



THE PROBLEM OF GOD

Week Two

Opening Prayer

Jesus, we thank you for this group. As we gather together today, please help this time to be life-giving for us as individuals and as a group. Amen.

Leader Instructions: If your group is new or you have new members in your group, here are some additional questions for you to go over with your group.

To help us get to know one another a little better, let's hear a little bit about your EastLake story.

- How long have you been coming to EastLake Church?
- Why did you go to EastLake Church the first time? What caused you to come back the second time?

Icebreaker

- What is something you believed in as a kid, but you don't believe in now? What was that process of discovery like?
- Tell us about a time you were foolishly gullible, impressionable, or easy to persuade.
- Tell us about a time you were unnecessarily suspicious, doubtful, or skeptical of someone or something.
- In life, what good might come from having a more impressionable bent? What good might come from having a more skeptical posture?

Talk it Over

This week is week two of our new series, The Problem of God. A foundational idea in this series we want everyone to keep in mind is that faith is not intended to be religious, wishful, magical thinking. Faith is not about blindly following something or avoiding all questions or doubts. In fact, faith is not 100% certainty. Each of us has permission to think critically or question issues surrounding faith, God, the Bible, and so forth. There is even room for doubt in our faith story; doubt is not the opposite or the enemy of faith. Rather, when we talk about faith we are talking about having enough confidence to commit to a course of action because of a reasonable level of trust. In other words, Christian faith is simply reasonable confidence in the evidence of Jesus.

- Tell us about a time you knew there was a level of risk involved but you put your trust in something or someone and things worked out well in the end.
- What are some small indicators that tell you someone or something is "trustworthy?"
- In your own life, how do you see, or how have you seen, your faith and doubt coexist?
- Tell us about a time God showed up in your life amidst your doubts and questions.

In order to help us create a safe, trusting environment as a group, it's important we understand that the goal of this group is to help friendship and faith grow. This means we will respect each other as we talk through our discussion and we will graciously remember that each of us is in process. The goal of this group is not to force our opinions, views, beliefs, faith, etc. on one another. This means we can disagree and still listen to one another, get along, and point one another to the love of God.

(Content continued on the next page.)

- What are some relational qualities or group rules that might help us build trust and safety as a group?

The invitation laid out for each of us in this series is that we each stay open to following where the evidence may lead us — instead of pushing for where we hope the evidence leads or where we feel the evidence should go.

- Sometimes it can be hard to listen to ideas that don't support what we want to hear or currently believe. Tell us about a time you struggled to follow the evidence. What created the struggle for you?
- Tell us about a time you thought one thing and then evidence encouraged you to see things differently. In other words, tell us about a time you were proven wrong. What was that process like?

Will someone read our theme verse Hebrews 11:1 out loud for us? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

- Tell us about meaningful ways you have grown in your confidence in God despite a lack of 100% certainty.
- What are some aspects of your faith and life that help you find confidence in God?
- Is there an area of your faith you wish you had more confidence in? Tell us what that area is and why you desire more confidence in that area?

This week we covered two big topics involving faith. First, we looked at the “Christ Myth” or the discussion around the question of whether or not Christ actually existed or if the Christ story is all just a myth. Next, we looked at the legitimacy of the Bible. These two issues go hand in hand and are each their own immense areas of study. This week's talk barely scratched the surface of these two topics.

- Prior to this week's talk, have you contemplated or heard about the “Christ Myth” before? If so, tell us what you have heard or considered.
- If the Jesus story were just a myth, what ramifications would this have for Christianity?
- If the Jesus story is in fact true, what ramifications does it have for humankind?
- Where are you at personally on the question of the Jesus story being real or a myth?
- What is the hardest part of the Jesus story for you to believe?
- What are the doubts/questions you have had to confront in relation to the Bible, and why?
- What issues do you hear from people most often in regard to their doubts about the Bible?
- In what ways is it hard for you to trust the Bible? In what ways is it easy for you to trust the Bible?
- In developing your trust or mistrust of the Bible, how much have you considered the historical scrutiny it has been placed under?

Will someone read Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV) out loud for us? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

The point of the Bible is to reveal a God who loves you and wants you to know him. What we see in the Bible is a progressive revelation of God interacting with humanity in order to help them know his love. The overarching message of the Bible is to present the story of a loving, good, present God. Jesus exemplifies this message. The Jesus story is the crux of the narrative.

- How would seeing the Bible as a collection of books that reveal a progressive story impact how you read and relate to the Bible?
- Do you view the purpose of the Bible differently now than you used to? Or, does your idea of what the purpose of the Bible is differ from what we heard in the message? If so, how?
- What impact does it have on us today if we understand the point of the Bible is to tell us about God's love?

Closing Prayer

Leader Instructions: Feel free to lead this week's closing prayer using the prompt below or praying your own prayer for the group. You can also ask your group if someone would like to share a quick, simple closing prayer.

God, thank you for bringing us together today to talk openly about issues and questions regarding our faith. Thank you for welcoming our doubts, questions, and critical thinking. Help us to grow in our confidence in you and your love in our process of honest exploration. And please help us to grow in friendship through this process too. Amen.

Closing Reminders For Our Group

- Let's each commit to attending all six weeks of this group.
- As a group, let's make sure we have all our group logistics squared away for next week. For example, who wants to bring snack next week? Are we all set on when we meet next? Are there any childcare details we should talk about?

How To Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead.