

Exploring Christianity:

Do All Roads Lead To God?

DO ALL ROADS LEAD TO GOD?

Name: _____

Grade: _____

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Faith Under Fire Participant's Guide

Read It! *One Way?*

Jeff and Tony sat on the floor of their dorm room, staring at the open books in front of them.

"So . . . what do you make of this, Jeff?" Tony asked.

"I don't know," Jeff muttered. "I didn't like it when you told me about it, and I don't like it any better reading it for myself."

"I know what you mean. You got another slice of pizza over there?"

"Here," Jeff slid the box over to his friend, the remaining piece of cold pepperoni pizza shifting during the transition. "Maybe it's not as bad as it sounds. Let me read it again." He picked up the Bible and read the troubling verse carefully: "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' Nope, it still sounds totally exclusive. I hate it."

"It doesn't sound like the gentle, loving Jesus that I remember hearing about growing up," Tony said.

"It seems like he's drawing a line in the sand. You're either in or out," Jeff complained.

"But . . . what if that's it? What if he *is* the way, the *only* way?" Tony asked as he munched a bite of pizza.

"Look, maybe we've got it all wrong. Maybe it doesn't mean what we think it means. We need an expert," Jeff said.

"What time is it?" Tony asked, polishing off the last bite of crust.

"Late," Jeff observed.

"Let's just check out that church down on Third. Maybe somebody will still be around there."

"Why not?" Jeff agreed.

The door creaked as they slowly pushed it open. The pews were empty, the lights dim, the wooden floors echoed as they walked down the aisle. A moment later, someone in the back opened a door, spilling a ray of light into the sanctuary.

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"Can I help you guys?" asked the slender, gray-haired man standing in the doorway.

"Yeah, sure, that would be great," Tony said as he introduced the two of them. "We were talking about a verse in the Bible, and we wanted another opinion. What do you make of this?" Tony flipped open his Bible to John 14:6 and read it aloud. "That sounds awfully exclusive. It doesn't seem fair to me to count some in and some out based on whether or not they happened to hear about Jesus."

The pastor—"just call me Stephen"—nodded; he had taught from this passage a few times in his thirty-plus years of ministry. "Jesus didn't mean he was the *only* way," he assured them. "He meant he was the *best* way. He was—and is—the *best* way to learn about the way to God."

Jeff shook his head. "But that's not what it says. Jesus is saying he is *the* way, and we need to find truth and life through him alone. Isn't that the point he's making?"

"Imagine taking a road trip to Chicago," Stephen began. "There are a lot of different highways and side roads you could take to get there. Some ways would take longer than others, but there *is* a best, most direct way. The best way is the most efficient way, but it's okay if you don't take the most efficient way, because all ways will eventually get you there." Stephen noticed Tony tapping the arm of his chair nervously. "What's on your mind, Tony?"

Tony stopped tapping. "I see your point, but some things *are* very narrow. Jeff's car runs only on gasoline, not water or milk or beer. We can't try pouring Mountain Dew in his gas tank because there's no other way to make his engine run so we can make the trip to Chicago in the first place. See, there's no give or take on some things. Look, Stephen, a lot of times, there really is only one way . . . and maybe this time, Jesus meant he was *the* only way." Stephen looked at the boys with compassion. He understood

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their desire to find answers. It reminded him of his own search years ago, which led him into ministry. He wanted to encourage them. "Think about it—"

"I am!" Tony exclaimed. Jeff elbowed him.

"No, it's okay. I understand your excitement. Let me try explaining it this way. In science, the answers are often cut-and-dried, but in subjects like philosophy and theology, it's more interpretive, more fluid. So consider this: If you want to master a subject, say something like physics, you have a couple of ways to go about it. You could go to the bookstore and the library and gather a lot of books around you, read them all, and you'd probably learn a lot about physics. But another way," he leaned forward, hoping this analogy fit the undergrad mentality, "would be to sign up for a college course on physics taught by a brilliant professor. Now, you tell me, which of those two ways would be the *best* way to learn about physics?"

"Signing up for the course," Tony answered.

"Exactly." Stephen watched their faces. "That's what Jesus meant. Going to God through Jesus is like taking the course taught by the all-knowing master. He isn't the *only* way to God, but he *is* the *best* way."

Both Tony and Jeff hesitated, each deep in thought. Finally, Jeff broke the silence. "Thanks for your time, Stephen."

"No problem. Come back any time. Take care."

When the heavy door shut behind Jeff and Tony, they paused on the top step. "What's the matter, Jeff?" Tony asked.

"I don't know ... I guess I just wonder," Jeff continued, as they headed back to the dorm. "It still seems like he's changing the meaning. Hey, which way do you want to take back to the dorm?"

