



FAITH *Questions*

SESSION 5: TROUBLING CHURCH HISTORY



Session Activities

Aim: To dive into the ideas around troubling church history, to think about how we sensitively deal with them today, and how we see the goodness in amongst the challenge.

Leaders note: This session is best used as a follow-up to the 'Purpose of the church' session earlier in the resource. While each session can be used independently, they are best used together to give a well rounded view. As with that session, remember that there may be elements of this that may be challenging or uncomfortable for participants and so be sensitive when delivering them.

INTRODUCING

This session begins with the assumption that there are elements of church history to be troubled by. It is worth spending some time with the group to start with to find out if they agree, or if they think that actually the history of the church is generally positive.

To do this well, we want to give space for the group to be able to be open in what they think, and help members who may be less confident in sharing in a group setting. For this reason this next activity will be anonymised. Have each person take a Positive and a Negative card, and have them think by themselves about a high point, and a low point of church history and put them on the appropriate card. Once they have done this, have them place the cards centrally and then as the leader pick them out and group them into the Positive and Negative. Some questions to consider with the group are:

1. Are there any ideas/events that repeat in either group?
2. Are there any patterns to what is in one group and what is in the other?

NOTE: Make sure that the group understand that this is not the point to pick apart other people's suggestions. People may be feeling vulnerable having taken a risk putting their ideas down, we want to make sure that they feel listened to and able to contribute in the rest of the session, rather than feeling like they are going to be shot down for any suggestion.

EXPLORING

Troubling Church History script

EXPANDING

The aim of this activity is to show how the church has been a net-positive over its history, when looked at from the perspective of attitude shifts rather than at individual events.

To get the group thinking about this, have the Characteristics Cards printed. You may need more than one set if you are working with a larger group. Have the cards cut out individually and either pass out one set per group, or have one set centrally. Using Side 1, have the group discuss whether the characteristic or value on the card is seen positively or negatively today. You might also decide to rank them from most to least positive.

Once you have done this, ask a person to take one card at a time, and read the text on the reverse. The idea is to introduce participants to these values having changes over time, and the way we think of them as good or bad shifting as well.

Once you have looked at the backs of all of the cards, and if your group has a good grasp of the ideas, then ask them if they can see the way that Christianity has influenced the way we think of these ideas over time.

Going Deeper

Where has this come from?

To help you think about this more deeply, and if your group are engaging well with the material so far, a good place to look for the foundations of this worldview are the creation stories of the different people groups.

To support this, below we have summarised Origin Stories from three ancient cultures: Hebrew, Greek, and Babylonian. Our aim in exploring these is not to start a conversation about the beginnings of the universe, but instead to think about what the people from these cultures thought about themselves.

Babylon

- Before the start of time, the gods emerged, with Marduk becoming the most powerful.
- There was a battle amongst the gods, culminating in a fight between Marduk and Tiamat.
- Marduk defeated Tiamat, and from her remains created the sky.
- Marduk used his blood to create humans. Humans were made as slaves to the gods, to do the things the gods did not want to.
- After this, Marduk ordered the creation of Babylon.

Greek/Roman

- In the beginning there was chaos, out of which emerged Gaia. Gaia then gave birth to the sky.
- The first Titans were born, six male and six female.
- Zeus was born as the son of the Titan Cronus. He fought his father for rulership of the world and won, before banishing the titans to the abyss.
- Zeus charged Prometheus with creating humans, which he did out of mud before Athena breathed life into the clay figure.

Hebrew

- In the beginning there was nothing, with God hovering over the nothingness.
- God spoke sky, water, and earth into being, before populating them with stars, birds, fish and animals.
- God created humans from soil, breathed life into them, and placed them in a special part of creation where all was provided for them.

Ask participants if they can pick out:

- How the stories make them feel.
- What is the place that humans have in the story? Are they significant?
- How might this affect the way people who grow up with these stories see each other.

Leaders Note:

What we are trying to explore with this is that the Genesis creation story seems peaceful and methodical, with humans treated as significant partners. In contrast they are an afterthought in the Greek story, and slaves in the Babylonian. This underlying sense of humans as important to creation is why Christianity has had the effect over history that it has, with human life increasing in value and significance over time. Draw this out with the group so that they can draw the threads together.

PRAYING

As we come to the end of this session, there are some different areas you could focus your groups prayers;

- You could focus on thanking God for the work of His Church in the world, and the slow and steady transformation that it has acted as a focus for.
- You could focus on thinking about those areas where the church has not been what it should, where it has focused on the wrong things, the wrong people, the wrong values. While we cannot take responsibility for these things ourselves, we can speak to God about how the church can make amends for these things, and how we can be part of it's reconciliation in doing this.
- You could focus on the difference your church could make to your area now, how as a community you can live out the values that Jesus taught and bring goodness, joy, and hope to the streets where you live.