Hinduism is often called the "oldest living religion" or the "oldest living major religion" in the world. It is the world's third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam.

The word *Hindu* is derived (through Persian) from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, the historic local appellation for the Indus River in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent, which is first mentioned in the Rig Veda.

Core Beliefs of Hindus - Hinduism is not an organized religion and has no single, systematic approach to teaching its value system. Nor do Hindus have a simple set of rules to follow like the Ten Commandments. Local, regional, caste, and community-driven practices influence the interpretation and practice of beliefs throughout the Hindu world.

Yet a common thread among all these variations is belief in a Supreme Being and adherence to certain concepts such as Truth, dharma, and karma. And belief in the authority of the Vedas (sacred scriptures) serves, to a large extent, as the very definition of a Hindu, even though how the Vedas are interpreted may vary greatly.

Some of the key beliefs shared among Hindus:

1. **Truth is eternal. -** Hindus pursue knowledge and understanding of the Truth: the very essence of the universe and the only Reality. According to the Vedas, Truth is One, but the wise express it in a variety of ways.
2. **Brahman is Truth and Reality. -** Hindus believe in Brahman as the one true God who is formless, limitless, all-inclusive, and eternal. Brahman is not an abstract concept; it is a real entity that encompasses everything (seen and unseen) in the universe.
3. **The Vedas are the ultimate authority. -** The Vedas are Hindu scriptures that contain revelations received by ancient saints and sages. Hindus believe that the Vedas are without beginning and without end; when everything else in the universe is destroyed (at the end of a cycle of time), the Vedas remain.
4. **Everyone should strive to achieve dharma. -** Understanding the concept of dharma helps you understand the Hindu faith. Unfortunately, no single English word adequately covers its meaning. Dharma can be described as right conduct, righteousness, moral law, and duty. Anyone who makes dharma central to one's life strives to do the right thing, according to one's duty and abilities, at all times.
5. **Individual souls are immortal. -** Hindus believe that the individual soul *(atman)* is neither created nor destroyed; it has been, it is, and it will be. Actions of the soul while residing in a body require that it reap the consequences of those actions in the next life — the same soul in a different body.
   a. The movement of the *atman* from one body to another is known as *transmigration.*
   b. The kind of body the soul inhabits next is determined by *karma* (actions accumulated in previous lives).
6. **The goal of the individual soul is moksha.**
   a. *Moksha* is liberation: the soul's release from the cycle of death and rebirth. It occurs when the soul unites with Brahman by realizing its true nature.
   b. Several paths can lead to this realization and unity: the path of duty, the path of knowledge, and the path of devotion (unconditional surrender to God).

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Hindu Gods and Goddesses

Introduction: Hindus acknowledge that, at the most fundamental level, God is the One without a second — the absolute, formless, and only Reality known as Brahman, the Supreme, Universal Soul. Brahman is the universe and everything in it. Brahman has no form and no limits; it is Reality and Truth.

Thus Hinduism is a *pantheistic* religion: It equates God with the universe. Yet Hindu religion is also *polytheistic:* populated with myriad gods and goddesses who personify aspects of the one true God, allowing individuals an infinite number of ways to worship based on family tradition, community and regional practices, and other considerations.

Here are just some of the many Hindu gods and goddesses:

1. **Brahma, the Creator** - is the first member of the Hindu Trinity and is "the Creator" because he periodically creates everything in the universe. (The word *periodically* here refers to the Hindu belief that time is cyclical; everything in the universe—except for Brahman and certain Hindu scriptures—is created, maintained for a certain amount of time, and then destroyed in order to be renewed in ideal form again.)
2. **Vishnu, the Preserver** - is the second member of the Hindu Trinity. He maintains the order and harmony of the universe, which is periodically created by Brahma and periodically destroyed by Shiva to prepare for the next creation.

   Vishnu is worshipped in many forms and in several *avatars* (incarnations). Vishnu is an important, somewhat mysterious god. Less visible than nature gods that preside over elements (such as fire and rain), Vishnu is the *pervader*—the divine essence that pervades the universe. He is usually worshipped in the form of an avatar.
3. **Avatars of Vishnu** - The literal meaning of the word *avatar* is "descent," and it's usually understood to mean divine descent. Avatars are savior forms of a god that descend to earth to intervene whenever help is needed to restore *dharma* (moral order) and peace. Two of Vishnu's ten avatars are Rama and Krishna.
   a. **Rama** - one of the most beloved Hindu gods and the hero of the Hindu epic called the *Ramayana.* He is portrayed as an ideal son, brother, husband, and king and as a strict adherent to dharma. Millions of Hindus derive satisfaction from reading and recalling Rama's trials and tribulations as a young prince who was exiled from his kingdom for 14 years.
   b. **Krishna** - If one Hindu god's name is known and recognized throughout the world, it is Krishna. Hindus identify Krishna as the teacher of the sacred scripture called the *Bhagavad Gita* and as the friend and mentor of prince Arjuna in the epic the *Mahabharata.*

      For his devotees, Krishna is a delight, full of playful pranks. But most of all, Lord Krishna's promise to humanity that he will manifest himself and descend to earth whenever dharma declines has sustained Hindu belief in the Supreme Being over thousands of years.
4. **Shiva, the Destroyer** - is the third member of the Hindu Trinity, tasked with destroying the universe in order to prepare for its renewal at the end of each cycle of time. Shiva's destructive power is *regenerative:* It's the necessary step that makes renewal possible.

   Hindus customarily invoke Shiva before the beginning of any religious or spiritual endeavor; they believe that any bad vibrations in the immediate vicinity of worship are eliminated by the mere utterance of his praise or name.
5. **Ganapati, the Remover of Obstacles** - also known as Ganesha, is Shiva's first son. Lord Ganapati, who has an elephant head, occupies a very special place in the hearts of Hindus because they consider him the Remover of Obstacles. Most Hindu households have a picture or statue of this godhead, and it's not uncommon to see small replicas of Ganapati hanging from rearview mirrors of cars and trucks!

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Hindu Gods and Goddesses, cont. and the Caste System

6. **Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning** - the consort of Brahma and worshipped as the goddess of learning, wisdom, speech, and music. Hindus offer prayer to Saraswati before beginning any intellectual pursuit, and Hindu students are encouraged to offer prayers to her during the school/college term and especially before and during examinations.
7. **Lakshmi** - the goddess of good fortune, wealth, and well-being. As the consort of Vishnu, she plays a role in every incarnation. (She is Sita, wife of Rama; Rukmini, wife of Krishna; and Dharani, wife of Parashu Rama, another avatar of Vishnu.)
8. **Durga Devi** - a powerful, even frightening goddess who fights fiercely in order to restore *dharma* (moral order). Yet, while Durga is terrifying to her adversaries, she is full of compassion and love for her devotees.
9. **Indra,** the King of Heaven and lord of the gods - wields a thunderbolt and is a protector and provider of rain.
10. **Surya, the sun** - (or Soorya) is a golden warrior arriving on a chariot pulled by seven white horses.
11. **Agni, the fire god** - holds a special place in Hindu fire ritual to this day as the *sacrificer* (the priest who performs the ceremony); the *sacrifice* (the ritual fire and the offerings made into it); and the *witness* to all rites.
12. **Hanuman,** the monkey king and devoted servant - featured in the great Hindu epic the *Ramayana.* He earned his path to deification by performing feats of strength, devotion, and courage while helping Rama (an avatar of Vishnu) in countless exciting incidents.

Hinduism and the Caste System

All societies have some sort of social system in which people are classified based on education, culture, and income levels. In ancient India, such a system was inspired by Hindu scriptures and implemented as a way to create a society in which all essential functions were addressed and all people assumed roles based on their lineage. Centuries later, the classification was dubbed the *caste* system. Its concept was based on this division:

1. **Brahmin: The priestly/intellectual class** - The ideal brahmin has qualities of serenity, self-restraint, purity, forgiveness, uprightness, knowledge, realization, and belief in God. The associated "job description" includes:
   a. Serving as a gatekeeper of knowledge of Brahman,
   b. Providing intellectual advice to governing bodies,
   c. Offering priestly services and religious leadership,
   d. Grappling with fundamental questions of life.
2. **Kshatriyas: The warrior class** - The requisite talents for kshatriyas are physical prowess, courage, splendor, firmness, dexterity, stalwartness in battle, generosity, and lordliness. The associated functions include defending the country from external aggression or internal strife, and specializing in the science and tactics of warfare.
3. **Vaishyas: The trade/commerce class** - The vaishyas specialize in trade and commerce. Modern vaishyas are primarily traders and entrepreneurs. No specific qualities are prescribed in the Hindu scriptures for this and the next caste.
4. **Shudras: The agricultural/labor class** - The shudras do manual labor such as tilling the land, working in the fields, and raising cattle and crops. In practice, this caste came to include everyone not belonging to the other three castes, except for the *untouchables:* people performing the most menial labor, such as sweeping streets and tanning leather.

