Leader's Guide

Questions Encore: Where Do I Start?

1. Purpose of the Study

This concluding devotional provides an opportunity to move from examining Christianity's claims to considering our personal response to Jesus Christ.

Throughout the series, we have explored intellectual objections, moral questions, historical evidence, and concerns arising from suffering and everyday life. Now we ask what those investigations mean for us personally.

Central truth: Christianity is not merely a worldview to evaluate; at its center is a Savior to trust. Jesus' identity and authority call for a personal response.

Leader's objective: Encourage thoughtful consideration of Christ's claims while clearly presenting salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Begin with the golf illustration, read the key Scriptures, and use the three study questions to guide the discussion. Leave sufficient time to explain the gospel and invite an honest response.

2. Biblical Foundation

Matthew 12:22–30 — Neutrality is not an option.

Consider reading or mentioning the surrounding passage rather than verse 30 alone. Jesus has healed a demon-oppressed man, and the Pharisees attribute his work to Satan. Jesus exposes the failure of their reasoning and explains that his deliverance of people demonstrates the arrival of God's kingdom.

His statement, "Whoever is not with me is against me," concerns allegiance to him and his kingdom. He is not simply asking people to admire his teaching. He is confronting them with his authority.

An important clarification: Jesus does not say that neutrality becomes opposition only after someone has investigated long enough. His words expose neutrality itself as an illusion. Continued investigation is valuable, but it is not a spiritually neutral position.

Explain this patiently. The passage does not permit shaming sincere questioners or force a public response. We should communicate both the seriousness of Jesus' claim and his welcome to sinners.

John 20:30–31 — Evidence is meant to lead to faith

John explains that he selected and recorded Jesus' signs so readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and receive life in his name.

Christian faith is not a refusal to think. John invites readers to consider testimony about who Jesus is and what he has done. Yet his purpose reaches beyond intellectual agreement: he wants readers to trust Christ and receive life.

Help the group distinguish between knowing facts about Jesus, agreeing that those facts are true, and personally relying on him for salvation.

Ephesians 2:8–10 — Faith receives; it does not earn

Salvation is God's gift, not the achievement of human effort. Our response does not purchase forgiveness or make us worthy of acceptance. Faith receives Christ and rests on his finished work.

Verse 10 adds an important balance: good works are the fruit of salvation, not its foundation. We are not saved because we obey; those whom God saves are being renewed to walk in obedience.

The golf illustration has a limit here. Committing to a shot depends on the golfer's execution. Salvation depends on Christ's accomplishment, not on the quality or intensity of our decision.

3. Discussion Guidance

Question One: Golf and Indecision

"Think of a time when you hesitated over an important shot. Did delaying your decision help, or did it make matters worse?"

Let participants describe a specific situation. What information did they need? At what point did further analysis become second-guessing?

Golfers understand the importance of commitment. Indecision often produces tentative swings, poor execution, and regret. Nevertheless, a confident swing does not guarantee a good result. Confidence is only as helpful as the judgment and ability behind it.

Follow-up question: "What is the difference between gathering information you genuinely need and looking for a guarantee you cannot have?"

Bridge to the devotional: Investigating Christianity matters, but information alone is not the final goal. The question is whether Jesus is trustworthy.

Leader's caution: Do not equate a hurried golf decision with a hurried profession of faith. We are not trying to generate an emotional response or persuade someone to say words they do not mean. We are inviting people to consider Christ honestly and respond sincerely.

Question Two: The Claims of Jesus

"Why do you think Jesus refuses to offer a position of permanent neutrality in Matthew 12:30? What makes his claims different from those of other influential religious or moral teachers?"

Begin with the passage's setting. The issue is not simply whether Jesus offers helpful advice. It is whether God's kingdom has come through him and whether people will acknowledge his authority.

For prep, read John 14:6 and Acts 17:30–31. Jesus identifies himself as the way to the Father. Paul announces God's command to repent and points to Jesus' resurrection as assurance of coming judgment.

Follow-up question: "What is the difference between admiring Jesus and trusting him?"

A person may appreciate Jesus' compassion or moral teaching while resisting his authority. Saving faith does not merely select the parts of Jesus' teaching we find appealing; it receives him as Savior and Lord.

Leader's caution: The seriousness of Jesus' claims does not, by itself, establish their truth. Keep pointing participants back to the biblical testimony, his works, his death, and his resurrection. Do not replace thoughtful discussion with the demand, "Just believe."

