

World Religions 101

There are many religions out there, more than we can fit on this sheet. So how can you share the gospel with them? Start by finding and talking to people of other faiths! Don't avoid people because they dress strange, talk or smell strange. Make some new friends!

When sharing, always start with similarities, then focus on the important differences of the gospel message. Always remember to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). If you are studying to talk with someone, PLEASE DIG DEEPER! The info below is simply discussion and starting points. Spend plenty of time studying to know what you're talking about. Take the time to learn and you may even surprise or connect with them because of your knowledge!

Listen, and be slow to respond. No one is converted by winning debates or arguments. The goal is to have others know and trust in Jesus Christ as savior and Lord! When you feel rejected or down, remember to rely on conviction of the Holy Spirit and power of the word of God for conversion. Do your best to sow seeds of the gospel, but remember, you're just the messenger!

Atheism (1.6 billion)

- God does not exist
- Jesus is just man, not divine
- No authoritative texts just Science, reason and personal autonomy
- No life after death

How to Share the gospel

- Create humble dialog
- Cause honest questioning
- Point to creation & design
- Question objective morality
- Point them to God's love

Agnosticism (included in Atheism)

- Greek meaning: "without knowledge"
- It is impossible to know if God exists
Jesus is just man, not divine
- It is impossible to know if there is life after death
- Typically falls under atheism or mysticism

How to Share the gospel

- Point to God becoming man
- Point to God's word
- Share personal life change with Jesus

Secular Humanism (Included in Atheism)

- God does not exist
- Jesus is just man, not divine
- No authoritative texts just Science, reason and personal autonomy
- Human progression at any cost
- View humans as basically good
- Religion was made up to control people

How to Share the gospel

- Question objective morality
- Discuss the unique claims & miracles of Jesus
- Discuss a timeline of Bible history & fulfilled prophecies
- Discuss reliability of the Bible

Postmodernism & Universalism

- Truth is what you make it
- All religions are the same
- Mystical in personal discovery
- Uncertain future

How to Share the gospel

- Question objective morality
 - Discuss the unique claims & miracles of Jesus
 - Discuss absolute truth
 - Discuss heaven/hell
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Islam (1.7 billion)

- “No god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet”
- Sacred texts are the Qur’an, the Hadiths, and Shariah
- There are five pillars in Islam that you must do
- They believe Jesus was alive and was a prophet but did not die on the cross. There are conflicting conspiracy theories as to how he rose again
- There will be final judgement but we can’t know for sure where you will go

How to Share the gospel

- Know what they believe about you!
- Discuss Jesus’ divinity
- 3 persons, one God
- Discuss origins of Bible vs Quran
- Discuss the authenticity of Jesus dying on the cross
- Salvation by faith alone
- Point to God’s love & desire for personal relationship

Buddhism (488 million)

- Founder Siddhartha Gautama started the religion as a response to the suffering around him. He called the path Nirvana or liberation from suffering
- There is an Eight Fold Path and Suffering that are part of the common beliefs, salvation comes through self-effort

How to Share the gospel

- Focus on a personal loving God who gives purpose
- Jesus is God, not a teacher
- Salvation through faith
- God will satisfy our desires
- We long for meaning in suffering

Hinduism (1.08 billion)

- A mix of pantheism (God is everything and everything is god) and polytheism (many gods exist) 330 million gods that are worshiped
- Your soul must pass through reincarnation many times before it can reach Moksha (liberation from reincarnation)
- Three paths: devotion, knowledge and works
- Yoga is a common practice that can lead to moksha, it uses the body to clear the mind connect to Brahman (supreme god)

How to Share the gospel

- Continually point to Jesus: his nature, claims, promise
- Clearly explain the bad news
- Affirm their worth and hope
- God is personal
- God is pursuing you!
- You can be saved forever

Animism (232 million)

- Greek meaning “breath” or “life”
- Ancestor worship
- Not a formal religion, mostly oral teachings
- Attempt to communicate with the spiritual forces (astrology)
- Co-exists with other religions

How to Share the gospel

- Demonstrate Christian community
- Share the gospel clearly
- Exalt Christ
- God is sovereign/powerful over your life & your sin

Judaism (15 million)

- Abraham was the father and patriarch
- The first religion to be monotheistic
- Salvation comes through good works and it’s not guaranteed
- They are awaiting the Messiah to come restore order and peace in world
- The relationship with God is a covenant relationship
- God chose them as his people to have them be an example of holiness and ethical behavior to the world

How to Share the gospel

- Use Jewish terminology
 - Study prophetic scriptures like Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22 in OT or even the Tanakh
 - Discuss sacrifices and security of salvation
 - Relationship vs religion
 - Be sympathetic and avoid back and forth debate
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Catholicism (1.1 billion)

- Greek for “universal doctrine” refers to the broad term that describes all Christian doctrine
- Church was founded by Jesus & Peter was first Pope
- They believe that Jesus was divine, the elements of the last supper actually become the body and blood of Jesus.
- Threefold ministry: bishops, priests and deacons.
- Often use images, candles, incense and water for worship.
- Honor/worship Mary as saint as well as other saints.
- Pray for the dead as well as repeated memorized prayers.
- Seven Sacraments: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and holy marriage.