   Note that the creation of a group called *untouchables* was a manmade perversion of the caste concept set forth in Hindu scripture—a perversion fought by modern Indian leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi.

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Christianity and the Caste System

Introduction: What does the Bible say about the caste system? How did Jesus relate to people of different social, cultural and educational levels? What should our response be today to this derivate of Hinduism?

God the Father created all men to be equal. Acts 17:26 says *"From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth;"*

1. Romans 2:11 tells us *"For there is no partiality with God.*"
2. This fact is repeated in Ephesians 6:9 and in Colossians 3:25.
3. Galatians 2:6 tells us that *"God does not judge by external appearance."*
4. The Apostle Peter reflected this truth in Acts 10:34-35 when he said *"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."*

Jesus demonstrated a life of love and respect for all, regardless of their class or race, etc.

1. In Jesus' day those with leprosy were literally untouchable. Jesus showed His love for them by healing them, but He also broke a social taboo by physically reaching out and touching them. (Luke 5:12-13)
2. Another "untouchable" for whom Jesus had compassion was the woman in Luke 8:43-44 with a problem of continuous bleeding. In that day women with such a condition were not allowed to touch others but Jesus received her touch and healed her.
3. Jesus showed compassion for all social outcasts, such as the *"woman who had lived a sinful life."* (It is thought that she had been a prostitute, or at least a promiscuous woman.) (Luke 7:36-39)
4. Jewish men of Jesus' day were both sexist (they considered women to be worth less than men) and racist (they considered those of other races to be inferior). A Jewish man would not have spoken to a Samaritan women yet Jesus conversed with such a woman and offered her living water. (John 4:4-26)
5. Jesus' whole life and attitude of love for and acceptance of all was embodied in his statement to Nicodemus in John 3:16, *"… that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

The Apostle Paul, who had been a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," spoke similarly in Galatians 3:26-28, *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

1. He repeats this value in Romans 10:12 and again in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where it says, *"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."*
2. Paul expands on this teaching in Col. 3:11 and concludes: *"… but Christ is all, and is in all"* (in all His children).
3. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul tells us "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" In Christ, all the old social stigmas and racial biases are done. Those who are in Christ are all equally redeemed and equally loved by God. In Christ there is no further distinction of race, tribe, caste or color.

Conclusion: Dr. S.D. Ponraj, in his book entitled <u>*Understanding Hinduism*</u>, states: "Communication takes place in the context or social relationships, and the castes are strong social relationships which the missionary should use to his advantage. … In the initial stage, the caste system has to be recognized and used as a channel of communication, but in the later stage, when people accept the Christian faith, they need to be taught about Christian brotherhood and the fellowship of God's people without caste differences."

God's children are all to be one (united) in Christ (John 17:23). We are to genuinely love each other without bias with the love of God (Romans 12:9-10). While it is true that man looks at outward appearances, God looks at our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7)! May the Church of Christ reflect this fact! May our ministries reflect this reality in everything we do!

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Hinduism and Divine Authority

Hinduism recognizes many different religious authorities. Different Hindu groups may emphasize different authorities.

1. The highest written authorities in Hinduism are the *Vedas*.
2. Lesser authorities include the epic poems *Ramayana* and *Mahabhrata*. The latter includes the *Bhagavad-gita* (BG, p. 24). These are not considered quite as high in authority as the Vedas, yet in practice they have had greater popular influence.
3. The following claim is made about the *Vedas*: "The Absolute Truth is contained in the *Vedas*, the oldest scriptures in the world. The essence of the *Vedas* is found in the *Bhagavad-gita*, a literal record of Krishna's words."
4. The Brahmanas are authoritative commentaries on the basic Vedas. Upanishads and Aranyakas are more recent writings generally considered authoritative.
5. In addition, the Brahmans (religious teachers) are considered authorities.
6. Hindus do not claim these authorities were all revealed by a direct, deliberate act of God (as the Bible claims to have been). In general Hindus believe God is everywhere in nature, and godly men can perceive the truth revealed within or around them. These scriptures are viewed as truths these godly men have perceived from their own study. The *Bhagavad-gita*, however, does claim to be the very words of Krishna.

The Bible Doctrine of Authority:

1. Men can learn how to please God only by means of Divine revelation.
   a. Isaiah 55:8, 9 - God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours, like the heavens are higher than the earth.
   b. Galatians 1:8, 9 - No teaching except the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring salvation and a right relationship with God.
2. Man cannot find spiritual truth by looking within himself. God must speak to man to reveal spiritual truth from outside the man himself.

The Bible was spoken by God.

1. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 - It is not the word of men, but the word of God. God sent the Holy Spirit to guide inspired men and teach them the will of God. So every word, as originally given, was exactly the word God wanted.
2. 1 Corinthians 14:37 - Paul claimed that the things he wrote were the commands of the Lord. Nearly all other Bible writers made similar claims. Such statements are found repeatedly in the Bible.

The Bible contains all truth regarding God's will for man.

1. John 16:13 - The Holy Spirit guided the inspired apostles into all truth. This is the message that they then recorded for man in the Scriptures.
2. 2 Timothy 3:16,17 - As a result, the Scriptures make the man of God complete, furnished completely to all good works. No further revelation is needed.
3. [John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Peter 1:3; Acts 20:20,27.]

God preserves the Scriptures so they will always be available to instruct men.

1. 1 Peter 1:22-25 - The gospel will live and abide forever, unlike grass that springs forth and then dies.
2. 2 John 2 - The truth will be with us forever.

No religious guides other than the Bible are acceptable to God.

1. Since the Bible is a perfect revelation of God's will, no other authoritative guides are needed. And since no spiritual truth can be found within man that was not revealed to him by God, God has decreed that we must follow only His message revealed in the Bible. No other source of spiritual authority should be accepted.

Man-made laws and human traditions are not acceptable as spiritual guides.

1. Matthew 15:1-9, 13 - Doctrines of men make our worship vain.
2. Proverbs 14:12 - When men follow ways that seem right by human wisdom, the end result is death.

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Hinduism's Concept of God

The Hindu concept of God contains both pantheistic and polytheistic elements.

Pantheism - Hinduism teaches that God is ultimately an impersonal, eternal force or power of existence, having none of the attributes or characteristics of persons (such as knowing, thinking, loving, etc.). This force, called Brahman, is present everywhere in everything in nature, especially in all living things: every plant, every animal, and especially every man.

1. Brahman can be thought of as a sort of spirit force that has no personal qualities, but which pervades everything in the Universe. The attributes of personality are believed to exist only in physical, material beings. But God, in pure form, is impersonal and has no personal characteristics.
2. This impersonal essence, pervading all things, is also found within us. So, the "spirit" within us is divine. It is part of God. The real inner you is God. Your inner essence is the essence of deity.
3. The *Bhagavad-gita* says our eternal souls are "part and parcels of God."
4. When you understand such concepts, you begin to notice common references to them. For example, the "Force" in the Star Wars movies is essentially Brahman - the impersonal universal force present everywhere and in everything.
5. These concepts are also popularized by the New Age Movement.

Polytheism - The Divine Essence or Brahman manifests or expresses itself in the physical world in the form of physical beings that possess personality. As such, Deity is manifested in many gods of many forms.

1. There are three Supreme gods: (1) Brahma, the creator, (2) Vishnu, the preserver, and (3) Shiva, the destroyer. These are generally recognized as equal, though certain sects emphasize one or the other. And note that they differ in realms of power and authority.
2. Avatars are incarnations of these gods who have come to earth as men.
3. There are also many lesser deities having various levels or realms of authority. Some rule over certain areas of the earth or certain aspects of nature, such as fire, sun, wealth, water, etc.
4. Religious teachers and dead ancestors are also worshiped as deities.
5. The worship of various deities and images is popular. This worship often involves the use of many images. The concept of the all-pervading Brahman is mainly theoretical among the religious leaders.

The Concept of God in the Bible - There is only one true God.

1. Three separate Beings possess Deity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But unlike Hindu deities, these three are completely united in will, goals, purposes, etc. All have complete authority over all aspects of creation (in contrast to one over fire, one over wealth, etc.). So, they are completely united to form one God (John 17:20, 21).
2. Deuteronomy 4:35-39 – "The Lord is God; besides Him there is no other."
3. Isaiah 43:10, 11 – "Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior."
4. Exodus 20:3 - You shall have no other gods before Me.

God possesses the characteristics of a living personal spirit Being.

