



CONFRONTING

CHRISTIANITY

Series Guide

Confronting Christianity: An introduction

John Lennox, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford and himself a best-selling author, has described Rebecca McLaughlin's *Confronting Christianity* as,

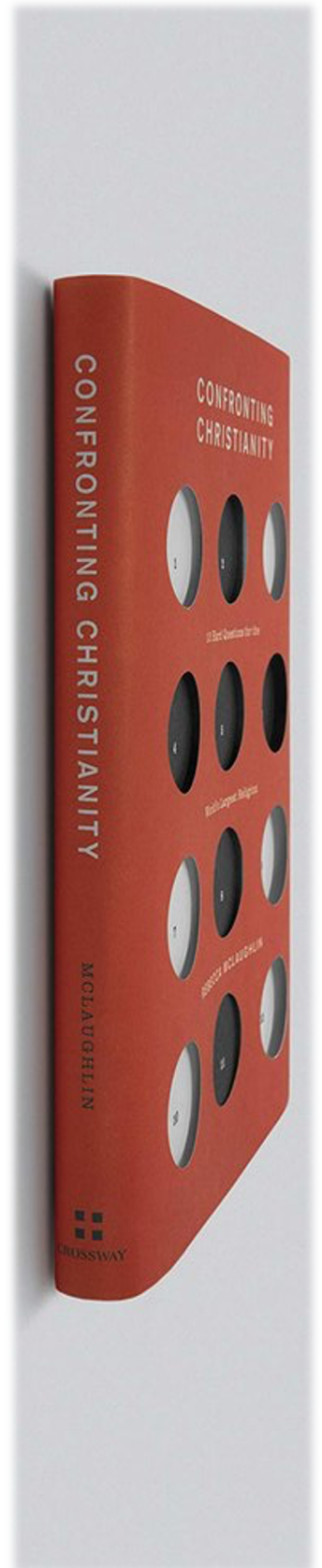
"Compelling reading, not only because of its intellectual rigour and the fact that it is beautifully written, but also because of its honest, empathetic humanity".

It really is a book for our time, and we commend it whole-heartedly. It is well worth a read (or a listen on audiobook if you're more of a listener than a reader; Rebecca narrates her own book on Audible). McLaughlin covers 12 difficult questions that face the Christian faith. In a sense, these questions confront Christianity; in another sense, our culture finds Christianity confronting because of our faith's understanding of these 12 issues. Either way, *Confronting Christianity* is an apt title.

At St Matthews this term we won't have time to cover all 12 issues, and our *Confronting Christianity* series is probably best described as loosely based on the book. But we trust that the 6 topics we'll be covering on Sundays, plus the 2 midweek specials, will help you to think Christianly and biblically about these questions. And we hope that they will aid you in engaging in helpful ways with your friends, family members, colleagues and neighbours, so that in every way you commend Christ to them.

This study guide has space for you to jot down notes from the Sunday messages, plus the 2 midweek specials. It also includes 5 studies that you can do with your group, or think about on your own.

May God be with you as you confront the Christian faith from a different angle this term.



Study Timetable

We've prepared these small group studies to use following the Sunday message. Here's a suggested timetable for their use (but feel free to use them in the way that works best for you).

Sunday Sermon Date	Topic	Midweek (growth group)	What?
		On Board/Leader training sessions: Tues 19 / Wed 20 / Thurs 21 July	
Sun 24 July	Are we better off without religion?	25-28 July	Study 1
Sun 31 July	Should we take the Bible literally?	1-4 August	Study 2
Sun 7 August	Is God homophobic?	Midweek special: The Bible and Gender	
Sun 14 August	Would a loving God send people to hell?	15-18 August	Study 3
Sun 21 August	Is Christianity the only true religion?	22-25 August	Study 4
Sun 28 August	Does the Christian faith crush diversity?	Midweek special: The Bible and Human Life	
		Bonus study: Does the Christian faith crush diversity?	
Sun 4 September	Father's Day Special & <i>Stories of Grace</i> series begins		

Sun 24/7: Are we better off without religion?

Reading plan

Monday: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Tuesday: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20

Wed'day: 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Thursday: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Friday: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Study 1: Are we better off without religion?

Start

What are some of the usual criticisms that people make of religion in general? Are any of these peculiar to the Christian faith, rather than applying to religion more broadly?

Is there any evidence that these criticisms are accurate?

Read, think, talk, etc.

- 1. Christianity confronts some of our culture's pathways to the good life, like money and comfort. What alternative does the Christian faith have to Western culture's rampant materialism? Read Luke 12:13-15, Acts 20:32-35, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19.**
- 2. What alternative does the Christian faith give to Western culture's obsession with comfort and convenience? See Mark 8:34-37; 10:42-45.**
- 3. Christianity also offers a better story than our culture's current experience of conflict. What alternative does the Christian faith offer to our society's tendency to blame & cancel others, and insistence on being right? See Luke 7:36-50.**

4. What alternative does the Christian faith give to the isolation that springs from our modern emphasis on the individual? See John 13:34-35.