How to Share the gospel

- Catholics will say there is little difference, but point out the reformation is still fully alive today. Study the reformation together
- Watch the reformation movie “Luther” on YouTube
- Key differences: justification by grace through faith in Christ alone (not works), dependence on unbiblical sacraments, Bible alone is authority and truth, Bible canon, Biblical pastorship vs priesthood, Mary & saint worship (idolatry).

Jehovah’s Witness (8.2 million)

- Founded in 1870 by Charles Russell in Pennsylvania
- Use their own Bible translation “New World Translation”
- Best known for their door to door ministry
- Deny the bodily resurrection of Christ
- Do not observe Christmas, Easter or birthdays
- Do not believe in the trinity or that Jesus is God but that Jesus was begotten and is the angel Michael
- Satan was cast down from heaven in 1914 and that’s when the end times began
- Do not believe in hell but the soul ends after death
- Only 144,000 will go to heaven, the rest will live on earth
- Can only call on Jehovah God to be saved
- Baptism is vital for salvation (based on works)

How to Share the gospel

- Talk about YHWH not Jehovah as being the accurate name of God throughout the OT
- Discuss assurance of salvation
- Discuss origin of the Bible vs New World Translation
- Look over verses that show Jesus was not a spirit when he rose from the grave
- Examine the scriptures to show the trinity John 1:1, Acts 5, John 10:30, Heb 1:3-9, John 8:36, 2 Cor 3:17, & many more.

Mormonism (14.8 million)

- Known as “Latter Day Saint” movement started in 1820 by founder Joseph Smith and followed up by Brigham Young during the Second Great Awakening
- Smith had many visions of angels telling him he to start his own church
- Book of Mormon was written on golden plates (nowhere to be found because he returned them back to the angels) written in Egyptian language found in New York
- He translated the plates with a seer stone which he placed in a hat and placed the hat over his face
- Believe in God (& the heavenly mother which bore all people on Earth) Son & Holy Spirit as 3 distinct persons
- Believe we are literally birth children of God and that the disciples were angels and we too will become gods one day and rule our own planet
- Practice polygamy and baptism as salvific

How to Share the gospel

- Discuss Bible origins
 - Salvation by faith alone vs works
 - Share your testimony of the changing power of the Holy Spirit in your own life
 - Challenge origins of Mormonism & Joseph Smith
 - Discuss fulfilling Bible prophecies vs recent false mormon prophecies
 - Emphasize the message of grace in the gospel!
 - Only Christ is perfect
 - Point them to one of the many non profit ministries reaching out to mormons
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Seventh Day Adventist (25 million)

- Founded in 1863 by Ellen White in Michigan
- Preaches a health message and members are encouraged to be vegetarian, caffeine and alcohol free
- They hold the Saturday as the Sabbath holy day.
- Ellen White the founder & was hit in the head by a rock when she was 7 years old and a few years later started having visions which she believes are connected
- She had 2,000 visions and in each one she did not breathe and had superhuman strength
- They believe the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church are "Babylon".
- They believe they are the remnant of the church as spoken of in Revelation and
- The mark of the beast is going to church on Sunday
- Believe that the Archangel Michael and Jesus are the same person
- Believe that you can achieve a sinless state on Earth and it is possible to overcome sin and live a perfect life

How to Share the gospel

- Discuss Ellen White and origins, plagiarism, and the 1844 false prophecy
- Discuss how only Christ is perfect (Romans 3) and we need him for salvation
- Discuss legalism and emphasize the grace of the gospel Rom. 5:6-10
- Discuss the universal church and the authority of the Word of God over a prophet and contains Christians in all ages Rom 12:4-5, Eph. 1:22-23
- Many consider seventh day as Christians for their faith in Christ as personal savior, even in a yoke of legalism

Taoism (7.5 million)

- Religious and philosophical religion of Chinese origin and it emphasizes living in harmony with Tao or "way"
- Laozi is the founder of Taoism in 4th century BCE
- Main elements are the yin, yang, & the Five Phases
- Taoism is defined as pantheistic, Three Pure Ones: Yuanshi, Lingbao, Daode. Sacred text is the Tao Te Ching written by Laozi

How to Share the gospel

- Addressing their fear of the gods. Many are afraid to turn to Christianity for fear of retribution from their gods
- Talk about a personal relationship with God and prayer
- Salvation by grace and faith not works

Sikhism (24 million)

- Originated in Punjab India, sikhism means "disciple"
- Have sacred scriptures written by Guru Granth Sahib
- Fundamental beliefs include meditation, faith, one creator, unity of all mankind, social justice, service, honest conduct, do not believe in absolute truth and reject discrimination of all kind
- God is known as Ik Onkar, the One Supreme Reality