1. The Bible says that God is spirit (John 4:24), and is not flesh and blood (Mat. 16:17).
2. However, God possesses the qualities that characterize living, personal, individual beings. These include the following:
   - Living (John 5:26)
   - Loving (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-11)
   - Speaking (Matthew 3:17)
   - Working (John 5:17,20)
   - Knowing (Matthew 6:8,32)
   - Willing (Matthew 7:21)
   - Seeing (Matthew 6:4,6,18)

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Hinduism's Concept of Man's Ultimate Destiny

The Hindu Concept of Man's Destiny
Hindus believe that when a person dies his spirit is given another earthly body, that of an animal, a person of another caste, or a god, depending on how he lived in his current life. This cycle of death and rebirth continues on and on until one is finally released.

Three specific Hindu beliefs about man's ultimate destiny:

1. **Reincarnation** - Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny.
2. **Karma** – the belief that ones circumstances in life are completely determined by his previous conduct, either in this life or in previous lives. Everything good and everything bad that happens to us in this life comes as a payment for our own past conduct. Nothing is ever the fruit of what others did, but always the consequences of our own conduct. By doing good deeds in this life, therefore, one can improve his circumstances in the future reincarnations.
3. **Liberation** - The final goal of Hinduism is to escape or be released from the cycle of reincarnation. Hindus seek to be set free from birth, death, and rebirth, to arrive at a state of pure impersonal being without a physical body. The exact nature of this final state is not clearly defined. Some view it as a ceasing of consciousness, others as a sense of bliss. But the end result is that man is somehow absorbed into the eternal Being (Brahman), becoming part of God. All souls, without exception, will attain this highest spiritual summit, though it may take many lives. So it follows that there is no eternal hell or damnation in Hinduism.

What the Bible teaches about Man's Destiny.

1. Man has only one earthly life and death. (Hebrews 9:27)
2. At death, the body returns to dust and the spirit returns to God who gave it (not to another body). (Ecclesiastes 12:7)
3. When one has died, his destiny is fixed. He cannot pass from a destiny of suffering to one of bliss, nor vice-versa. (Luke 16:26) It follows, therefore, that there is no such thing as reincarnation.

Three specific Christian teachings about man's ultimate destiny:

1. **Resurrection**
   a. Those who are dead will come forth when Jesus returns. (John 5:28, 29)
   b. After Jesus died, He arose from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:22)
   c. Notice that each person will come back from the dead as himself or herself, not as an animal, a god, or some other person.
2. **Judgment**
   a. Just as it is appointed to man once to die, so it is appointed after that to face judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)
   b. At judgment, each one will receive a reward according to the life he lived in the body, good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10)
   c. Paul told the idol worshipers of Athens that all would be judged. (Acts 17:31, 32)
3. **Final destiny**
   a. After judgment, men receive their eternal destinies. The righteous receive eternal life, a state of bliss, in the presence of God. The wicked receive eternal punishment, suffering and sorrow, separated from God. (Matthew 25:46)
   b. God will judge everyone in the Great White Throne Judgment. (Rev. 20:11-16)

The Bible not only contradicts the Hindu teaching of reincarnation, it offers proof of resurrection through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—proof that no other religion in the world can offer or even attempts to offer.

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Hinduism's Concept of Man's Ultimate Destiny, Cont.

According to Hindus, what is man's ultimate destiny and how can it be achieved?

The Hindu Concept of Transcending:

1. The ultimate destiny and hope of Hindus is to escape material existence and the reincarnation cycle. This occurs when each person ultimately becomes absorbed into God. Leaving this material life or moving beyond it is commonly referred to as "transcending." Whatever helps achieve that goal is called "transcendental." (This term is used repeatedly in the introduction to the Bhagavad-gita.)
2. There are several ways taught by which man can achieve transcendence. Different groups emphasize different methods, but they do not reject those taught by others.
3. According to *Hinduism Today,* "Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation, yoga or selfless service ... Hindus believe that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding."

Following are some of the common ways Hindus seek to reach liberation:

1. **Good deeds** (Karma) - It is believed that if people do enough good works—especially works that are unselfish and de-emphasize material interests—they will achieve a better reincarnation. This process continues until finally one escapes the cycle of reincarnation and material existence completely.
2. **Austerity and self-denial** - One must live as a recluse, withdrawing from the pleasures and personal interests of life, putting no emphasis on possessions, etc. As a result, physical life loses its hold on the person's inner being. When he dies, he is released forever.
3. **Knowledge** - As one learns more and more, especially by studying the Vedas, he comes to understand that his true nature is part of the Diving Being. As he fills his mind with such ideas, his thoughts and deeds are less concerned with material interests. When he dies, physical life has no power over him, so he is released.
4. **Devotion** (Worship) - If one continually expresses love and dedication to God, he will become so concerned for God that this life loses its attraction. When he dies, he is released from the reincarnation cycle.

   This is especially emphasized in the Hare Krishna movement. If one dies thinking proper thoughts about Krishna, he is guaranteed to immediately be taken out of the reincarnation cycle to the spirit realm. In order to be sure one is thinking right when he dies, his life must be filled with constant thought of Krishna. This proper thinking comes by reading the Vedas, but especially by chanting the Hare Krishna mantra.
5. **Meditation** (Yoga) – Hindus believe that life (physical circumstances) is thought to be a temporary illusion (*maya*). It is not the ultimate reality. We think it is reality only because we do not understand that our inner self is part of God, which is the ultimate reality.

   By deep inner meditation in his self-conscious mind, one can discover his real self. This is called self-realization. As we understand this and begin to think and act accordingly, we become detached from the importance of this life. Things in this life become better, but especially when we die we are released from the reincarnation cycle. This is the method involved in Transcendental Meditation.

In all these avenues, repeated reincarnations may be required as a person gradually moves to higher and higher levels till he leaves the cycle. He must bring this about by his own effort. The gods may help, but there is no concept of a Supreme Being who pays the penalty of sin on behalf of the sinner.

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Christianity's Concept of Man's Ultimate Destiny

Introduction: The Bible teaches that man is born to live one physical, biological life, and that after this life he will live either in eternal bliss in God's presence or in eternal anguish. (Heb. 9:27, 28)

Our sins spiritually separate us from God.

1. Romans 3:23 - All are guilty of sin, which is disobedience to God's will (1 John 3:4).
2. Isaiah 59:1, 2 - Because of our sins, we are out of harmony and fellowship with God. He is then ***not*** dwelling within us. Because of this spiritual alienation from God, we will be separated from God eternally if our sins are not forgiven.

Because of God's love and grace, Deity came to earth in the form of man (Jesus) and died as a sacrifice to pay the penalty of man's sins.

1. John 3:16 - God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that those who believe in Him might not perish but have eternal life.
2. 1 Peter 2:24 - Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might live.
3. The incredible beauty of the Gospel is that God Himself chose to do for His creatures what man could not do for himself. He did this at incredible cost of suffering and anguish to Himself. That is the Gospel concept of Divine grace, a concept that is totally absent from Hinduism.

No human efforts can achieve forgiveness or restore a relationship with God apart from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

1. Ephesians 2:8, 9 - Our good works cannot save us apart from faith in Jesus. While it is true that we ought to live good lives and worship God, etc., these do not save us. We must receive forgiveness by Jesus to be saved. This is in direct contrast with Hindu thinking that every avenue to God is based on human works.
2. Matthew 6:7 - Endless repetition of certain phrases—such as the Hindu mantras—cannot save us.
3. Acts 4:12 - There is salvation in no one other than Jesus. (See also John 14:6.)

To receive the forgiveness God offers, man must repent, believe and confess.

1. We must repent of our sins - Acts 17:30.
2. We must believe - John 8:24.
3. We must confess Christ - Romans 10:9, 10.

Those who do not receive Christ into their hearts will live eternally in anguish.

1. Matthew 25:41 describes this eternity as an "eternal fire."
2. Daniel 12:2 describes it as "shame and everlasting disgrace.
3. Other passages that speak of hell in the Bible: Isaiah 66:24, Mark 9:43, Rev. 14:11.

Those who receive Christ into their hearts will live in eternal bliss in God's presence.

1. John 3:16 tells us that those who believe in Jesus Christ will enjoy eternal life.
2. John 14:2 describes heaven as being like a mansion with many rooms.
3. Rev. 22:1-5 describes heaven as a place where there is no curse (therefore, no suffering, sickness, pain or death), with no more night, the city where God's throne will be. The tree of life will be there as well.
4. Rev. 21:4 tells us there will be no tears in heaven, and no more mourning, death or pain.
5. Rev. 21:18-25 describes heaven as a stunningly beautiful city, with streets of gold, walls of jasper, the foundations decorated with every kind of precious stone. There will be twelve gates will each be made of a single pearl.
6. 2 Peter 3:13 and Rev. 21:1 speak of "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." There are many who believe that when Christ returns He will redeem all of creation and make everything new, and then establish His throne here on earth—a new, redeemed, healed-of-sin, perfected earth.

