

Worldview Basics

Course Lecturer: Dr. Sid Buzzell

If you have not already done so, it is important that you first review our [Leader's Packet](#) for specifics on how to open, facilitate, and close your group sessions.

This Leader's Guide walks you step by step through this lesson. Use as much of the suggested material as you find helpful. Some sections have more than one discussion question or idea so you can choose an option that fits your group. Feel free to add other ideas as well. You may also choose to extend this particular lesson to two or more sessions.

The Leader's Guide contains information that isn't covered in the Listening Guide so the group session adds value to those who have completed the Listening Guide.

Step by Step Through the Study

As you prepare for the session, you will find information you need to lead the discussion questions in this Group Leader's Guide.

What Are the Major Worldviews?

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 1. “In Lesson 1, we will see the error of trying to explain the whole of reality by considering only a part of it. We will discuss a definition of *worldview* and introduce six worldviews that are commonly held in our world today.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

This session on worldviews is fairly complex, and a good deal of the content may be new to many of your group members. Because it will take time to process the content of this first lesson, the Discussion Guide is divided into sessions. You have the option of combining the two sessions into one if your group feels comfortable moving through the discussion more rapidly, or you can spread the discussion over two sessions if you think it better to move more slowly. Read this study guide and decide which option will fit your group, and proceed as you think best.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study, you should be able to

Goals 1 and 2 are addressed in Part 1 of this Group Discussion Guide.

1. Explain “The Blind Men and the Elephant” illustration concerning the misperception of the truth.
2. Accurately define what is meant by the term *worldview*.

Goal 3 is addressed in Part 2 of this Group Discussion Guide.

3. Identify by name and concept six worldviews commonly held in the world today.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

Open the session by introducing yourself and asking group members to do the same.

- Ask each to share a general fact about themselves: family, where they attended high school, their favorite course or activity in high school, if they could live anywhere in the world, where would they live and why, etc.
- Tell the group this is a general “get to know you” introduction, and you will talk about world religions and how we relate them to our own life’s spiritual dimensions later in the session.

Discuss the course purpose from the syllabus (printed below). You will introduce the session purpose in a few moments.

How would your life be different if you had been born into another home, culture, or religious faith? Your perspective of life is influenced by your culture, your background, and your life experiences. This is called your worldview. The Worldview Basics course will compare six major worldviews and examine what makes a biblical worldview so unique. We will discover how worldviews influence you and others in ways you and they may not always be conscious of.

Talk through the course goals listed below. (We will review the lesson goals later.)

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Accurately define what is meant by the term *worldview*.
- Identify by name and concept six worldviews commonly held in the world today.
- Explain how each worldview answers these questions: “What is real?” “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” “Why am I here?” “What is the basis for my values?” and “What does the future hold?”
- Discern comparisons and contrasts between each worldview on topics of reality, identity, origins, meaning, ethics, and the future.
- List the six distinctives of a biblical worldview and explain to someone else the internal consistency of a biblical worldview in contrast to the other worldviews examined.
- Explain how part of God’s truth can be found in each worldview.
- Make a decision concerning which worldview you feel to be the most consistent with truth.

Ask if anyone has questions about any of the goals.

Ask group members to talk about:

- What they think a worldview is.
- How familiar they are with various worldviews held by people today.
- Ask if anyone knows someone who practices a worldview or religion different from their own and how they relate to that person.
 - ◊ Do they converse about their views of life? Acknowledge their differences? Avoid the person? Feel a need to explain their own worldview or religious beliefs? Other?

Discussion Part I

Read or summarize “The Blind Men and the Elephant” parable and poem from Lesson 1 and ask the group if someone can explain what the story is about. What’s the “moral of the story”? (*Listening Guide question 1*)

Discuss how the fact that each of us lives with only a partial understanding of reality can be dangerous.

Ideas for Discussion

- *We may conclude that our view is comprehensive, when it is limited, and live our life with only a narrow and uninformed perspective on our world.*
- *We may disagree with or even resent or reject others because they have a limited view of reality that differs from our limited view of reality and conclude that our partial views are right and others’ partial views are wrong.*
- *Others?*

Discuss ways the “Elephant” parable’s teaching can be helpful.

