



## Leader's notes

# why on earth... are some Christians so judgemental?

This session asks why some Christians seem so judgemental, and asks why some people act that way.

We find that Jesus showed us a different way to relate, an approach to others that's about love and acceptance.

**Needed:** Drinks, name/picture badges (if desired), Session Sheets, some pens.

**General Intro:** Why on Earth...? takes a look at some of life's hardest questions. Each session offers simple first steps in exploring a difficult subject. These are not final answers, just starting-points. Group members are invited to talk about their own thoughts and experiences with honesty. Then we explore Christian angles on the subject, and begin to think how these might apply in our own lives.

**Session Intro:** Faith can inspire amazing acts of kindness, generosity and charity in people. And yet some religious people seem to spend their time judging and criticising others. They often come across as angry and intolerant, which puts lots of people off the whole idea of faith. In this session we ask why some religious people appear to be so judgemental. And we explore a powerful story which shows that real faith is not about judging people. Instead, Jesus tells us it's about loving people and being there for them, whatever they are going through.

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## Starters (approx 30 mins)

- Drinks, welcome, notices, write name badge (if desired).
- Two short passages later in the session need to be read aloud. Identify somebody who is happy to do this (alternatively, the leader can plan to read them).
- ICEBREAKER:  
Ask group members to imagine they have won the lottery. What are they going to spend their winnings on, and why? Ask each person to share their answer with the whole group, and ensure everybody who wants to speak has the chance.
- BACKGROUND NOISE (in pairs):  
Ask group members to get into pairs. Hand out Session Sheets and invite everybody to look at the Background Noise picture.

Explain that we all carry thoughts and ideas in our head on a range of issues. These ideas may come from lots of places. In pairs, we are going to explore the 'background noise' already in our heads on the topic. Explain that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers here: it's all about examining our own starting-points.



Explain that the thought-bubbles represent:

- > (School) School and upbringing
- > (People) Friends and family
- > (TV) TV and film
- > (Smartphone) Social media
- > (Question-Mark) Anything else

In their pairs, invite group members to discuss their own thoughts and experiences to do with religious people being judgemental. Have they experienced this themselves? Or come across examples in the news or in TV programmes? Anywhere else? Use the thought-bubbles as a prompt if helpful.

After a few minutes, invite people to rejoin the whole group. Invite them to share anything they discussed if they would like to.

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## Main Course (approx 45 mins)

- VIDEO
- ON SHEET:  
Ask group members to look at Video Recap, a summary of key points in the video:



**Son wastes dad's money**



**Dad welcomes him home**



**Older brother is angry**



**Dad represents God**



**Uptight religious people**



**Being there for others**

- DISCUSS (*whole group*): Allow a few minutes to discuss each of the following questions:
  - What part of the video stood out for you?
  - Did you identify with any of the three characters yourself?

- ON SHEET: Divide the group into three groups (an easy way to do this is to go round the group in turn and ask people to call out a number: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3...). When people are in their groups, tell them each group is going to be one of the three characters, and see things from that character's perspective:

- 1) Older Brother Group
- 2) Younger Brother Group
- 3) Dad Group

Ask somebody to read out *Text: the real hero?* on the Session Sheet.

'I think the hero of the story is the older brother.  
He's the one who plays by the rules, and sticks around to help his Dad.'

Ask each group to discuss how their character would react to that statement. Is it true? Is it missing something important? They have around 10 minutes for this.

- DISCUSS (*whole group*): Ask each group in turn to feed back their main ideas to the whole group. Open it up for discussion (around 5 minutes).
- ON SHEET: Ask the group to have a look at *Right and Wrong?* on the Session Sheet.



- EXPLAIN (*read out*): This picture imagines what might be going on in the older son's mind. He accuses Dad of not believing in right and wrong, because Dad welcomed the younger son home without punishing him.
- DISCUSS (*whole group*): Take a few minutes to discuss each of the following questions:
  - Is it true what the older son says here: that Dad doesn't believe in right and wrong?
  - What is the difference between believing in right and wrong, and being judgemental? Can you think of an example?

- ON SHEET: Ask somebody to read out *Text: speck and log* on the Session Sheet.

'Why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?'  
(Jesus)

- DISCUSS (*whole group*): Take a few moments to discuss the following questions:
    - What does Jesus mean here?
    - What is the serious message behind the funny picture Jesus paints?
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## **Dessert** (*approx 15 mins*)

- Invite the group to join in either the Creative Prayer or Space to Think (as decided by the leader before the session). Then end by praying the Closing Prayer out loud.

### 1) Creative Prayer:

- Invite the group to sit quietly, with eyes closed.
- Invite them to put themselves in the shoes of the younger son. Do they need to say sorry to God for something, and return home? Take a few moments to think about this.
- Next, invite them to put themselves in the shoes of the older son. Is there a particular person in their own life they resent, or feel angry with? Invite them to think how God views that person. Finally, invite group members to pray that God will help them deal kindly with that person.

**2) Space to Think:** time to reflect on words from the Bible, ending with the Lord's Prayer Tell the group you are going to read out a short passage from the Bible (below)

Say you are going to read the words twice, slowly.

Invite them to take a few minutes in silence to think what one word or idea stands out to them, and why.

Read the passage (twice, slowly):

'The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, "All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!" His father said to him, "Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!" ' (Luke 15: 25-32)

*(Modern Version)*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

*(Traditional Version)*

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

• **Closing Prayer** *(read aloud):*

Lord God, we thank you that you show us the paths of right and wrong, and a better way to live. But we also thank you that you are full of love and mercy, and welcome us home with open arms when we go astray. Help us to reach out to others with the same love and forgiveness you've shown to us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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## **Takeaway**

- ON SHEET: Ask somebody to read out the *Takeaway* section:

In the week ahead, read these words of Jesus at the start of every day:  
'Do to others as you would like them to do to you'.

Look for opportunities to show the sort of kindness and hospitality to another person that you'd like people to show you.