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Free: life

WEEK 1

INFORMAL INTRODUCTION

(Option 1)

This is an informal introduction to the rest of the studies.

The following is a pretend report from a newspaper of the time, and needs two of the CU to read it out as though an interview itself.

HEBREW TIMES * REVIEWS *

SHOCKING NEW BIOGRAPHY SET TO CAUSE FURTHER SCANDAL

Emmaus Madeup

Much has been made concerning the recent biography of Jesus of Nazareth, by the little known author John Mark.

In this controversial work, oral anecdotes have been collected using many eyewitnesses of the now famous events themselves.

Accounts include; the baffling feeding of well over 5000 people from what would appear to be a simple meal for one, countless healings, or - more surprisingly, the "resurrection" of the man himself after his public execution by crucifixion.

Fact or fiction: it is left up to the reader to decide who exactly is this man they have started to call Messiah?

ROLE PLAY

Interviewer = I, John Mark= JM

I: John Mark, how did you first come to hear about Jesus for yourself?

JM: My mother has been a follower for as long as I can remember, and we used to have meetings at our house. The more I heard about this man the more I wanted to know Him for myself, so I resolved to meet up with those who knew Him personally. Firstly a man named Peter, one of His closest friends, allowed me to spend a great deal of time with Him. The stories he told about Jesus were just so amazing, I only hope I have done them justice in this work.

I: You also spent much time with Paul of Tarsus, who curiously never knew Jesus himself.

JM: Well that's true in a sense. Paul spent the beginning of his life with one aim only, and that being to torture and wipe out Christians. However, on one of his travels he saw a vision of Jesus himself and since then his life has turned around completely. His one aim in life now is to tell people about Jesus and that, whether we know it or not, we all without exception, need Him.

I: You make it sound as though this man Jesus were still alive!!

JM: That's the main message I hope my readers will discover for themselves. Jesus isn't just a great historical figure, a good man or even a prophet, He's the son of God Himself and as such, His death wasn't the end but the beginning!

I: I look forward to reading this for myself then! John Mark, thank you very much.

To Discuss...

1. What does our culture say and think about Jesus?

There has been no one more famous or controversial than the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Even in His own times people were left unsure....

Read Mark 8v27-29:

²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
Peter answered, "You are the Christ.¹"

2. Who would we say He is in this group?

We invite you to join us for 4 more weeks to have a look at what God's intervention in the person of Jesus really means.

Come with an open mind to answer the question:

'Who is Jesus?'

WEEK 1 FORMAL INTRODUCTION (Option 2)

*All of us whether we know it or not have a 'Worldview'
- By this we mean the way we look at things such as life,
relationships, and answering others.*

This world view will always affect the way we respond to everything.

...What is a worldview?

In the old days when people thought the world was flat and that ships would fall off the edge, sailors stayed close to the shore and the popular belief was that the sun was driven in a chariot, by a god, across the sky each day.

Once it was discovered that the world was round - all these ideas changed. Exploration of unseen places was possible, for no one would fall off the edge, and the sun and moon obviously went all the way round the earth.

More was discovered, the moon did indeed go round the earth but the earth was just one of many planets circling the sun. So the view of the world changed again and people began to question the significance of humans in the grand scheme of things.

...Worldviews today

Many people still believe that because we have made such great advances in technology, home comforts, and health, things can only get better! The theory of Evolution supports such a world view.

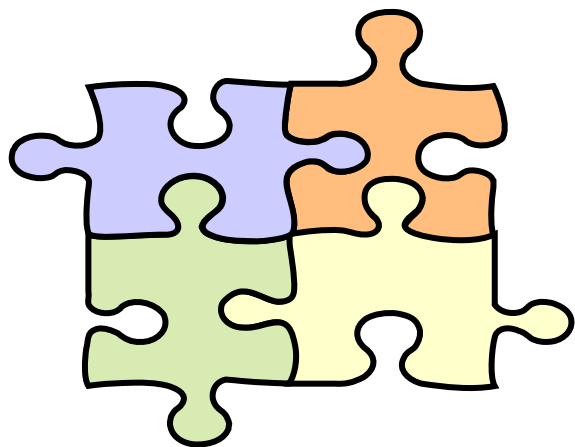
¹ Christ/Messiah: The 'Anointed One' chosen by God to free his people

Others having lived through the last decades of job insecurity, environmental scares, global poverty, wars and ethnic cleansing, conclude that the world will always be hopeless and so aim to make the best of it they can.

Most people focus on themselves, their lives and their goals. This is the focus of many of the world's religions so many people's world view is shaped by how much of a religion they accept.

More recently, people have tended to mix and match ideas from many sources and as we live in a multi-faith society this seems sensible to many people.

So the question is: *Where does God fit into all of this?*



...What's your World View?

People usually believe in God unless they decide not to. This may or may not account for the fact that there are more believers than card carrying atheists.

So you may believe in God but what sort of God or gods do you believe in?

Step-by-Step exploration

1. Do you believe in **one God** or **many gods** - that's a fundamental question. If you have never thought this through then do so now. Jews, Christians and Muslims are firmly in the one God camp; animists, pagans, Hindu's and Buddhists have many gods.

2. Do you believe in a God/gods with a start and finish = **finite**
or a God/gods that are forever, before and after all time = **infinite**.

This is important - if you don't know, try answering this question

'Do I wonder where God came from?'

Such a question when asked seriously means you think there is a time before God, so He can't be the Ultimate Reality.

It starts getting slightly tougher now ...

3. Do you believe in God/gods who **are** the world or **separate** from it.

You might not see this issue here and indeed many people are drawn to the idea of **god being the world** without even realising. They talk of Mother Nature doing or being, of a **world that is sacred** and needing care, love and attention and of **seeing god in everything**.

They may not worship flowers and trees but amongst them are those who 'commune with nature'. Such an attitude sees the world or even the universe as God.

The alternative is to see **God as far greater than the sum of everything we know and experience**. So the Creator is more powerful than the sum of the whole, just as the potter is more powerful than the clay.

4. If we are prepared to consider that God is outside of time and space (**infinite**) is he involved in the world or not?

The gut human response is - we *think he could be but in practice he isn't*.

This gives rise to questions like:

Why doesn't God do something about...?

Why did God allow...?

Culturally we have grown up in a world which says that in the event of God existing, he isn't involved. He might have started off with a big bang, but since then evolution has done the rest. Yet deep down, usually hidden away even from ourselves is the response that turns to prayer when all else fails, *the untaught hunch that God intervenes*.

No wonder then that many of the world's major religions have, to a certain extent, this as a core thesis: **that God appoints someone to show the way, a set of ideas to follow, holy things to do, hints at answers to....**

Christianity however goes much further, not only does it claim that God *is* interested in the world and *can* intervene, its central message is that *God himself* came to earth to solve its greatest problem.

We began by asking - **how does God fit into this world?**

We are beginning to see that this is the wrong question.

It is not so much how He fits in, but how we fit into His world!

This represents a complete 'U' turn of thought. No longer is it the search for 'me' and 'my' but for 'God' and 'His' and what **He** has done.

...Such a 'U' turn is at the heart of what the Bible calls Repentance.

TO DISCUSS...

1. As a group, honestly and briefly discuss what you think 'your worldview' is currently.

2. What do you think your culture says and thinks about Jesus Christ today?

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