5. What is your emotional response to the alternatives that religion in general, and the Christian faith in particular, holds out to the dominant (secular materialist, individualistic, etc) story our culture tells?

Pray

Heavenly Father,
We praise you for making yourself known to us,
Through your Scriptures and in the person of your Son.
Help us to see ourselves as we truly are,
And to see your Son too,
That we might have life to the full in his name.
Amen.

Sun 31/7: Should we take the Bible literally?

Reading plan

Monday: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
Tuesday: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
Wed'day: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Thursday: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
Friday: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Study 2: Should we take the Bible literally?

Start

When people ask, “why take the Bible literally?”, a lot hinges on what they mean by “literal.” What do you think it means?

Read, think, talk, etc

- 1. Imagine a friend said the following things; what would happen if you understood them literally?**
 - My heart is broken...
 - I nearly died of embarrassment...
 - It was raining cats and dogs...
 - I am feeling blue...

And what does that tell us about the way we use language in everyday life? Can we apply that understanding to reading the Scriptures?

- 2. What sort of questions should we ask ourselves when working out how to read any passage of Scripture?**

- 3. How should we understand miracles in the Bible?**

4. Read Psalm 19. Do we treat parables or poetry differently to how we read miracles within Scripture?

5. What should we make of apparent contradictions in the Bible?

6. If we are to take the Bible seriously as God's word to us today, how should we respond to any passage we hear or read? Read Matthew 7:24-27, James 1:22-25.

Pray

Dear Lord

Thank you that you speak to us through Scripture.

Forgive us for being so reluctant to listen

And so slow to put it into practice.

Help us to recognise the Bible as not mere words on a page

But your kind instruction for our lives,

That we might know you and live for you.

Amen.

Sun 7/8: Is God homophobic?

Reading plan

Monday: Luke 5:1-16

Tuesday: Luke 5:17-31

Wed'day: Luke 6:17-26

Thursday: Luke 6:27-36

Friday: Luke 6:37-42

Midweek special: The Bible and Gender

Sun 14/8: Would a loving God send people to hell?

Reading plan

Monday: Luke 6:43-49

Tuesday: Luke 7:1-10

Wed'day: Luke 7:11-17

Thursday: Luke 7:18-35

Friday: Luke 7:36-50

4. How does Jesus' response in the Garden of Gethsemane confirm this understanding of wrath and hell? See Luke 22:39-44.

5. In what way can hell be good news?

6. How would you answer a friend or family member who asked you the question: why would a loving God send people to hell?

Pray

Heavenly Father

We praise you for your justice, even as we shudder at the thought of hell.

We thank you that Jesus experienced hell on our behalf,

So that we might not have to.

We beg for your mercy upon our friends, family and neighbours

That they might trust in Jesus, and avoid eternal destruction.

Amen

Sun 21/8: Is Christianity the only true religion?

Reading plan

Monday: Genesis 12:1-20

Tuesday: Genesis 13:1-18

Wed'day: Genesis 14:1-24

Thursday: Genesis 15:1-21

Friday: Genesis 16:1-16

4. How does Jesus' exclusive claim affect the way we live now?

5. What comfort is there for us in Jesus being the only way, the truth and the life?

6. What are some of the ways you might interact with people over the question of Christianity's exclusive claims in future?

Pray

Dear Lord

Thank you that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life,
And the only way to come to you.

We praise you that he has taken responsibility to bridge the gap between
us and you.

And we pray that our conversation would be gracious, and our lives would
bear humble witness to him.

Amen

Sun 28/8: Does the Christian faith crush diversity?

Reading plan

Monday: Genesis 17:1-27

Tuesday: Genesis 18:1-33

Wed'day: Genesis 20:1-18

Thursday: Genesis 21:1-20

Friday: Genesis 22:1-19

Midweek special: The Bible and Human Life

4. How do the following verses also point to biblical diversity:

- **Matthew 28:19-20:**

- **Galatians 3:28:**

- **James 2:1-9:**

5. How do we see this diversity reflected in the modern church?

6. How can we keep the Bible's picture of diversity in the forefront of our minds and prayers, and our church involvement?

Pray

Dear Lord

We recognise the heavenly picture of a diverse church worshipping you. Forgive us for the ways we fall short of that picture, and for all the ways we have excluded people who are different to ourselves.

Help us to celebrate the diverse ways we are one in Christ.

And help us to live for him with great unity.

Amen.

Notes



GROWTH