"I don't suppose it matters," Tony said with a grin. "Or does it?"

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Watch It!

Use the following space to take notes as you view the video in which Lee Strobel interviews Kenneth Bowers, a member of the national governing body of the Bahá'í of the United States and author of *God Speaks Again: An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith*, and Gregory Kouss, president of Stand to Reason and author of the book *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*.

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1. Why do you think there are so many different religions in the world? Is it confusing or frustrating to you that there are so many religions from which to choose? Explain.

“The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. . . . Truth is the exclusive property of no single scripture. . . . I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mohammed or Zoroaster.”

Mahatma Gandhi

2. Why do you think God allows so many religions to exist? Why doesn't he just narrow down the choices so it's easier to find him?

3. Do you think all the major religions are fundamentally the same or fundamentally different? If you can, give reasons to back up your answer.

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"I am absolutely against any religion that says that one faith is superior to another. I don't see how that is anything different than spiritual racism. It's a way of saying that we are closer to God than you, and that's what leads to hatred."

Rabbi Schmuley Boteach

4. Consider the following two statements: "***There are many different ways to get to my house.***" / "***All roads lead to my house.***" Are both of these logical? Why or why not?

"To overlook obvious differences between religions might seem broad-minded. In reality it is about as proud and narrow as a person could get. To say all religions are basically the same is to claim to be smarter than each of the billions of people who believe the unique aspects of their religion are of supreme importance to God. It is to claim that even though you are not an expert in their religion, you know they are wrong—you know their religion is really no different."

Grantley Morris

5. How likely does it seem to you that any one religion would have the final say on what is true or not? Explain.

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“The extreme [Christian] who believes that all Muslims go to hell is probably not so much ignorant ... as blinded by dark dogmatic spectacles through which he can see no good in religious devotion outside his own.”

Theologian John Hick

6. Kenneth Bowers holds to the Baha'i belief that there is one God who has progressively revealed the same path through various divine messages throughout history (including, but not limited to, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad). What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of this claim? Do you agree or disagree with this assertion? Explain.

7. Given two contradictory and opposing statements, choose all that apply:

- Both statements may be true at the same time.
- Both statements cannot be true at the same time.
- At least one statement must be false.
- One statement may be true or both statements may be false but both statements cannot both be true at the same time.

“Moses could mediate on the law; Muhammad could brandish a sword; Buddha could give personal counsel; Confucius could offer wise sayings; but none of these men was qualified to offer an atonement for the sins of the world. . . . Christ alone is worthy of unlimited devotion and service.”

Theologian R. C. Sproul

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8. Gregory Koukl makes the following statement: "Either Jesus was the Messiah or he was not the Messiah. If he's not the Messiah then the Jews are right and the Christians are wrong. IF he is the Messiah then the Christians are right and the Jews are wrong. Under no circumstance can they both be right. When you die you either go to heaven or hell, or you get reincarnated, or you get absorbed into God, or you lie in the grave. But you can't do them all." What is your reaction to Koukl's statement? Does it seem reasonable to expect all regions to be true in their own way, in spite of significant differences? Why or why not? Explain your response.

9. Read the legend of the elephant and the blind men (see next page). How does this legend apply to the issue of searching for and discovering the truth about God and religion? Do you agree with its conclusion? Why or why not?

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An Indian Legend *Six Blind Men and the Elephant*

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.
The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"
The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! what have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"
The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up he spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"
The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"
The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man

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Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope.
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
They all were in the wrong!

JOHN GODFREY SAXE (1816–1887)

10. Do you agree or disagree with the concept that because human understanding is finite, and God is infinite, humans need some kind of divine revelation to more fully understand who God is, so that we are no longer like the "blind men" only seeing a small part of the larger truth? Explain your response.

11. According to the following Bible verses, do you think that Jesus taught that there are many paths to God? Explain.

[Jesus speaking] "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that

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leads to life, and only a few find it. Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." (Matthew 7:13–15)

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. (1 Timothy 2:5–6)

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. (John 10:7)

He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:10–12)

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death. (Proverbs 14:12)

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. . . . At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people." (Matthew 24:4–5, 10–11)

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12. According to the Scriptures from question 11, what conclusions can you draw about Jesus' claim to be the only way to God? How confident are you that all roads lead to God?

“Even though many religions seem to be the same on the surface, the closer one gets to the central teachings, the more apparent the differences become. It is totally incorrect to say that all religions are the same.”

**Josh McDowell, *Answers to Tough Questions
Skeptics Ask about the Christian Faith***

13. How, if at all, do the exclusive claims of Jesus worry, bother, or embarrass you? Has your reaction changed over time? Explain.