

# SOUL

*Christianity*  
EXPLORED

## Before we begin

This section contains the studies to work through over the seven-week *Soul* course. It includes all the material in the group member's *Soul Handbook*, together with a range of activities, and answers to the questions.

The *Soul* course has been written with 15-18s and young adults in mind. The sessions work alongside the *Soul DVD*, and the activities and questions are designed to stretch and challenge older teenagers and young adults.

However, you know your group best. You may decide that replacing some or all of the episodes from the *Soul DVD* with live talks will suit your particular group better. If so, talk outlines for the seven sessions can be found in the appendices on page 121.

We have aimed to keep the material as flexible as possible to allow you to make these adjustments easily if they would help your group.

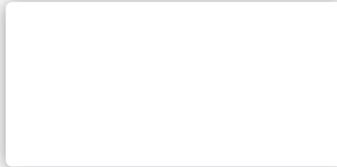
# 1 Christianity is Christ

If you could ask God one question, and you knew it would be answered, what would it be?

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## READ MARK 1:1

1 What does Mark say Christianity is all about in the first sentence of his book?



2 How is that different from some of the pictures we've drawn?



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**Note:** In the notes that follow, the **bold text** shown in the light grey boxes (like this one) is the material that appears in the *Soul Handbook* used by group members.

# Christianity is Christ

▶ *Welcome the group and thank them for coming. Introduce yourself if necessary, letting them know that you are there to help and answer any questions they might have.*

▶ *Explain how the session will work and what time it will finish. Let the group know what kinds of things they will be doing, eg: We'll be doing some warm-up activities to get to know each other a little, having a brief discussion, watching a DVD, and then looking together at a bit of the Bible. There will be plenty of time and opportunity for you to ask any question you want to.*

▶ *Explain that no one will be asked to read out loud, pray, or answer any question they don't want to. This group is about trying to look at the answers to the big questions of life in a relaxed way.*

## OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY

▶ *If it is appropriate for your group, start the session with an icebreaker activity.*

## 2-MINUTE MIXER

**Aim:** To get everyone to know each other and to “break the ice”.

**Equipment:** CD/MP3 player; timer; whistle, gong or car horn.

▶ *This is essentially “speed dating”, but where the aim is to share a few bits of information with each other, so that everyone meets each other.*

- Tell the group that they must talk to five different people for two minutes each, and share the following information with them: Full name (including middle names!); where they were born; their most precious possession; their closest friend; the reason they decided to come to this *Soul* group; an unusual fact about themselves; what is the first

## Leader's checklist

### Have you...

- Made it clear to people the time and place where you will meet?
- Collected any items needed for the activities?
- Enough Bibles or Mark's Gospels for the group?
- Soul Handbooks and a pen or pencil for each group member?
- Set up the Soul DVD ready to play? (Or prepared the optional talk and added any personal illustrations.)
- Thought through your answers to each of the questions?
- Prayed for each group member and yourself as the leader?

thing they would buy if they were given loads of money, etc. Choose a short list of questions that is suitable for your group. You may want to put the questions up on a flipchart or powerpoint slide where people can see them.

- ▶ Play music during this time, and blow a whistle or bang a gong (or just shout) when the two minutes is up.

**Note:** If you have a larger group, you could do this in one minute, so that people get to speak to more people. It will create a more energetic activity.

## TRUE OR FALSE?

**Aim:** To get everyone to know each other and to “break the ice”.

**Equipment:** None.

- ▶ Ask a group member to give three “facts” about him/herself – two of which are true and one made up.
- ▶ The rest of the group then votes on which “fact” is the made-up one.
- ▶ Repeat until every group member has had a turn at giving their three “facts”.

**Note:** Do this as one group if possible, to help you get to know each other – but if you have a larger group, divide into small groups with a leader in each one to run the game.

