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Welcome to the Journey

What if God is real? Really real. Truly, the God of the universe and our creator? If God is real, it changes everything—how we live and love and work.

We do believe that God is real and because of this, we want everyone to have the freedom to doubt him, question him and take their own journey to find him. As leaders in one of many churches in Los Angeles it's important to us that anyone on this quest can decide to accept God or reject him and still be loved by the local church. This is the reason for this study.

If you are a doubter, skeptic or seeker — this is the place for you to ask your questions, push against the religious jargon and discover what you believe.

If you are a long-time church-goer — this is the place for you to re-discover what you believe and perhaps draw closer to God as you wonder and doubt and push against what you “always believed”. It is hard to have intimacy with one you cannot question—so dig in and question God!

As you enter into this study we don't want to pull any kind of bait and switch. We do believe in the God of orthodox Christianity. We believe that God is a triune God (a God who is one, yet three —Father, Son, Holy Spirit). We believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man. We believe that he lived, died, was resurrected and then ascended to the right hand of God the Father to rescue us from the consequences of sin (today and for all eternity).

Author and Pastor Bill Hybels says this:

I like to think of the difference between Christianity and religion as the difference between do vs. done. Religion is about following lists of do's and don't's. Religion is about what we can do for God to be good enough to get into heaven. But the problem is that you never know when you've done enough.

Christianity is about what God has done for us. God did for us what we could have never done for ourselves. He lived the perfect life we could never live, and Jesus died on the cross to pay for all of the wrongs we've committed, or ever will. To become a real Christian is to humbly receive God's gift of forgiveness and to commit to following His leadership. When we do that, He adopts us into his family, and begins to change us from the inside out.

Thank you for diving into this study. We pray it is a safe place for you to consider the claims of Christianity.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Fletcher and Amy Cathey
www.womensbiblestudyLA.com/ifgodisreal

How to Use this Study Guide

Here are some tips for using this guide and getting the most out of this study. Each week is divided into three sections. Week one is a little different because there is no personal study attached. But here is what to expect on the other weeks.

1. Personal Study

This section guides you through a time of personal reflection. We encourage you to set aside time each week to read, think and respond. You should be able to do the study in 45-60 minutes. We recommend that you don't try to do it all in one sitting, but instead divide your time over three to four days. Then you don't have to rush, and you have time to really ponder what you are studying.

All the articles suggested for reading in the Explore part of this section are found at www.womensbiblestudyla.com/ifgodisreal under the supplemental reading.

2. Teaching Notes

This section gives you space to take notes during the teaching. You can find the teaching at the website listed above on the main page.

3. Group Discussion

We think that you'll get the most from this study by doing it with a group of people. After you do the personal study and listen to the teaching, be sure to process what you have learned with others on the same journey. You can find a group at www.womensbiblestudyLA.com/groups.

Just a few tips for group life:

1. Avoid giving advice — be a person who wants to understand.
2. Listen well — ask follow up questions, lean in. Be more concerned about hearing the other than what you will say next.
3. Put away phones because . . . Well, you get it.
4. Keep up with one another throughout the week via email, text and phone calls.
5. Allow for disagreement. Agree to disagree and seek to understand the position of the other person.
6. Love each other—care, listen, value, be kind, be patient, and be appropriately vulnerable.

Week One: If God is Real . . . What will I ask Him?

Teaching Notes



The Power of Questions

*"You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers.
You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions."*

Naguib Mahfouz, Nobel Prize Winner

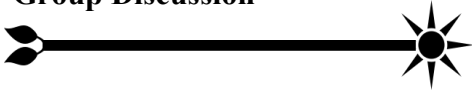
"Questions are the glue of empathetic communication: they energize and enliven conversations, inviting people to participate and to share insights and opinions. When you use them properly, people feel included and listened to and, therefore, will be much more likely to engage in meaningful and productive conversation. Lately, I started noticing that many discussions are, in fact, more like simultaneous monologues: instead of listening, each person is just waiting his turn to talk."