Ideas for Discussion

- *If each of us realizes that we see only a limited aspect of the whole, we are more open to listen to others’ viewpoints and learn from each other.*
- *If we talk and listen to each other, we can combine individual visions of the whole to produce a more accurate understanding of our world.*
- *We will welcome differing viewpoints as helpful rather than reject them because they differ from our own, and we allow them to enrich our limited view.*
- *Others?*

Discuss requirements for the “Elephant” idea to be helpful.

Ideas for Discussion

- *We must trust that others have intelligent views that differ from our own.*
- *We must “listen” to one another and honestly evaluate their perspectives even when they differ from ours.*
- *We must be humble enough to admit that others have perspectives we do not have.*
- *We must sift and weigh all views so we wisely select and reject perspectives.*
- *Others?*

The following information may help clarify why we all have a tendency to discredit ideas that differ from our own.

- *A phenomenon called “confirmation bias” was quantified in a 1979 Stanford University study, which found that confronting people with facts proving that a belief they held is wrong did not change their*

minds. In fact, to the contrary, it often further cemented the belief in their mind.

- *A 2004 study at Emory University showed that when given weak evidence that confirmed their belief and strong evidence that refuted it, most people gave more credibility to the weak evidence that supported their idea rather than change or abandon their belief in response to the stronger evidence that refuted it.*
- *So unless we are aware of the “Elephant” concept, we may be more inclined to reject other perspectives than we are to learn from them.*

Read the following sentence from the second paragraph of Lesson 1.

Each of the blind men was partially right in what he experienced but ultimately wrong in his conclusion.

- *What’s the point of this statement? What lesson should we consider from it?*

Ask if anyone can recall having someone correct or clarify a fact or point of view they had expressed in a conversation.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Did they feel confused or embarrassed because they expressed an opinion based only on part of the whole truth?*
- *Did they appreciate and thank the person for adding to their limited perspective and broaden their understanding of the point they expressed?*

Ask if anyone has corrected or added to another’s expressed opinion and how the person responded to them.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Did the person appreciate your added perspective?*
- *Were they embarrassed and/or offended because they felt you had “corrected” them?*
- *Did you present your additional or alternate understanding of the idea they were discussing in a nonthreatening way that didn’t confront or offend the other person?*

From the group members’ experience, do they think most people ...

Ideas for Discussion

- *Appreciate it when others add to their “view of the elephant”?*
- *Feel embarrassed and/or defensive when others add to their “view of the elephant.”*
- *Ask group members how they respond when someone “adds to their elephant”?*

Read this sentence from the third paragraph of Lesson 1:

Not only is this clever parable amusing, it also carries an important point about the way we all look at our world. The part of reality we see shapes our view of what is true.

Ask if anyone wants to state the point of this “View of the Elephant” parable in their own words.

Ideas for Discussion

- *After some discussion, you may want to present the following summary for the group to evaluate:*

- ◇ *Each of us is limited in how we view parts of our world and can only gain a fuller, richer perspective of our world if we trust and listen to others' views.*
- ◇ *We can enrich others' views by feeling confident to express our perspectives on reality.*
- ◇ *We can enrich our own views by carefully listening to and fairly weighing others' perspectives.*

Read the following sentence from the fourth paragraph of Lesson 1:

The reality that each of us sees, however, is often fragmented and confused by the different windows of popular media.

Discuss people's major sources of information that feed their opinions, their perspectives on world affairs, and on their own way of living in the world.

- *Newspapers? Magazines? Which ones?*
 - ◇ *Discuss differences between serious news magazine like Newsweek and gossip magazines like The Enquirer. More conservative newspapers like the Wall Street Journal and more liberal ones like the New York Times.*
- *TV news or talk shows? Which ones?*
 - ◇ *Discuss differences between conservative networks like Fox and more liberal ones like CNBC?*
 - ◇ *Do group members watch only one or various news sources?*

Ask if group members are more open-minded and agreeable with one perspective and close-minded and ready to disagree with another.

Discuss the idea that our attitude toward what we hear influences what we actually "hear" and whether we seriously consider it or immediately reject it.

Ask the group what perspectives the people they spend the most time with (peers, co-workers, neighbors, club or church members, etc.) have and how it influences them.

What Is a Worldview?

A worldview, therefore, is our assumption about what makes up our world.