Question Three: Personal Response

"What questions, doubts, fears, or attachments might keep someone from trusting Christ? What would taking one honest step toward him look like this week?"

Possible obstacles include intellectual doubts, fear of surrendering control, disappointment with Christians, attachment to sins, fear of others' reactions, or the assumption that moral respectability is sufficient.

Listen carefully. These are possibilities to explore, not motives to assign. Do not assume that you know why another person struggles to believe.

Follow-up question: "Do you feel that you must first become a better person, understand everything, or make yourself worthy before coming to Christ?"

Explain that repentance means turning from sin to God. Faith means relying on Jesus rather than on our goodness, religious activity, or ability to improve ourselves. Repentance and faith belong together; neither earns God's favor.

For someone still investigating, a useful next step might be reading John's Gospel with a trusted Christian and discussing specific questions. Make clear that these activities do not save; they provide opportunities to hear and consider the gospel.

For someone ready to respond, explain that they may come to Christ now, confessing their sin and trusting his mercy. They do not need a polished testimony or a prescribed form of words.

For Christians, ask: “Where might you be treating Jesus as an adviser whose suggestions you can decline rather than as the Lord you trust and follow?” Make clear that imperfect obedience does not mean Christ has abandoned his people. The call is to renewed repentance and reliance on grace.

4. The Gospel Explained

A helpful way to summarize the Christian message is through four connected truths.

God: Our Creator is holy, righteous, loving, and worthy of our worship. We belong to him and are accountable to him.

Sin: We have rebelled against God in thought, desire, word, and deed. Our problem is deeper than a lack of information or a few bad habits. We cannot remove our guilt or reconcile ourselves to God through moral effort.

Christ: The eternal Son of God became truly human. Jesus lived the obedient life we have failed to live, offered himself as a sacrifice for sinners, bore God’s judgment against sin, and rose bodily from the dead. His saving work is sufficient; we cannot add to it.

Response: God calls us to repent and believe the gospel. We turn from sin and self-reliance to receive and rest in Christ alone for salvation. The Holy Spirit graciously opens our hearts and enables this response.

Saving faith includes knowledge of the gospel, agreement with its truth, and personal trust in Jesus. Its saving power does not lie in how strongly we believe but in the Savior we trust. Even weak faith rests on a strong Savior.

5. Questions or Objections That Might Arise

“What if I still have doubts?”

Unanswered questions need not be hidden or dismissed. Ask which questions are most troubling and address them honestly. Faith does not require exhaustive understanding, but it does involve trusting Christ. A believer can struggle with doubts while continuing to rely on him.

“Doesn’t choosing Jesus make salvation depend on me?”

Scripture calls us to repent and believe, while teaching that salvation is entirely God’s gracious work. Our response is real, but it is not a contribution that completes Christ’s work. We depend on his mercy, not on our ability to make a sufficiently impressive decision.

“What about people who say they believe but show little love?”

Christians still sin and sometimes fail grievously. Such failures should be acknowledged, not excused. At the same time, genuine faith bears fruit over time. Ephesians 2:8–10 holds together the truth that works cannot save us and the truth that grace changes how we live.

“Are you asking me to make a decision today?”

We are inviting you to respond honestly to Jesus, not pressuring you to perform for the group. His call to repent and believe is urgent, but no leader can manufacture genuine faith. Ask your questions openly, and do not assume that postponement provides a position of neutrality.

6. Closing the Series

Remind participants that the purpose of the series was never merely to win arguments or accumulate religious information. It was to consider the truth of Christianity and, ultimately, the person of Jesus Christ.

For non-Christians, welcome further conversation about unresolved questions while clearly inviting them to trust Christ. Offer to meet privately, without requiring anyone to announce a response to the group.

For Christians, ask whether growing knowledge of Scripture is producing greater faith, obedience, humility, and love. We never graduate from dependence on grace.

Suggested Closing Thoughts

Over these many weeks, we have asked difficult questions about God, Christianity, and the meaning of life. We have considered evidence, arguments, and objections. But the most important question is not simply whether Christianity makes sense to us. It is whether Jesus Christ is who he claims to be.

If he is, then his claims deserve more than admiration or intellectual agreement. He calls us to repent and trust him.

The wonderful news of Christianity is that our hope does not rest in the strength of our faith, the quality of our decisions, or the goodness of our lives. Our hope rests entirely in Jesus Christ—who he is and what he has accomplished for sinners.

You do not have to make yourself worthy before coming to him. You come because you need the mercy he freely gives.

So perhaps the best way to conclude our series is with the question Jesus asked his disciples: “But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15).