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Hinduism Followed by the Tribals and Dalits *

The Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes: One of the important factors that every Christian worker should know is that all Hindus are not the same. Tribal and Dalit people groups in India have their own indigenous religions. They follow mostly animistic Hinduism (belief in spirit world) in faith even though they believe in a Supreme God. In spite of the influence of orthodox Hinduism, the majority of tribals and Dalits still adhere to their own kind of Hindu faiths. We can describe their faiths as Tribal Hinduism and Dalit Hinduism which are in much extent opposite to orthodox, philosophical and classical Hinduism. The Hindu high caste people worship the cows; and the Tribal and the Dalit Hindus cut and eat the cows. But both of them are considered as Hindus by the Indian Census.

Some factors that make Christianity attractive to Tribals and Dalits:

1. Christian faith offers human dignity and equality to all, no matter how disadvantaged. As pointed out in Lesson 32, God does not consider any as being inferior to others, but looks instead on our hearts. The 1871 Census Report stated "The Christian missionary, as a rule, persevered in breaking through the time honored custom of treating the Pariah as dirt and has admitted him to equal rights and privileges."
2. The Scheduled Caste people see Christianity as a means of escaping the Hindu caste system. Christianity offers an alternate value system to the Hindu system of generational bondage and social injustice.
3. Many Dalits who earlier turned to Buddhism (or Neo-Buddhism) have become disillusioned because Buddhism in fact worships no god. Many Dalits, cognizant that there is a God to be worshiped, are turning in their spiritual hunger to Jesus.
4. The Scheduled Caste people are attracted to the brotherly love and unity evident among believers. They see the Christian faith as a peace-loving religion where every one, regardless of caste is treated as equal.
5. Tribals and Dalits long for a higher form of faith which is closer to Christian faith.

Some factors that discourage Dalits from becoming followers of Jesus.

1. The Constitutional Problem – As per the Constitution of India, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes offered special privileges in education, jobs and other such advantages. But in practice all these privileges are offered only to those who profess Hinduism. This injustice is a great handicap for Dalits wishing to embrace Christianity.
2. The second obstacle that discourages Scheduled Castes from becoming Christians is the threat of persecution. This persecution is often sanctioned by high-ranking political leaders. Many are reluctant to take the dangerous step of becoming a Christian.
3. Social ostracism – When Dalits take the courageous decision to become a Christian they often become ostracized from their families and villages or neighborhoods. Most particularly, it is often difficult for a young Dalit Christian man or woman to be considered for marriage.
4. Christian workers are too often not ready to accept the Scheduled Caste believers. Some workers question the validity of group decisions (when many Dalits come to Christ together). Some question the motives of those coming to Christ.

Five characteristics of Tribal Religions:

1. Belief in a Supreme Being
2. Belief in the spirit world
3. Belief in supernatural power
3. Belief in magic and witchcraft
4. Belief in blood sacrifice

Note the overlap between Christian Truth and Tribal religious beliefs:

1. Both recognize a Supreme Being who created the universe and our world – and everything therein.
2. Both believe in the spirit-world. (Christians believe in Satan, demons and the angels.)
3. Both believe in blood sacrifice; Jesus Christ offered His own body as the ultimate blood sacrifice for our atonement, making all future blood sacrifice unnecessary.

* This lesson and the next are gleaned from *Understanding Hinduism*, by Dr. S. D. Ponraj. The book is available through Mission Education Books, Chennai.

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Popular Hinduism

Variety of Popular Hinduism: Popular Hinduism is a mixture of many different religions, including Animism and ancient Dravidian and Aryan religions. It consists of innumerable variations, depending on the tribe or village, etc.

Following are some general beliefs and practices of Popular Hindus:

1. Belief in numerous gods and goddesses – It is said that Hinduism has three hundred and thirty million gods and goddesses. Different deities are worshiped at different festivals and by different castes.
2. Belief in idols and temple worship – Unlike the philosophical Hindus, popular Hindus worship idols, visit the temple and offer *pujas*. Idols are found everywhere.
3. Belief in rituals, offerings and festivals – Popular Hinduism is an expensive religion to follow because of all the required rituals and festivals.
4. Belief in pilgrimages – The followers of popular Hinduism go on pilgrimage to different holy places such as Varanasi, Tirupati, Rameswaram and Sabarimala.
5. Belief in supernatural powers – Like the tribals, popular Hindus believe in spiritual powers, both good and bad. Their lives are often controlled by fear of these powers and by bondage to them.
6. Belief in blood sacrifice – Most popular Hindus believe in blood sacrifice to appease the gods and goddesses.
7. Belief in magic, witchcraft, sorcery and the evil eye – Many Hindus use rituals, purifications, charms and amulets to escape the "evil eye," to manipulate the spirits, to counteract curses, witchcraft and disease, and to persuade the gods to grant children, to give good harvests and success.
8. Belief in astrology – Millions of Hindus follow astrology, horoscopes, divination, and auspicious omens and moments.
9. Belief in *gurus* and god-men – Popular Hindus believe that certain *gurus* and god-men can do miracles and lead them to prosperity and to God. Some of these god-men present themselves as avatars of gods and accept worship.

Methods of communicating the Gospel to Popular Hindus: (Most of these methods can be used in Tribal evangelism as well, since many of their beliefs overlap at least to some degree.)

1. Resident witness required – The Gospel message must be demonstrated in the life of the missionary by living with the people.
2. Group decision is strategic – Popular Hindus have a group consciousness, and as such any decision must be a joint-family or joint-community decision.
3. Use of Kinship/Relationship is important – Family ties are strong and so the missionary should use them in communicating the Gospel. Approaching popular Hindus individually is not only irrelevant but would bring opposition to the Gospel.
4. Both Oral and Written communication are needed – Some popular Hindus are not literate and are best reached through story-telling, songs, drama and dance. Satsangh is a good method of communication in the villages. Literature is also helpful, of course, for those who read.
5. Power Encounter is effective – The real issue is "power" among popular Hindus. The power of Jesus Christ should be demonstrated as a greater power than the powers of the gods and goddesses they have believed in and worshipped for generations. In other words, miracles are the powerful evidence of the Gospel among the popular Hindus.
6. Holistic Ministry must be Part of the Mission Work – Most popular Hindus are poor, backward and oppressed in their society. They have been denied social justice for centuries. They look to the missionary for social emancipation as well as spiritual emancipation. They look for holistic ministries that will meet their aspirations and transform their community. The missionary should respond positively and present the Gospel as a holistic development factor.

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Tribal Religions

The next two lessons are excerpted from Strategies for Church Planting Movement, by Dr. S. D. Ponraj.

The Two Kingdoms Concept:

The Kingdom of Heaven	The Kingdom of the World
1. God is the Ruler	1. Satan is the ruler
2. The Holy Spirit	2. Evil spirits
3. Worship of the Lord Jesus	3. Worship of the idols, demons, materialism
4. Represented by the missionary, etc.	4. Represented by witchdoctor, shaman, etc.
5. Preaching the Gospel	5. Preaching the false gospel
6. Forgiveness of sin, freedom and joy	6. Bondage to sin, fear and guilt
7. Practice of prayer, praise, and worship	7. Practice of magic, witchcraft, sorcery, and materialism
8. Miracles of healing, exorcism	8. Temporary miracles but long-term bondage
9. Repentance and conversion	9. Defeat and destruction
10. Eternal life with God in heaven	10. Eternal death with Satan in hell

Believers belong to the Kingdom of Heaven and must fight against the Kingdom of the World.

This power encounter is fought at the following different levels:

1. *Personal level:* A personal struggle between the flesh and spirit in the realm of moral and ethical behavior. The apostle Paul says: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). This is a spiritual struggle at a personal level.
2. *Structural level:* A battle against oppressive structures in society used by Satan. We must remember that the human structures themselves are not demonic. They are neutral, and they are needed for proper functioning of the society. But they are used by Satan and evil forces. They represent political, social, cultural, and religious systems and structures—for example, the caste system formulated and practiced by the orthodox Hindu society.
3. *Territorial level:* This refers to the ruling spirits and demonic strongholds over geographical areas or communities (Eph. 6:10-18). In Daniel 10, we read about such conflicts in the cosmic realm. It is warfare in the supernatural world.
4. *Mission-field level:* Here, the missionary encounters people engaged in demon possession, witchcraft, sorcery, magic, idol worship, and immoral living. He must face the demonic forces represented by the witchdoctor, witches, shamans, and religious priests. He must free such people from the bondage of Satan and its evil forces and bring them to Christ.