The first two paragraphs of this section presented some ideas that help explain the definition. As you read each of the following bullet points that summarize information in those paragraphs, ask if group members agree or disagree with its point.

- *All of us are trying to make sense of life.*
- *When dealing with life's tragedies, our worldview becomes more influential in how we think and act than it does in calmer moments.*
- *We can all agree that the world around us really exists.*
- *Beyond that basic point, we most often believe that we have what we might call "the clearest view of the elephant," or even "the only clear view of the elephant."*

Additional Material: A worldview is a theory of the world that each of us uses to define a

reasonable manner of living in the world. It is a mental model of reality; a set of more or less clearly defined ideas and attitudes about how the world works and how we should live in it.

Ideas for Discussion

- *A number of factors help shape a person’s worldview — their natural temperament; their family and educational background; the values, attitudes, and habits they have developed through interaction with peers and respected mentors; and many other factors.*
- *Ask group members to name an incident in their life that influenced their beliefs and attitudes, like a significant educational experience, a religious conversion, a powerful moment of enlightenment, etc.*
- *Ask if they can name a person or persons they looked to or currently look to as a major shaping influence in how they view the world.*
- *Ask if there is someone a group member talks with regularly (a co-worker, boss, teacher, spouse) who has a clearly different “window” on the world than their own.*

Divide your group into smaller groups of two or three and ask them to finish the sentence, “A worldview is ...”

Write a definition of a worldview (not their own worldview, but of what a worldviews “is”) in language they are comfortable with and that sounds like it’s their own definition — an explanation they feel comfortable using.

Ask groups to share their definitions and let other groups interact with them.

Read the introductory paragraph to this portion of the lesson stated below:

In an age of global communication and travel, our interaction with other cultures has made us increasingly aware of the different ways we look at our world. Let’s see what distinguishes these worldviews and what they have in common.

And ask the group ...

- *If they can describe their own worldview and give it a name.*
- *How clear they think other people are about their own worldview.*
- *If anyone can name any of the major worldviews.*

It would help if, before the session, you posted the six questions and the six worldviews discussed in the course on a chalkboard or a flip chart so the group has ready reference to both.

Read the following list of the worldviews you will discuss in the course, and ask if someone would like to define any of them as you read its name.

- *Monotheism: One God exists who is separate from but involved with the universe.*
- *Deism: God created an orderly universe to operate on its own.*
- *Naturalism: Matter is all that exists and is best understood through science.*
- *Nihilism: We must question objective truth and positive values.*
- *Existentialism: Life has no objective meaning, so significance is individually created.*

- *Pantheism: Everything that exists is God (Spirit). Matter is an illusion.*
- *Personal Combination: This isn't a worldview, but some people combine elements of other worldviews and create their own, unique view of the world.*

Ask if any group members have recently conversed with someone who holds a different worldview.

If so, how did the differences in the worldviews come up in the conversation?

How did the conversation go?

Application

Ask the group to write down three or four ideas they believe are essential to their worldview. What ideas, facts, concepts, or sources of information do they believe are essential to help them make sense of our world and their place in it?

- *After they have written down the three or four items, ask them to read what they wrote down and why.*
- *There are no right or wrong answers here. The exercise is designed to help group members see what parts of the “elephant” different group members name as important to them.*
- *The exercise also pushes our mind to begin identifying what matters most to us as we begin to clarify and recognize what our own worldview is.*
- *Finally, the exercise allows us to hear how each of the others in the group define the “elephant” and provides opportunity to gain various perspective on what it looks like.*

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

If you are dividing the Lesson 1 discussion into two discussion sessions, set the time for your next session.

If you are continuing the Lesson 1 discussion, take a break at this point and then move on to the next page of the Group Leader's Guide.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Discussion Part II

If you choose to divide the discussion of Lesson 1 into two sessions, review Part 1 of Lesson 1's discussion.

Read Lesson Goals 1 and 2 and ask the group if they think they have achieved them:

Goals 1 and 2 are addressed in Part 1 of this Group Discussion Guide.

1. Explain "The Blind Men and the Elephant" illustration concerning the misperception of the truth.

- *Ask the group what the main point of the elephant story was.*

2. Accurately define what is meant by the term *worldview*.

- *Ask if someone can define a worldview and briefly explain what role it plays in a person's life.*

Goal 3 is addressed in Part 2 of this Group Discussion Guide.