The Questions I Will Ask if God appears physically before me.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Week One: If God is Real . . . What will I ask Him?

Group Discussion



Keep it Real

Draw your spiritual journey over just the past five years and share what you are comfortable to share with your group. Where are you in the picture? Where is God? Or is there no God? If there is a God, what does he look like? [A “spiritual” journey is simply how you relate to life spiritually, as you define spiritual].

Word Association

Record what ***immediately*** comes to mind when you hear the following words (write just one word and take no more than one minute to complete this entire assignment).

Church —

God —

Jesus —

The Bible —

Christians —

Share the questions that you listed on page 6

As you share and listen to others, use this space to record 2-3 questions shared by others in your group that resonate with you.

Week Two: If God is Real . . . Why does it matter to me?

Personal Study



Be Honest

What are three negative messages from social media, culture and your relationships that you allow to define your purpose?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three positive messages from social media, culture and your relationships that you allow to define your purpose?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If you are fully convinced that there is a God, how do you imagine that will alter the definition of your purpose?

Explore

Go to www.womensbiblestudy.com/ifgodisreal and scroll down to the supplemental reading. Read the article, *Our Unique Purpose Unveiled*. Record your thoughts and questions.

Consider the Bible

We have a lot of messages that seek to define our purpose. If God is the true creator he is uniquely equipped to define our significance. Read the following passages and use the space below to record your thoughts and questions.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . .

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created

Them male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them,

"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.

And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Genesis 1:1, 26-31

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways . . . Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say,
"Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the
darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful,
I know that full well . . . How precious to me are your thoughts,

God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand— when I awake, I am still with you.

Psalms 139: 1-3, 7-14, 17-18

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:1-2

The Son (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:15-16

Respond

After reading the article on the purpose of life and reading the Bible passages, what are your honest questions and personal reflections?

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. They will never take the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man.

Blaise Pascal

God, you make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in your presence,
With eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalms 16:11

Week Two: If God is Real . . . Why does it matter to me?

Teaching Notes



Response to the Meaning of Life Video:

God's Intent for His Creation:

Relationship

Glory

If God is real, you are of ultimate worth.

*Genesis 1 tells us that ultimately and finally we are theological creatures:
creatures in relationship to God and whose significance lies in reflecting God.*

Dr. Richard Lints

Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in Thee.

Augustine

Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.

Saint Catherine of Siena

Week Two: If God is Real . . . Why does it matter to me?

Group Discussion



1. In the video clip at the beginning of the message—to what definition of the meaning of life did you most resonate? [<http://www.exploreGod.com/what-is-the-meaning-of-life>]
2. How have you typically defined your purpose in life? How has your definition changed after doing the personal study or listening to the teaching?
3. What struck you most about God's intent for his creation?
4. If God is real, and truly the creator, how does this change the way you live out your purpose?

Week Three: If God is Real . . . Why is there so much suffering?

Personal Study



Be Honest

Suffering, evil, hurt and injustice are all around us. You would be hard pressed to find anyone who will tell you all is as it should be in the world.

List three injustices or sufferings (historical or current) that you have observed or learned of that prompted you to ask “Why?”.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now list three injustices or sufferings (past or present) you have *personally* endured that prompted you to ask “Why?”.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Explore

Go to www.womensbiblestudyla.com/ifgodisreal and scroll down to the supplemental reading. Read at least one of the following articles on suffering: *Tim Keller Wants You to Suffer Well*; *The Problem of Pain - Chapter VI* and *Does God Cause Suffering?* Record your thoughts and questions.

Consider The Bible

While the articles you just read give some added perspective on the sufferings of the world and on our own personal suffering, the Bible also has much to say about the reason for suffering, its purpose and God's response to it. Read the following passages and use the space below to record your thoughts and questions.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Genesis 3:13

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Romans 5:12, 17

He (Jesus) was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:3-5

[Background: this passage is consider a prophecy about Jesus, the Messiah]

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Philippians 3:10

. . . we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5:3-4

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Romans 8:16-18

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelation 21:3-4

Respond

After reading the articles regarding suffering and searching the Bible passages, what are your honest questions and personal reflections?