▶ *If neither of these activities will work for your group or for yourself, there are more ideas online at [www.ceministries.org/soul](http://www.ceministries.org/soul). Or feel free not to use any!*

## EXPLORE

▶ *Give a Soul Handbook to each participant. Ask them to turn to page 4 and to write down their answer to this question:*

**If you could ask God one question, and you knew it would be answered, what would it be?**

▶ *Ask the group to share their answers. Note down what they are so that you can deal with them at some point during the course. Don't attempt to answer all the questions at this time, but do acknowledge every question and assure the group that they will be covered during Soul. (Some questions will be answered by the talks and some – like questions about suffering – are best dealt with after the talks on the cross / grace.) However, you may want to answer one or two short questions at this point, if they are simple to deal with and not contentious. You might also want to write your own question and share it with the group. **Note:** If your group members would be embarrassed to say their questions, ask them to write them on a piece of paper and put them in a “question box”. You can then collect all the questions from the box and read them to the group.*

➤ Reassure the group that the questions they are asking are perfectly normal – and they are questions that many people have about life and God. You may even say that this is a question that you have struggled with. This is to help people see that the things they may feel very intensely about are things that others struggle to understand too.

➤ Either here, or after the talk, the group may ask questions on science/evolution/creation. Make sure you plan a time to talk about this – probably during a later session, using the notes on page 185. It may be enough at this point to say that the course is not making any particular point about evolution or creation. We're simply showing that we are either the result of an accident or we have been made by someone – and that this makes a difference to how we see "the meaning of life".

### GROUP ACTIVITY: POSTER

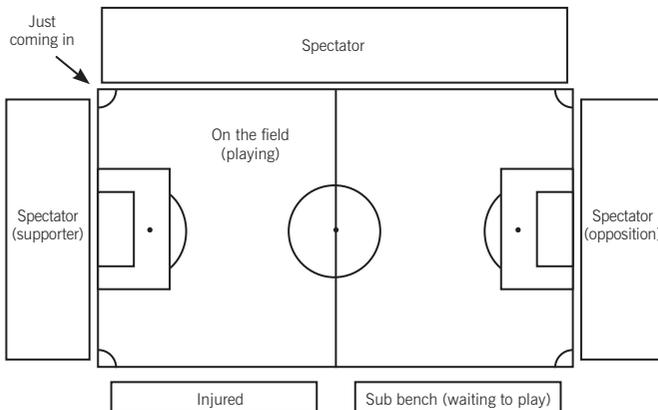
- Give the group one large piece of paper and some pens. Ask them to draw a poster of things that come into their minds when they think of Christianity. For example, they might draw a large cathedral or church building. If some of the group prefer not to draw, they can write single words on the poster instead.

**Note:** Leaders need to allow the group to draw what they want. If they want to draw something that is theologically problematic, allow them to do it because there will be an opportunity later to correct misunderstandings.

**Note:** It is important to do this activity as it is referred to in the study questions.

### OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY: FOOTBALL PITCH

- Give the group one large piece of paper and some pens. On it draw a football pitch or soccer field with areas marked like the diagram below: supporters, opposition, entrance, injury bench etc. Ask group members to mark with a cross where they think they are at the moment, ie: a player would be someone who thinks they are already a Christian; coming in the entrance would be someone who doesn't know much about the Christian faith, and is just starting to look it over; injured – has been a Christian, but is now not sure; opposition – hostile to Christianity for some reason; supporters – have always been to church (from a Christian family perhaps) but starting to ask if this is the team they want to support for the rest of their lives.



Explain that this is to help them, not for others to judge them. Allow people to think it over and put a cross where they think they are, and give them the chance to explain why they put their mark where they did. **Do not force anyone to make a mark if they don't want to.**

**Note:** This activity is optional. If you think it will be unhelpful for your group, or you are concerned that it may “pigeonhole” them right at the beginning of the course, then don't use it.

You can download a sheet with this illustration on it at [www.ceministries.org/soul](http://www.ceministries.org/soul).

▶ Give each person a Bible. Show them where they can find Mark's Gospel. Explain how chapters and verses work.

▶ Ask everyone to turn to **Mark 1:1**.

▶ One of the leaders should read **Mark 1:1** aloud; then the group should work through the questions below. The answers are given here for your reference.

**Note:** The questions and quotes in *Soul* are based on the 1984 edition of the New International Version (NIV). If you are using the 2011 revised NIV, you will find that “Jesus Christ” in Mark 1:1 has been changed to “Jesus the Messiah”. The change from “Christ” to “Messiah” does not change the meaning of the verse, since the terms mean the same. They speak of the King who God promised to send into the world. “Christ” is from the Greek word; “Messiah” comes from the Hebrew.