Religious Functionaries in a Primitive Religion – A religious functionary is a person who possesses skill, personal qualities, and knowledge of lore and ritual beyond that of the ordinary tribal person. The following are some different categories of functionaries:

1. Tribal priests, ritualists, shaman, sacrificers, healers, and diviners. These are accepted by the entire community, believed in and responsible for its welfare. They are chosen by traditional and respected procedures.
2. Witches and sorcerers. Witches are commonly regarded as troublemakers, nuisances, fearsome creatures, and as posing danger. Sorcerers become so by irregular and secret procedures over which the community has no control.
3. Other practitioners such as magicians, both those who claim to do only good (white magic) and those who work. Many magicians work both white and black magic. This again is a spiritual supernatural realm where the devil and his evil forces enslave people and use them to destroy each other and society. The missionary must face these evil forces and deliver the people from them with God's supernatural power.

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The Reality of Spiritual Powers in Indian Villages

Spiritual supernatural powers are real among India's tribal and rural societies. These spiritual powers are manifested in the following:

1. ***Mana*** – This term came from the South Pacific islands where it refers to supernatural power distinct from personal beings. This spiritual power is an impersonal mysterious life force that pervades all things. People believe that a person's success equals the amount of *mana* he possesses. *Mana* can be gained by rituals, rites, divination, and blood sacrifice.
2. ***Omens*** – An omen may be defined as any phenomenon believed to have supernaturally inherent portent. An omen is not an immediate event but rather a warning or alerting of an event to come.
3. ***Magic*** – Magic is a specialized art governed by a system of rules and rituals, mantras (chants), and special worship, which includes offerings and blood sacrifice, to manipulate supernatural powers (including evil spirits) to accomplish things the magician wishes to do.
4. ***Witchcraft*** – This is the possession of some mysterious supernatural power, which is used by its possessor (who is called the witchdoctor or sorcerer) exclusively for evil and antisocial purposes. A witch is a person, usually female, who works evil by employing the help of spirits. The sorcerer, witch, and witchdoctor practice evil or black magic to harm others.
5. ***The Evil Eye*** – This is a belief that the eyes of certain people emit shafts of impersonal supernatural power that strike an object and injure, stunt, or destroy it. A person with a piercing gaze or ugly appearance, or who is crippled, ill tempered, or irritable, is often accused of having an evil eye.

   The technique of avoiding the evil eye is to distract the gaze to other objects or marks, which supposedly absorb the shaft of power instead of the person or thing. Spells and rituals are also practiced to ward off and avoid the withering glint.
6. ***Fetishism*** – A fetish is generally defined as an object believed to possess supernatural power because of being occupied or possessed by a spiritual being. The magician manipulates the object in the rituals as a visible sign of the invisible power residing therein.
7. ***Cults of the Departed*** – This is a belief that after death, humans continue to live and become personal supernatural beings with certain powers. Primitive people believe that a person's life, soul, or spirit continues to exist after death. The cults of the departed can be divided into two parts: spirit worship and ancestor worship.
   a. ***Spirit worship***. This is a "religious dependence upon the disembodied souls of ordinary deceased relatives." People believe that when they dispose of the deceased in a kindly manner, they can then petition them for blessings; but if they dispose of them improperly, they will have to then make propitiation. It is believed that the powers of these spirits are not equal to that of the ancestors or gods. For example, the Oraons of Chotanagpur in Jharkhand State believe that the spirits of near kin help and heal them. The tribes in the Chettiagarh region call the departed back home to live with the family in a clay pot meant to be their abode. The Dhodias, Dublas, and Nayakas of Gujarat believe that the departed souls can't be called back because they go to be with the gods. But the extended kinship groups come together once every four or five years to bewail and commemorate the departed.
   b. ***Ancestor worship***. This designates the religious adoration or propitiation of any spirit of the dead. It indicates the religious dependence on tribal heroes thought to be supernaturally powerful. An "ancestor" is a departed person, formerly a human on earth, around whose memory and mythical biography a religious cult has gathered. He becomes a cult hero, responsible for the group he once belonged to. For example, the Gond tribals revere their tribal hero, Lingo.

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Militant Hinduism

The next two lessons are excerpted from Understanding Hinduism, by Dr. S.D. Ponraj.

Hindutva (also called Hindu Nationalism)

1. Vir Savarkar founded *Hindutva* ideology, making a distinction between "Hinduism" and Hindutva. While Hinduism was considered a religion, "Hindutva" includes the religious, cultural, linguistic, social, and political aspects of the life of Hindus.
2. The Hindutva ideology has helped promote unity between the various Hindu communities and sects, strengthening Hindu society and religion. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena and other members of what is called the "*Sangh Parivar*" stoutly defend the cause of Hindutva.

Hindutva is based on four dogmas (according to David Burnett, in *The Spirit of Hinduism*, p.55):

1. The *Vedas* alone are true; all other scriptures are perversions of truth.
2. Hinduism alone has the answers to the world's problems.
3. India alone is the land of perfect spirituality, and so is the foremost nation on earth.
4. A true Indian is a Hindu, and a Hindu alone is a true Indian.

In recent years there has been increasing intolerance from the Hindus due to "Sangh Parivar."

1. This has been especially true in different states of India where the BJP has been in power.
2. Therefore it is important that missionaries and evangelists understand Hindutva, and prepare themselves well so that they can withstand when opposition and persecution come.

The implications of Hindutva ideology: Dr. C. V. Mathew has done much research on Hindutva ideology. In his book "Hindutva: A Christian Response" (p. 175-177) he lists the following major implications of such an ideology:

1. The inter-relatedness between Hinduism and Indian culture postulated by Hindutva naturally leads to cultural imperialism. "Let us make the whole world Aryan."
2. Hindutva entertains a singular vision: "One nation, one people, one religion, one language, one culture, and one executive." This vision of a single culture and nation is at its essence absolutistic and totalitarian.
3. Hindutva provides the foundation for religious nationalism. Religion is politicized. A theocratic nation with a communal Constitution is envisaged.
4. Non-Hindu religious missions are viewed as anti-national enterprises, even treason.
5. Hindutva ideology can lead to deified nationalism that justifies the use of force—a *dharmayuddh* (holy war).
6. Hindutva does not provide any common ground or principle to have a meaningful and edifying dialogue with other religious and racial communities.

A Christian Response to Hindutva - Dr. C. V. Mathew (p.177-178):

1. Be authentic Indian disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Be authentic patriotic citizens of the country. In patriotism, we shall be second to none.
3. Challenge the foundations and implications of Hindutva in local and national forums.
4. Be concerned about human rights and avoid the narrow agenda of "Minority Rights."
5. Be actively involved in the political decision-making process - from panchayat to the parliament. Christian presence and involvement in such processes are imperative. Active participation in nation-building is crucial.
6. Facilitate dialogue among all who are interested and concerned about the interests of our country and people. Be the agents of reconciliation and justice, not just when Christians are involved. Rather, the Church should function as the "conscience of the entire society."
7. Educate believers in these matters and prepare them to face any eventuality with sympathy, sensitivity, conviction and courage. The convictions and fearlessness of the prophets and the compassion and servant-hood of the apostles seem to be imperative for the Church.

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Responding to Militant Hinduism

Reasons for which believers in India are facing opposition and persecution from the Hindu militants (from Dr. S.D. Ponraj's book, *Strategies for Church Planting Movement,* p.295):

1. *There is a conflict of values between Christians and Non-Christians:* Believers are compelled to share God's love and salvation with others, which provokes persecution.
2. *The Socio-cultural Issue:* Hindu militants don't want to see the backward and illiterate peoples to be uplifted and enabled to stand equal with the Hindu high caste elite people.
3. *Economic issues:* Efforts made by Christian missions have enabled the tribals and other backward communities to climb economically. When a person is transformed within he also lives out a life of transformation, resulting in socio-economic lift. This has angered the rich Hindu high caste landlords who have been oppressing the poor over the centuries.
4. *The political power game:* The BJP, the political wing of the *Sangh Pariwar*, has always used religion to secure votes and thus come to power.
5. *Christians provide soft targets:* Muslims and Sikhs have repeatedly demonstrated their capacity for retaliation. Christians, so far, have not chosen the path of retaliation.
6. *The BJP-led government's indirect and direct support to the Hindu militants*: Opposition to Christian missionary work greatly increased when the BJP came to power in 1998. This is especially true in states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.
7. *The growth of the Church across the nation:* Some Hindu militants have seen that the Church is growing in India. They know that the Christian faith is very appealing to the popular Hindus. The *Sangh Pariwar* feels that Christianity is a threat to Hinduism.