Week Three: If God is Real . . . Why is there so much suffering?

Teaching Notes



The Problem

The Privilege

The Promise

We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to.
God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience,
but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

When suffering comes, we yearn for some sign from God, forgetting we have just had one.

Mignon McLaughlin

Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.

C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

I wasn't praying. I was beyond praying. Someone back home was praying earnestly for me, but if I had prayed any prayer in that moment it would have been, 'My God, my God...why have you forsaken me?'

Fantastic the privilege of being identified with our savior in his sufferings.

Helen Roseveare

Week Three: If God is Real . . . Why is there so much suffering?

Group Discussion



1. What is your response to the statement that suffering is a result of sin? Sin being rebellion against God and against his design for his creation.
2. How are you apt to respond to suffering in the world around you? What about in your own life?
3. How has your view of suffering changed or been challenged in your personal study or in listening to the teaching?
4. Have there been times of suffering, struggle or sorrow in your life that you can look back on and see the value (personal growth, a mended relationship, closeness with God, etc.)?
5. Does any of what you learned/heard offer you comfort in the face of a current suffering or pain? If so, how?

Week Four: If God is Real . . . How do I know the Bible is reliable?

Personal Study



Be Honest

List five doubts or questions you have about the Bible.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Explore

Go to www.womensbiblestudy.com/ifgodisreal and scroll down to the supplemental reading.

Read at least one of these articles on the Bible: *You Can Take the Bible Literally—A Summary*;

How Did We Get the Bible? and *Is the Bible is Reliable?* Record your thoughts and questions.

Consider the Bible

The articles you read give evidence to the reliability of the Bible. But, the Bible also has much to say about itself and it's necessity in your life. Read the following passages and use the space below to record your thoughts and questions.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

²Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.

³They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.

⁴Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,

like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

⁶It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other;

nothing is deprived of its warmth.

⁷The **law of the LORD** is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The **statutes of the LORD** are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

⁸The **precepts of the LORD** are right, giving joy to the heart.

The **commands of the LORD** are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

⁹The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

The **decrees of the LORD** are firm, and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

¹³Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight,

LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,

Jesus explained to (the two men he met) what was said

in all the Scriptures concerning Himself . . . Now Jesus said to (his disciples),

"These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Luke 24:27, 44

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

John 20:30-31

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Romans 15:4

Respond

After reading the articles on the reliability of the Bible and reading the Bible passages, what are your honest questions and personal reflections?

Teaching Notes



The Necessity of the Bible

Romans 1:20

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Psalms 19

1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

9 The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

11 By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

From Elohim to YHWH

Teaching Notes continued . . .

Week Four: If God is Real . . . How do I know the Bible is reliable?

Group Discussion



1. What questions and doubts did you have (or do you have) about the Bible?
2. What about the Bible surprised you in the personal study or in the teaching?
3. Even many Christians avoid the Bible, why do you think that is?
4. If you were fully convinced that the Bible is true, how would that change the way you live?

Week Five: If God is Real . . . Can I really know who the true God is?

Personal Study



Be Honest

List seven questions and/or doubts you have about the ability to know the one true God and whether or not Jesus is really that God.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Explore

Go to www.womensbiblestudy.com/ifgodisreal and scroll down to the supplemental reading. Read the articles, *What Makes Christianity Different?* and *A Summary of World Religions*. You might also read, *How God Became Jesus—and How I Came to Faith in Him*. Record your thoughts and questions here.

Consider the Bible

In the Bible, Jesus claims to be God. His followers worship him as God. Read the following claims of Jesus and his followers and use the space below to record your thoughts and questions.

[Jesus said:] “I and the Father are one.”

Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

“We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

John 10:30-33

You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”

At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

John 8:57-59

[Background: Abraham was the founding father of Judaism and lived hundreds of years before Jesus. When Moses had an encounter with God he asked his name and God replied, “I AM.” To claim that you were God was punishable by death.]