3. Identify by name and concept six worldviews commonly held in the world today.

- *Introduce goal 3 and explain that it is addressed in Part 2 of this Group Discussion Guide.*

If you choose to combine the two discussion sessions of Lesson 1 into a single session, summarize and review the first two goals and then proceed on through the rest of the discussion guide.

What Are the Major Worldviews?

Tie the two parts of the group discussion guide together by reviewing the brief presentation of the six worldviews below.

Read the introductory paragraph to this section of the lesson stated below:

In an age of global communication and travel, our interaction with other cultures has made us increasingly aware of the different ways we look at our world. Let's see what distinguishes these worldviews and what they have in common.

List the worldviews you will discuss in the course and ask if someone would like to define any of them as you read each name.

- *Monotheism: One God exists who is separate from but involved with the universe.*
- *Deism: God created an orderly universe to operate on its own.*
- *Naturalism: Matter is all that exists and is best understood through science.*
- *Nihilism: We must question objective truth and positive values.*
- *Existentialism: Life has no objective meaning, so significance is individually created.*
- *Pantheism: Everything that exists is God (Spirit). Matter is an illusion.*
- *Personal Combination: This isn't a worldview, but some people combine elements of other worldviews and create their own, unique view of the world.*

Ask if any group members have recently conversed with someone who holds a different worldview.

- *If so, how did the differences in the worldviews surface?*
- *How did the conversation go?*

The rest of the Group Discussion Guide delves more deeply into what each of the six worldviews teaches about our universe and our place in it.

Group Leader Note: The following discussion questions for each of the worldviews are based on course material. Because some group members will be studying the lessons online as you are, it is important to follow the course format for this session. There is also a section attached to each of the worldviews that provides additional information about that worldview.

Monotheism: One God exists who is separate from but involved with the universe.

Additional Material: Monotheism maintains that there is one God who participates in the world He created while remaining distinct from it.

- *Although three world religions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are monotheistic, the Christian doctrine of monotheism differs from those of Judaism and Islam by teaching Trinitarian monotheism.*
- *Because monotheism is the topic of the last two discussions in this series, we will reserve a fuller development of its teachings until then.*

Ask if someone can name the three major monotheistic religions.

- *Judaism, Christianity, Islam*

Ask group members if they consider themselves to be a monotheist.

(Listening Guide question 15)

Ideas for Discussion

- *If so, which of the three monotheistic religions do you follow?*
- *How does your belief about God influence your overall view of the world and your place in it?*
- *Does it consciously influence how you live your life, and if so, how?*

Read the following summary points of Judaism taken from Lesson 1 (second paragraph of the section under Monotheism).

- *Judaism's beliefs are drawn from the books of the first five Old Testament called Torah.*
- *God revealed the content of those books to Moses and the prophets.*
- *Many Jews follow God's revealed Law and believe in a coming Messiah.*

Ask the group in what ways they agree and/or disagree with the Jewish worldview as stated here.

(Listening Guide question 17)

Read the following summary points of Christianity taken from Lesson 1 (third paragraph of the section under Monotheism).

- *Christianity is built on the Jewish Scriptures.*
- *The Christian New Testament differs from Judaism (and Islam) in its understanding of monotheism, in that it teaches that the One God is comprised of three Persons called God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.*
- *Christianity teaches that Jesus is God's Son, the Jewish Messiah, the promised Son of David.*
- *Jesus became human but retained His deity through the miracle of the virgin birth when the Holy Spirit miraculously impregnated Mary. As a human, Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified to redeem humans from their enslavement to sin.*
- *Jesus promised to return to earth and rule over a new heaven and new earth.*

Ask in what ways group members agree and/or disagree with the Christian worldview as stated here.

Ask in what ways Judaism and Christianity are similar and in what ways different.
(*Listening Guide question 18*)

Read the summary statements about Islam taken from Lesson 1.