### What does Mark say Christianity is all about in the first sentence of his book?

- ▶ He says that it is “good news”. (Explain that the word “gospel” means “good news”.)
- ▶ He says it's about Jesus.
- ▶ He says it's about Jesus being the Son of God. (\*see note on this below)

**\*Note:** Some eagle-eyed participants may notice a footnote in the NIV that says: “Some ancient manuscripts do not have the words ‘the Son of God’”, and ask you about it. This may, in turn, raise all kinds of issues about the reliability of the Bible, and the trustworthiness of Mark. If this is an issue for your group, or for an individual, plan to include some input on the reliability of the Bible. See notes on page 185.

### How is that different from some of the pictures we've drawn?

*This question is designed to tackle some of the common misconceptions about the Christian faith that may have come up in the poster-drawing exercise.*

- ▶ He says that it is “good news”. In other words it's not bad news; it's great, brilliant and exciting news – far from boring! If you think Christianity is boring, then you've not really understood what it's all about.

- ④ He says it's about Jesus. It's not about buildings, or services, or "religion" – it's about a man who lived and walked and breathed in history, called Jesus.
- ④ He says it's about Jesus being the Son of God. It's about God making himself known to us through Jesus.

## **DVD PRESENTATION**

▶ *Watch Episode 1 of the Soul DVD, or deliver Talk 1 using the notes on page 121. The notes for this talk can also be downloaded from [www.ceministries.org/soul](http://www.ceministries.org/soul) to enable you to adapt them for your group and add your own illustrations.*

▶ *There is a recap (called DOWNLOAD) in the group member's Soul Handbook for their reference. Encourage people to write notes on the Download page as they listen to the talk. The recap is also printed below.*

## **DOWNLOAD**

- ④ Christianity is not about rules or ceremonies. It's all about Jesus Christ.
- ④ If we're here by chance, we have no real significance or value. But God created us – so we matter enormously.
- ④ We all face death sooner or later. Since we all have to die, what's the point of living?
- ④ The Bible says we don't really start living until we know the one who made us, and live as he made us to live.
- ④ But how can we get to know God? We need him to reveal himself to us. Mark says he's done that for us by sending Jesus Christ. If we want to know what God is like, we must look at Jesus.
- ④ That's why "the gospel about Jesus Christ" is good news.

## **TALKBACK**

▶ *Use the questions below to encourage discussion (they are also printed in the group member's Soul Handbook).*

▶ *Remember that this is the first session, and the aim here is not to explain the whole gospel, challenge them to become Christians, or start an argument about what they currently believe. It is simply to open up the themes that will be covered in subsequent weeks.*

▶ *Be careful that TALKBACK does not run over time. It is much better to stop a good discussion, leaving them hungry for more, than to talk everything out in detail with the risk of boring some of the group, or putting them off coming back next time.*

**If you asked a group of people in the street: “What’s the point of life?”, what kind of answers would you get?**

- › Answers might include: making lots of money; having a good time; having good friends; finding love.
- › You might ask them why they think different people think different things are important.
- › The aim here is not to criticize these views, but to get the group thinking about the meaning of life. There is no pressing need to comment on them now, unless the discussion naturally heads that way.

**What do most people think about God and Christianity? Why do you think that is?**

- › This is to recap the EXPLORE questions, without getting too personal. Answers may include: boring, irrelevant, outdated, full of rules etc.
- › Explain that churches can very easily forget that Christianity is all about Jesus – and the resulting religion can become any or all of those things. But this is not real Christianity.
- › If necessary, sympathize with anyone in the group who may have had a bad experience of religion – an unhelpful minister, boring services etc.

**What about Jesus? Do people think he matters? What do you think?**

- › At this stage don’t press anyone to give an answer for what they think, but if they do, it may be appropriate to ask them why.
- › Remind them that, according to Mark 1:1, Jesus is “good news”.

## **CONCLUSION**

*Finish by encouraging your group members to come back next time. Tell them: “We’ve seen that Mark says that Christianity is all about one man, Jesus. Next time we’ll find out about some of the things Jesus did and said, and why Mark says that Jesus is ‘good news’.”*

## **AFTERWARDS**

- › Write down the questions that people have come up with, so that you can be sure to address them in the coming weeks. It may be helpful at this point to prepare a plan of which question you deal with each session.
- › Think about the people who came. Make a list so that you can pray for them.
- › Think about what contact you may want to make during the week to encourage them to come next time.