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Titus 2:11-14

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came (after the resurrection and appeared to them). So the other disciples told him,
“We have seen the Lord!”

But Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

John 20:24-29

Respond

After reading the articles on Christianity and World Religions, as well as the Bible passages, what are your honest questions and personal reflections?

Week Five: If God is Real . . . Can I really know who the true god is?

Teaching Notes



All those gods and religions

Buddhism —

Islam —

Judaism —

Hinduism —

Christianity —

Why I Believe:

1.

2.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 11-32

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

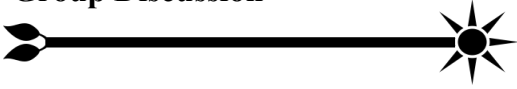
¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. ¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ **And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.** ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

²⁹ Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? ³⁰ And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? ³¹ I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Week Five: If God is Real . . . Can I really know who the real God is?

Group Discussion



1. What have you previously thought about the world religions and the claim of Christianity that it is the one, true religion?
2. What surprised you in your reading about the uniqueness of Christianity and the beliefs of the other religions?
3. How did the reading of the articles and the Bible passages alter your understanding of Christianity? Or did it?

Week Six: If God is Real . . . Why should I trust him?

Personal Study



Be Honest

“Trust God.” Easier said than done, right? Even for someone who believes in the God of Christianity, and is truly following Jesus, trusting God can be a difficult.

What does it require of you today to trust God (or to not trust God)?

If God is real, what should you trust about him and what should you trust him for?

List three things you trust God for today (or wish you *could* trust God for today):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Explore

Go to www.womensbiblestudyla.com/ifgodisreal and scroll down to the supplemental reading. Read at least one of the articles: *Trusting God When The Answers Don't Come*; *How Can I Know God?* and *The Fuzzification of Faith*. Record any thoughts or questions here.

Consider the Bible

While the articles provided give some added perspective on why and how we can trust God, the Bible, God's living word to us about Himself, is the very best source for growing our trust in Him. Read the following passages and use the space below to record any thoughts and/or questions.

But because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. "Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments

Deuteronomy 7:8-9

God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

Numbers 23:19

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Isaiah 43:2-3

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died — more than that, who was raised — who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . .

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:31–37

So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”

So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Galatians 3:6-9

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3

But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

Respond

After reading the articles about faith and trusting God, as well as the Bible passages, what are your honest questions and personal reflections?

Week Six: If God is Real . . . Why should I trust him?

Teaching Notes



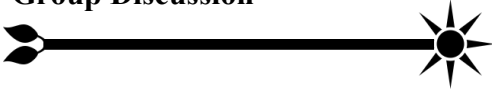
Faith in the Bible is always determined by its object... What matters is not so much the faith itself as what it is faith in. Faith, as we shall see, is like a window. It is not there because we happen to want one wall of the room to be made of glass. It is there for the sake of what we can see through it – and in order to let light into the room.

N.T. Wright

Teaching Notes continued . . .

Week Six: If God is Real . . . Why should I trust him?

Group Discussion



1. What about trusting God (or stepping out in faith) feels risky to you?
2. How does trust play into the most meaningful human relationships you have? How do you cultivate and build that trust? What makes you trust a person?
3. How might you apply those same principals of human relationship to the concept of faith (growing in trust of God)?
4. Have you ever put your trust in Jesus? If not, is that something you feel a desire or longing for? Do you feel closer to that today than you did yesterday?
5. What is your response to the idea that faith is both a gift AND a discipline to be practiced. How do you think practicing trust can help it grow? Have you experienced this at all in your life? How about with God?

Week Seven: If God is Real . . . how will I now live?

Personal Study



Becoming a Christian is simply receiving, by faith, the gift of Christ's life, death and resurrection as a means to salvation and life with God (today and for all eternity). Living as a Christian is summed up in the invitation of Jesus recorded twenty times in the first four books of the New Testament, "Follow Me." This week we look at what it means to follow Jesus, today and forever.

Be Honest

List three questions you have about following Jesus.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If you have been following Jesus for any length of time, what is delightful about following Jesus?