Therefore, the persecution against the Christians should not be considered as opposition for the Gospel by the common people in India. Many non-Christian Indians still appreciate the Christian faith and will accept it if they are given a chance.

How to respond to Hindu Militancy: (again, from S.D. Ponraj, *Strategies for CPMs,* p.295)

1. *Teach the new believers on Christian suffering:* Prepare the Christians to face the persecution. Their call is to "take up their cross and follow Him" (Luke 9:23).
2. *Be willing to suffer with new believers:* As Christian workers we must suffer with the people. Some times for security reasons the missionary leader / pastor has to move to a safe place, but always keep connected to the persecuted people with constant encouragement and help.
3. *Be Sensitive to the cultural and religious feelings of the public:* While preaching the gospel we should not invite opposition and persecution by using insensitive language. We need to be wise and tactful. However, we cannot compromise the uniqueness of Christ.
4. *Be wise and avoid confrontation:* When there is persecution, we should be extremely careful and go slowly. Let us be humble and wait for our God to take the vengeance and do the justice.
5. *Follow the law of the land*: We must file a FIR (First Information Report) with the local police station as soon as an attack has happened. We should cooperate with the police and government officials in their investigation. When they refuse to book an FIR, insist on it.
6. *Get the support of the public:* Build strong relationships with local merchants, the bank officer, your children's school teachers, political leaders and other non-Christians, particularly among the Muslims. At the time of persecution these people, because of friendship, will support us.
7. *Be willing to suffer for the protection of the new believers:* Protecting the new believers should be the top priority. The Christian workers should fight for their rights. In return, the new believers will protect the Christian worker. They need each other in times of persecution.
8. *Pray and mobilize prayer support:* We need the prayer support of the Christians, from local as well as from national and international. We should commit ourselves and the believers to the care of the Lord, praying and believing that "The Lord will fight for us."

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Gurus and God-men in Hinduism

The next two lessons are excerpted from Understanding Hinduism, by Dr. S.D. Ponraj.

According to Ajit Pillai, in a special column of *India Today* magazine, there are three kinds of New Age god-men:

1. **Reason-Defying Miracle Men:** Eye-popping visual tricks and sleights of hand are the name of their game. They materialize objects out of thin air and claim other superhuman feats.
2. **Veda-Expounding Wordsmiths:** Their forte is discourses that explain arcane holy texts in simple words and help join the dots.
3. **Yoga and Wellness Gurus:** Life coaches who help disciples to worldly success through a step-by step guide to physical fitness and mental peace, with a dash of music, meditation and alternative medicine tips.

Some of India's Gurus and God-men:

1. **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi:** Popularized transcendental meditation in the West. His fans included the Beatles. He blessed the 1969 Woodstock rock festival.
2. **Osho Rajneesh:** Known as a sex guru since he advocated a more open attitude towards sexuality. He was seen in better light after his death in 1990.
3. **Sadhu Vaswani:** He heads the Sadhu Vaswani Mission. He followed his saintly uncle's footsteps. The mission runs colleges, schools and hospitals.
4. **Anandamoyi Ma:** She is spiritual teacher and guru from Bengal. Hailed as a saint.
5. **Asaram Bapu:** Now facing hard times in Narendra Modi's Gujarat, his 350 ashrams organize spiritual discourses. Has a presence on the worldwide web.
6. **Baba Ramdev:** He has popularized yoga through TV shows and camps. He was part of the recent Anna Hazare-led stir against corruption. He is close to RSS.
7. **Kalki Bhagavan:** His spiritual movement is called Kalki Dharma. His mission is to enlighten people and help usher in a "golden age."
8. **Chandraswami:** He was close to late Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Controversial and connected, his name has come up in various scams and scandals.
9. **Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji:** He heads the Avadhoota Datta Peetham in Mysore. Has popularized "Raagaragini Vidya."

Most of the gurus and god-men are "pro-Hindu" and therefore we have to view them as Hindu gurus and god-men.

1. The god-men not only practice magic but also lean dangerously towards the Hindu right. Most of them have spoken up in support of Hindutva philosophy and programs.
2. At crucial times, like during the Ayodhya dispute, almost all the gurus and god-men spoke in support of the Hindtuva and their plan to build a Hindu temple at the disputed sight.

Who is qualified to be a guru or god-man? The author Kim Knott writes, "The key to a guru's authority lies in charisma rather than in caste tradition, formal training, or even virtue. Some gurus have no secular or Vedic education. Some are illiterate. But they all have the knowledge acquired through their own spiritual experience plus a profound ability to use this to good effect in helping others" (from "*Hinduism – A Very Short Introduction*" [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], p.23).

Spiritual Mystical Experience

1. Almost all the gurus have had some kind of mystical experience and they have the ability to share the experience with their followers. All experiences are not spiritual, some are physical well-being like Yoga, and others are based on their dreams and visions.
2. Similarly, Christian evangelists should be able to present their relationship experiences with the Holy Spirit. Further, Jesus had such a mystical experience with His Father when he was baptized. And the Apostle Paul had such an experience on the Road to Damascus.

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How to present the Gospel to Followers of the Gurus & God-men

1. People are not satisfied with the Hindu idol worship; they seek a personal relationship with a personal God. The gurus and god-men try to meet this need. **Response:** *Present Jesus Christ as "Sat-Guru" (True Teacher) and "Maha-Guru" (Great Teacher), the ultimate /final of all the gurus and god-men who have come into this world. Present Jesus Christ as one who will give His devotees a personal and a lasting relationship*.
2. People are not satisfied with Hindu philosophies, least of all the Hindutva ideology of the Sangh Parivar presented by many gurus and god-men. They tell about their mystical experience with some gods and goddesses. **Response:** *Present Jesus Christ as "the Personal God" who loves them and wants to bless them. In Christ the devotees can have a personal spiritual relationship with the Almighty Eternal God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
3. People are not satisfied with Hindu rituals and festivals. They want to live a peaceful and happy life and are seeking their well-being. Many of the gurus and god-men are addressing this issue and trying to give some solutions. **Response:** *Present Jesus as one who gives peace and joy. He gives His own peace which the world cannot give nor take away. Present Jesus who cares for our wellbeing – good health, happy family, etc.*
4. People want to see authentic miracles. Many of the gurus and god-men perform either bogus miracles or trick people by doing some magic or gymnastics like in a circus. They perform these "miracles" to convince people that they have power to do something extra ordinary; many among their devotees are fooled. **Response:** *Present Jesus Christ as the "miracle working Sat-Guru." Tell the stories and act dramas of all the miracles Jesus did while He was on this earth. And also tell the testimonies of the miracles happened in the lives of the believers. Such a personal testimony would be a powerful means of convicting the Popular Hindus to come to Christ and put their faith in Him.*
5. People want some human being who can pray for their problems and needs and who can give some assurance of God's blessings. **Response:** *While presenting Jesus Christa as the "Sat-Guru" the pastor and evangelist should also present himself as a "guru" who represents the "Sat-Guru." Every evangelist and pastor (both men and women) should act as a "guru" in their own life and ministry influence. Their dress and lifestyle should match like a "guru."*
6. People are always curious about new and strange experiences. That is why they seek out different gurus and god-men. There is a season for each of these gurus but their popularity is often short-lived. **Response:** *Present Jesus Christ as one who gives new experiences and new blessings. The Bible has teachings on rich spiritual experiences and the evangelist should always go with new teachings and new spiritual experiences.*
7. People want to know what Jesus Christ can offer which the pro-Hindu gurus and god-men cannot offer. Therefore the Christian evangelists should share the uniqueness of Christian faith and the spiritual benefits that the Hindu gurus and god-men cannot offer. **Response:**
    a. *Present Jesus Christ as one who offers forgiveness of sins through His suffering and death on the cross. This is unique which no Hindu guru can give. The presentation of the life, suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection will attract the devotees of these gurus to Christian faith.*
    b. *Present the gift of new life as promised in the Gospel. The experience of being born again by the Holy Spirit would be a new message for these devotees to hear. The Christian evangelist can share this with his own personal experience.*
    c. *Present the future hope of eternal life and heaven. No gurus and god-men can tell their devotees how to attain "moksha" or "heaven." They themselves do not know the way to heaven. But Jesus said, "I am the way…" He is the only way and this should be told again and again and the devotees will be attracted to this good news.*

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Power Encounter in Popular Hinduism

The next three lessons are from Strategies for Church Planting Movement, by Dr. S.D. Ponraj.