How to Share the gospel

- Discuss the trinity of 1 God in 3 persons
 - Humans are created in the image of God and hold greater value
 - One eternal life vs many reincarnations
 - We need Christ as savior, not our own strength. Only his name will save us!
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Jainism (4.3 million)

- Traditionally known as Jain Dharma, is an ancient Indian religion belonging to the śramaṇa tradition
- The central tenet is non-violence and respect towards all living beings
- The three main principles of Jainism are ahimsa (non-violence), anekantavada (non-absolutism) and aparigraha (non-possessiveness)
- The word "Jain" derives from the Sanskrit word jina (conqueror). A human being who has conquered all inner passions like attachment, desire, anger, pride, greed, etc. is called Jina
- Jains trace their history through a succession of twenty-four teachers and revivers of the Jain path known as Tirthankaras. In the current era, this started with Rishabhdeva and concluded with Mahavira. Jains believe that Jainism is eternal and while it may be forgotten, it will be revived from time to time
- In old age, you can stop eating to commit suicide

How to Share the gospel

- Talk about the supremacy of God and him as creator
- We can't live a perfect life but Christ did and we rest on what has done
- Be careful of the language you use. Say "I'm a disciple of Christ" rather than Christian
- Talk about the forgiveness of sins by God because of Jesus

Rastafarian (2.7 million)

- A religion which developed in Jamaica in the 1930s, following the coronation of Haile Selassie I as Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930
- Adherents worship him in much the same way as Jesus in his Second Advent, or as God the Son
- Rastafari has always been conceived as a way of life for and by people of African descent
- Rastafari holds many Christian beliefs like the existence of a triune God ("Jah"), who had sent his divine incarnate son to Earth in the form of Jesus (Yeshua) and made himself manifest as the divine person of Haile Selassie I
- Rastafari accept much of the Bible, although they believe that its message and interpretation have been corrupted
- The Rastafari way of life encompasses the spiritual use of cannabis and the rejection of the degenerate society of materialism, oppression, and sensual pleasures, called Babylon
- Responding to question about him being Jesus Christ "I have heard of this idea. I also met certain Rastafarians. I told them clearly that I am a man, that I am mortal, and that I will be replaced by the oncoming generation, and that they should never make a mistake in assuming or pretending that a human being is emanated from a deity."
-Haile Selassie

How to Share the gospel

- Discuss the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible
 - Discuss the trinity and focus on Christ being fully God and fully man
 - Make sure they possess a clear picture of the gospel and salvation, then discuss doctrinal differences after
 - Gently point how the Bible shows that worshipping man is idolatry
 - Use caution with vocabulary. Use "Yeshua" instead of "Jesus".
 - After sharing the gospel, focus on God's design for sexual purity, family, and free from drunkenness.
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Wicca (less than 800,000)

- Old English word for “wizard”
- New attempts to revive nature and fertility worship
- No unity of doctrine or organization
- Worship a mother goddess and a male horned deity (her consort)
- Three major beliefs are animism, pantheism, & polytheism
- Sometimes animal sacrifices, channeling spirits, sex or nudity in worship, astrology, numerology, palmistry, runes, and tarot cards

How to Share the gospel

- USE GENTLENESS 1 Pet. 3:15
- One God as creator
- God detests sorcery and false sacrifices Deut 18:9-14, Gal. 5:19-21
- Focus on repentance and the need for a savior
- Discuss God’s design for life

Scientology (less than 200,000)

- Created in 1954 by science fiction author Ron Hubbard
- People are immortal divine beings with past lives
- Pantheistic views on God
- A process of “going clear” to learn mystical secrets of life through confession “auditing” and donating
- Popular on the west coast among celebrities
- Well funded and organized, aggressively exclusive and dangerous

How to Share the gospel

- Find out deepness of involvement and be sensitive
- Focus on the authority of the Bible rather than a science fiction author
- Focus on the issue of our sin nature and need for a savior
- Share your personal testimony and life change

New Age (Impossible to calculate)

- Westernized form of Eastern religions' beliefs combined with occultic practices, self-help, holistic medicines, and forms of astrology
- Rarely self identify as “new age”
- Not a single organization
- Pantheism, Monism, reincarnation, You are a divinity and need to find out, no good/evil or objective morality, a new age of enlightenment is coming
- Techniques such as yoga, meditation, past-life regression, soul travel, and channeling spiritual guides may help one achieve enlightenment
- Jesus is not God, but someone who was enlightened

How to Share the gospel

- Focus on a personal God vs an impersonal force or energy. Jesus is unique!
 - Ask the New Ager what he or she believes about God and Jesus Christ. There is a lot of diversity
 - Discuss being created by God
 - Karma is a works system. Emphasize grace in the gospel
 - Humanity's problem is sin, not ignorance of divinity Rom. 3:23
 - A new world is coming, but it's through judgement. Show a need to exalt Jesus and turn from sin
 - "If there is no right or wrong way to God, then how can you claim that our gospel is wrong?" Lovingly point out that their position is illogical & contradicts itself
 - Encourage them to read the Bible, particularly the Gospels
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