What is challenging about following Jesus?

Explore

Go to www.womensbiblestudyla.com/ifgodisreal and scroll down to the supplemental reading. Read *The Call to Discipleship* and record your thoughts and questions here.

Consider the Bible

The invitation of Jesus to the skeptic, seeker and believer is, "Follow Me." Read the following passages and record your observations. Look for how Jesus invites people to let go of distractions, join his mission and be in close relationship with him.

Scripture	Following Jesus
<p>Mark 1:16-20 ¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.</p>	
<p>Mark 2:13-17 ¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. ¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."</p>	
<p>Mark 8:34-38 ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."</p>	

Scripture	What it means to follow Jesus
<p>John 10:14-18, 27-30 ¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” . . . ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”</p>	
<p>John 12:21-26 ²¹ [Some Greeks] came to Philip with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵nyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.</p>	
<p>1 Corinthians 10:31-33, 11:1 ³¹[Paul, a disciple of Jesus said:] So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— ³³ even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. ¹ Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.</p>	

Respond

After reading the article about discipleship, as well as the Bible passages, answer the following questions.

Tim Keller, in *The Call to Discipleship*, references a conversation that Jesus and Peter have in Luke 9:18-20 (below). Read the question of Jesus, put yourself in this passage, and record what your most honest answer is today.

*Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."
"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

Who do you say Jesus is?

Keller says in this article that becoming a disciple means three things (circle the one that most resonates with your journey today).

Setting a New Priority
Finding a New Identity
Living a New Mercy

How will you lean into the aspect of discipleship you circled this month?

After reading the Bible passages about following Jesus, what is the one thing that most impacted your mind and heart?

How do you want to follow Jesus differently as a response to all you read?

Week Seven: If God is Real . . . How shall I now live?

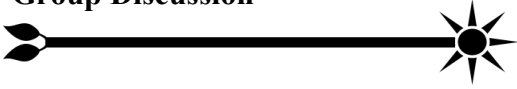
Teaching Notes



Come, follow me.
Jesus

Week Seven: If God is Real . . . How shall I now live?

Group Discussion



1. Why do you think people did and did not follow Jesus in the time of the New Testament?
2. After reading the article, doing the study and hearing the teaching, what most excites you (or does not excite you) about following Jesus?
3. What tends to get in the way of you following Jesus?
4. What most helps you to faithfully follow Jesus?

Week Eight: Stories from the journey

Personal Study



Be Honest

What four things do you most want to remember from your time in this study?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Explore

Go to www.womensbiblestudyla.com/ifgodisreal and scroll down to the supplemental reading. Read the stories of those who have come to faith in Jesus: *The Atheist's Dilemma*; *A Highly Reluctant Convert* and *Christ Called Me off the Minaret (how one Muslim came to faith)*. What surprises you about these stories of conversion?

Consider the Bible

The Bible is filled with stories of women and men encountering God. One of those stories is the story of Paul (aka Saul) recorded in Acts 9. In Acts 25:26-26:29, Paul, under accusation, shares his story with King Agrippa. Read that story here. Circle and underline anything that strikes you about how Paul came to faith and how that changed his life.

²⁶ . . . Paul began his defense: ² "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews . . . ⁴ "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. ⁷ This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. ⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? ⁹ "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one

synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

¹² “On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

¹⁵ “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ¹⁶ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

¹⁹ “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. ²¹ That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. ²² But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— ²³ that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴ At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.” ²⁵ “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” ²⁹ Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

Respond

Write your own story here.

Week Eight: Stories from the journey

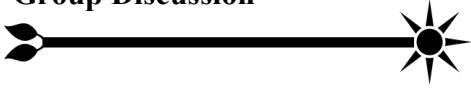
Teaching Notes



Reflections and Stories

Week Eight: Stories from the journey

Group Discussion



1. Share your answers to the question—What four things do you most want to remember from your time in this study?
2. What most struck you about the stories you heard in the supplemental reading and the Bible?
3. If you feel comfortable, share your story with your group.
4. Share one way that you plan to apply this study to your life this year.