Spiritual Warfare – Satan has enslaved millions of people throughout history, and he rules over millions today. When the evangelist goes to these enslaved people with the good news of the Gospel of freedom, the Gospel alone has the power to set people free from satanic power and give victory over all evil forces in their personal lives as well as in their community life. As the power of the Gospel works in the lives of the people, they experience new life and the peace and joy that come from the Holy Spirit.

Miracles are a Powerful Means of Communicating the Gospel.

Signs and wonders are clear manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit against the powers of Satan, as we see in the life and work of the Apostles and in the early Church. The signs and wonders included not only healings but also casting out demons (Acts 5:12-16). We see that signs and wonders are God's demonstration of power against the forces of evil. Thus the Lord confirmed the preaching of the Gospel with signs and wonders. (See Heb. 2:4.)

The missionary in the field must be careful not to make the miracles an end in themselves but a means of demonstrating the power of God so that people will hear the Gospel and believe in Christ and accept Him.

Some practical guidelines for the missionary as he encounters evil powers represented by spirit worship, ancestor worship, magic, witchcraft, etc. in the field:

1. *Missionaries must believe that the spirit world and evil forces are real* – The missionary in the field should recognize these powers and be prepared to deal with them. He must understand that these powers are not from God but instead are operated by Satan and demons, representing themselves as evil spirits, demigods, gods, goddesses, etc.

   The missionary must not only recognize the reality of demonic powers but also understand the biblical teachings about demons. He should always keep in mind the Scriptural truth that God has defeated Satan. Believers have the power to conquer demonic forces through the power of the Holy Spirit. Demonology is not a subject to study out of idle curiosity but a vital issue directly related to the daily life of the people. Therefore, ignorance of this subject will greatly hinder effective missionary work on the field.
2. *The powers of the spirit world are stronger than human powers* – R. Stanley, a missionary statesman, gives the following facts from Scripture regarding demons and their activities:
   a. Demons possess superhuman knowledge and intelligence. Lucifer was "full of wisdom" (Ezek. 28:12). Demons have millennia of experience with mankind. They know the weak points of human beings. Cunningness is Satan's primary character trait (Gen. 3:1).
   b. Demons have unusual physical strength (Mark 5:1-4; Acts 19:14-16).
   c. Demons are known for their destructive activities. Evil spirits can cause dumbness (Mt. 9:32, 33), blindness (Mt. 12:22), deformities (Lk 13:11-13, 16), convulsive fits (Mt. 17:15-18), mental disorder (Lk 8:27), and instill a suicidal tendency (Mk 9:22).
   d. Demons possess miraculous power (Acts 16:16; 2 Thess. 2:9).
3. *God's power is greater than all evil powers* **–** One of the important truths that the missionary should constantly remember is that God's power that is working in him is greater than all evil powers that are working in the world. The Bible clearly teaches that "He who is in you is greater than one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). It is with this power that He is sending us into the world to preach, heal, cast out demons, and deliver people from Satan's kingdom to bring them to God's Kingdom. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem…and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). We also read, "For every child of God overcomes the world; and the victorious principle which has overcome the world is our faith" (1 John 5:4).

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Power Encounter in Popular Hinduism – Cont.

4. *Evangelism involves power encounter* – People on the mission field are involved in spiritual warfare. The strongest opposition against preaching the Gospel comes from supernatural forces, represented by people like magicians and witchdoctors.
5. *God's empowering is essential to encounter and defeat spiritual powers* – The missionary not only believes in the reality of evil forces but also realizes the need of the Holy Spirit to counter and defeat evil powers. (1 John 4:4) The missionary must have a daily refreshing and empowering experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:18). He must live a holy and sanctified life so as to continue to experience the power of God in his ministry.
   a. The missionary must depend on the Holy Spirit to heal the sick, cast out demons, and deliver people from evil influences. Since primitive religious people believe that miracles come from their gods, exercising the supreme power of the Holy Spirit to perform miracles is often the most effective way to communicate the Gospel to them.
   b. Among popular Hindus, Muslims, and tribals, the main issue is power, *shakti*. Unless the missionary can demonstrate a "greater power" than that of their divinities, they will not accept the Gospel message.
6. *Strategic intercession will enable the missionary to overcome the resistance* – The Gospel faces resistance for various reasons, including socioeconomic, political, cultural, and religious factors. A major reason in many situations is the hold of demonic forces over the people. Sometimes Satan uses the systems and structures to keep the people under his fold. The Apostle Paul urged the Colossian church, "devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us too that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:2-4).
7. *Spiritual authority over demonic forces should be exercised in the context of evangelism and church planting* – There is a close relationship between preaching the Gospel and the practice of the power of the Holy Spirit. This was clear in the ministry of the early apostles, as we know regarding Philip (Acts 8:5-7). While commissioning the twelve disciples, Jesus said "Preach…heal…cast out demons" (Matt. 10:1-8). Evangelism means proclaiming the message of the Kingdom. Whenever demons are cast out, there is a visible manifestation of the power of the Kingdom (Luke 11:20).
8. *Missionaries should identify the spiritual strongholds in the community and pray for deliverance* – There are worship places, idols, and objects of worship that can have the powers of strongholds over the community. Demonic strongholds can be seen over individuals who come under the influence of the demonic forces as they tie some objects such as charms and amulets. To get complete deliverance, these objects must be cut off, the ancestors' baskets must be removed, and the village must be cleaned of all idols and objects of worship. In some villages, the tribals have demolished their worship place, as happened recently in one of the Santal villages in South Bihar. Sometimes the local people themselves will demolish their old worship place.
9. *Missionaries are called to live a wartime lifestyle on the field* – The spiritual warfare on the field in terms of reaching the unreached people and planting churches cannot be fought just with preaching and exorcism alone. It demands a wartime lifestyle in terms of holy living, constant prayer life, regular fasting, and living in consciousness of God's presence. Not only the missionary but also his wife and children should realize that they are on the battlefront and live a wartime lifestyle, because Satan often attacks not only the missionary but also his wife and children. The Missionary also should mobilize prayer support from his home base—his friends, prayer partners, and supporters. He should help them to realize that they too are in spiritual warfare along with their missionary on the field.

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Power Encounter in Popular Hinduism - Conclusion

The Lausanne Covenant has the following statement regarding spiritual warfare: *"We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and power of evil, who are seeking to overthrow the Church and frustrate its task of evangelization. We know our need to equip ourselves with God's armor and to fight this battle with the spiritual weapons of truth and prayer."*

A Word of Warning: Avoid Extremism

1. Avoid overemphasis on power encounter or spiritual warfare and its related subjects such as demon possession, casting out demons, attacks of demons on believers or missionaries, etc. In other words, don't try to see a demon behind every bush![2]
2. Avoid overemphasis on subjects such as spiritual mapping, binding strongholds, prayer walks, and holy swims at the expense of resident witness, active evangelism, and social involvement. Missionaries' involvement should be based on their calling and gifting. However, proper balance should be maintained on the mission field.
3. Avoid the tendency to shift the emphasis to "power" from "faith in God" and "truth of the Bible." Real spiritual power comes from one's understanding of the truth of the Bible and faith in God, who is the source of such power.
4. Again, proper balance should be maintained between the "truth encounter" and "power encounter."
5. Avoid preoccupation with the spirit world. Do not make exorcism the central activity of your mission work. Such an overemphasis can give Satan an important place and Jesus Christ a secondary place. Such a misplaced priority can hinder actual evangelism. Don't allow Satan to set your agenda.
6. Avoid all kinds of Satan's deceptions while dealing with the spirit world. Ask the Lord to give you the gift of discernment between spirits (1 Cor. 12:10; 1 John 4:1). Sometimes, evil spirits may pose as messengers of light and counterfeit the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
7. Avoid all manner of heathen practices related to consulting mediums, spirits, etc. Such practices are unbiblical and sinful (Isaiah 8:19; 19:3).
8. Avoid entertaining evil spirits while casting them out of the people. Do not allow them to speak, telling their stories. Follow the method of Jesus in rebuking them and ordering them to come out in the name of Jesus.
9. Avoid making Christian faith itself a new form of magic, and particularly prayer as a formula or chant to force God to do our wishes. Don't expect quick results for prayers. Sometimes we may lose battles, but with God's help we will win the war.

Summary – A healthy and balanced understanding and practice of spiritual power encounter is based on the following essential factors:

1. It is based on the teaching of the Bible and not on our experiences. Every experience should be tested by the biblical teaching.
2. It is based on a clear understanding of Satan and his evil forces represented by different sociocultural and religious systems and structures.
3. It is based on a committed and holy lifestyle.
4. It is based on active evangelism and compassionate service, not just making spiritual exercises.

End Notes

1. Winslade, *Demolishing Strongholds!*, p. 5
2. R. Stanley, *Blessing*, p. 3.

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Biblical Basis for Power Encounter

This lesson is excerpted from An Introduction to Missionary Anthropology, by Dr. S.D. Ponraj.

Introduction: The Bible, particularly the New Testament, teaches the reality of two kingdoms: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The struggle between these two kingdoms is seen especially in the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and throughout the New Testament.

Jesus Christ and Power Encounter:

1. Jesus and Satan confronted each other at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Matt. 4:1-11). These temptations were physical (Satan offered food to Jesus), material (Satan offered Jesus power over the kingdoms of the world) and spiritual (Satan asked Jesus to worship him) (Lk. 4:4, 8, 12).
2. During His 3 ½ years of ministry, Jesus constantly encountered the forces of Satan in different forms. Apart from preaching Jesus also healed the sick and exorcised evil spirits from people (Matt. 4:23; 10:7, 8).
3. Jesus' approach was to counter satanic forces by a three-fold ministry of preaching**,** healing**,** and exorcism**.** The synoptic gospels mention demons connected with the ministry of Christ seventeen times and in nine cases it is specifically stated that Jesus cast out the demons.
4. Jesus not only practiced exorcism but gave authority to His disciples to cast out demons (Matt. 10:1).

The Early Church and Power Encounter:

1. Signs and wonders are clear manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit over the powers of Satan, as we see in the life and work of the Apostles and the Early Church. The signs and wonders included not only healing from sickness, but casting out demons (Acts 5:12-16).
2. These signs were accompanied by the preaching of the Gospel. For example, the healing of the crippled beggar at the temple followed the preaching of the Gospel by Peter (Acts 3).
3. The Lord confirmed the message of the Apostles with signs and wonders (Acts 14:3).

The Apostle Paul and Power Encounter

1. In Acts 19, Paul was conversing with the animists of Ephesus. This discussion was not a philosophical debate nor a religious discourse based on traditions (as had occurred at Athens in Acts 17 and Corinth in Acts 18) but rather a spiritual power encounter with the forces of darkness. The Gospel was communicated through signs and wonders, which included healing and deliverance from evil spirits (Acts 19:11, 12).
2. After the spiritual power encounter at Ephesus, Paul writes in his epistle to the Church there how a believer must prepare himself to fight against the powers of darkness: *"Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:10-12).*

Conclusion:

1. The field missionary must be biblically taught—and spiritually prepared—to encounter the forces of the spirit world. Further, he must be aware that whenever someone is used by the Holy Spirit, that person will face the attacks of the Devil in different ways.
2. These may be as physical temptation, disunity in one's family or team, people opposing the Gospel message, or depression, to name only a few.
3. It is a fact that people on the mission field face more attacks from Satan than people at home. If the missionary learns to use the Word of God as Jesus did, and fully depends on the power of the Holy Spirit, the final victory over evil will be his (Col. 3:16).

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The Believer's Response to Hinduism

Introduction: How should believers respond to Hindus? Again, the following suggestions are gleaned from Rev. Dr. S. D. Ponraj's book entitled *Understanding Hinduism*:

First, we should have a good understanding of non-Christian religions. Because there are endless variations of Hinduism we need to be familiar with the specific beliefs of those we are trying to reach with the Good News of Jesus. As we become more familiar with their belief system, we will become better able to anticipate their objections and queries to our message and be able to explain and demonstrate the Truth of our message.

1. Jesus was thoroughly knowledgeable about the majority religion of His day. He quoted often from the Jewish Holy Scriptures and showed how He was (and is) the fulfillment of the Old Covenant. As we minister to Hindus—or to those of any religion—we must be able to clearly explain the transcendent truth of our Almighty God in terms that make sense to the religions and spiritual mindset of those we are trying to reach.
2. Dr. S. D. Ponraj quotes Sadhu Sundar Singh as follows: "This is what I tell the missionaries who come to us from abroad. You have been offering the water of life to the people of India in a foreign cup. That is why we have been slow to receive it. If you offer it to us in an Indian cup we are more likely to accept it." By understanding the mentality of those we are trying to reach we can better offer our message in a "cup" they will understand and be able to appreciate.

Second, we should understand the biblical theology of mission—and the uniqueness of our message of salvation in Jesus—in relation to other religions.

1. Having a thorough understanding of the Bible and of biblical theology will ensure that we not dilute the biblical message or allow it to be polluted by teachings from other religions. (When this happens it is called syncretism.)
2. For example, there are Christians who wrongly believe in karma or who read the horoscope for guidance. We must be able to recognize such false beliefs from Hinduism (or from other religions) and present God's truth without error or corruption.
3. At the same time, we must be able to discern the difference between unbiblical lies from the enemy (such as the belief in karma, etc.) and harmless cultural forms that can be adapted by the missionary for worship. For example, a people group's particular style of music or drama might be adapted for worship and for communicating the Gospel, except for any elements therein that are evil.

Third, we should understand the people group's concept and God's time for them.

1. Dr. Ponraj makes a direct connection between the comprehensive research on Indian people groups for the Edinburgh missions conference in 1910 and India's mass church-planting movements of the following years. Ponraj states: "Today mission leaders and mission strategists should study and understand where the Lord is leading us in terms of reaching the unreached people groups of other faiths."
2. Different people groups in India are turning to Christ today. We must find where God is preparing a harvest and respond when a people group begins opening to God's Truth.

Fourth, we should understand that those coming from Hinduism must be discipled, and not just be left as devotees. Hinduism is full of devotees, as each of its followers picks up a god or a goddess as his/her favorite. We do not want to see Jesus as being accepted as merely another of these many gods in the heart and mind of the new Christ follower.

Fifth, we should understand that the Gospel we preach demands that we live it out in our daily community lives. We should live holy lives and set a model to the Hindus of true godliness. Christians are often blamed that their lives do not match with what they preach.

Conclusion: "If Christ's life and sayings be the ultimate Truth for a disciple of Christ, he can with all humility invite others, with neither apology nor arrogance, to come further up from where they stand, to see his Guru as the ultimate Truth. This calls for radical thinking, both from the Christian and those who oppose his mission." Dr. Ebe Sunder Raj

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Course Conclusion

God's children are to be His witnesses to a lost and dying world.

1. God wants to give us the special, supernatural power of His Holy Spirit so that we can be His witnesses at home ("in Jerusalem"), in all the surrounding area ("in all Judea and Samaria") and to the ends of the world (Acts 1:8).
2. Our witness of Jesus is to be a light shining before all men (Matthew 5:16), regardless of their religious positions or social status.
3. Philippians 2:15-16 says, *"… so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe, as you hold out the word of life …"* May our lives shine like stars before our neighbors, friends and others, that the light of God's salvation will glow in and through everything we say and do.

We must engage those of other religions in redemptive dialogue that introduces them to our saving God.

1. We are to be His ambassadors to those around us (2 Corinthians 5:20). Remember that an ambassador represents his nation to other nations; we likewise must represent the kingdom of God to those of other religious and spiritual "kingdoms."
2. As a child of God you are always to *"be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have"* and to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).
3. Just as when Paul engaged the idol worshipers in Athens (Acts 17:17) we must have knowledge about the beliefs and practices of those around us. This knowledge will enable us to be able to reason with them and communicate to them the Truth of God's love and salvation.

We must help those of other religions see the uniqueness of Jesus and of Christianity.

1. Among all the religions of the world, throughout the ages, only Christianity offers a Savior—God Himself—who came to Earth to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10).
2. While the religions of the world offer many different avenues to God (or to eternal liberation), all but Christianity require human effort. Only Christ offers eternal bliss in His presence through faith alone in what He did for us on the cross (Ephesians 2:8-9).
3. The Gospel of Jesus Christ stands unique among all religious systems. The Founder of our faith alone offers the perfect sacrifice of the sinless, divine Son of God, who paid the price for our sins. He then arose from the dead, thereby assuring us the promise of eternal life.

We must help those of other religions see that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

1. Many argue that all religions lead to heaven, saying that "all roads lead to the top of the mountain." However, this analogy assumes that the roads go up, not down; that man makes the roads, not God; that religion is man's search for God, not God's search for man.
2. The great Christian thinker C. S. Lewis says this sounds like "the mouse's search for the cat." But we know that in fact it's the cat that seeks the mice. And Christianity is true when it presents God as seeking man, not the other way around.
3. There is no human way up the mountain, only a divine way down.
4. Christianity is not a system of man's search for God but a story of God's search for man.
5. True religion is not like a cloud of incense wafting up from efforts of men to the nostrils of a waiting God, but like a Father's hand thrust downward to rescue the fallen.

Conclusion: God declares that we are to be His witnesses (Isaiah 43:10-12). Verse 12 says *"'I have revealed and saved and proclaimed – I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses' declares the Lord."*

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