- *Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is a monotheistic worldview.*
- *The Qur'an (Koran), which was Allah's revelation to Muhammad in the seventh century, superseded the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.*
- *Islam teaches that God inspired the Bible's prophets but that their followers corrupted their original teachings. Allah's revelations to Muhammad corrected those corruptions.*
- *Muslims believe Allah created the world and affirms human rebellion against Allah.*
- *Muslims believe in heaven and hell and teach that heaven is achieved by submitting to Allah's laws.*
- *Muslims teach that Jesus was a great prophet but was not God's Son and did not die for the world's sins.*

Ask the group to name some ways Islam is like and unlike Judaism and Christianity.
(*Listening Guide question 19*)

Ask in what ways group members agree and disagree with the Islamic worldview as stated here.

Ask group members if Islam adds to or subtracts anything from their view of the "Elephant."

Deism: God created an orderly world to operate on its own.

Additional Material: Deists believe there is a supreme being who is unknowable. God is the "first cause" and foundational principle of rational thought in the universe. This god designed and created a universe with consistent laws that preserve it as a self-operating system. Like a clockmaker, God designed and created a mechanism that would run without His supervision or

intervention.

- *God did not reveal Himself in an infallible Bible but can be discovered through nature and reason.*
- *Deists vary on Jesus' nature, but most accept His moral teachings.*

There is no place in deism for divine revelation, miracles, or prayers to a God who refuses to intervene in how the universe — including its human inhabitants — function.

Read or comment on the summary statements (below) of the paragraphs in Lesson 1 that describe deism.

- *In the seventeenth century, scientific advances contributed to the founding of a philosophy that stressed the value of human reason over revelation.*
- *Deism teaches that an intelligent creator set up the world like a clockmaker would build a clock and expected it to operate without his interference.*
- *Some great intellects such as Voltaire, Sir Isaac Newton, and Thomas Jefferson were deists.*
- *Reason rather than revelation became the source of authority for deists.*
- *God does not interrupt the laws of our universe by performing miracles or answering prayers. He created it, set it in motion, and is not involved with its operation or its inhabitants, including humans.*

After presenting this brief introduction, ask if anyone in the group has further comments on deism.

Discuss deism by interacting on the following questions.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask how monotheism and deism are alike and how they are different.*
- *Ask which approach makes the most sense to members of the group. Why?*

While monotheism and deism disagree on basic theological points, there are Christians who feel more comfortable explaining God as One who doesn't interfere in our life (as a deist would). They wonder about unanswered prayer, about evil, about sickness, and other issues. You may (or may not) want to discuss how your group members relate to God on a day-to-day basis: As a monotheist or as a deist?

Ask group members if deism adds to or subtracts anything from their view of the "Elephant."

Naturalism: Matter is all that exists and is best understood through science.

Additional Material: Naturalism may be briefly defined as the philosophical conclusion that nature is the only reality, and it has been discovered through the intelligent application of experience, reason, and science.

Naturalism takes various forms, but philosophical naturalism provides a comprehensive and coherent worldview based on experience, reason, and science. It also defends science's exclusive

right to explore and theorize about reality, while responding to theories based on superstition or religious dogmatism.

Naturalistic philosophy teaches that human experience is the ultimate source and justification for all knowledge.

Read, or ask someone to read, the paragraph that describes naturalism.

With the publication of Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species, a naturalistic explanation for origins was proposed. The theory of evolution claimed that given enough time and under the right conditions, simple life forms would spring from nonliving matter.

Darwin's *The Origin of Species* has had a profound influence on many people's worldview. Ask group members:

(Listening Guide question 23)

- *How would and/or do you balance Darwin's theories with a monotheistic worldview?*
- *Can you relate an experience or conversation you observed or participated in where a Darwinist and a creationist discussed their worldviews?*
 - ◊ *If so, what was that experience like?*
 - ◊ *Did it influence your worldview? If so, how?*

Read Carl Sagan's quote from this paragraph:

"The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be."

Ask the group how agreement with Sagan's quote would shape a worldview that's different from ...
(Listening Guide question 27)

- *A monotheistic view of a Creator God*
- *A deistic view of a "clockwork" creator*
- *Their own view of God*

Ask group members if naturalism adds to or subtracts anything from their view of the "Elephant."

Nihilism: Objective truth and positive values are to be questioned and dismissed. Nihilism is more of an attitude than a formal philosophy.

Additional Material: Nihilism denies that there is meaning or purpose in life. Politically, it denies all established authority and institutions and argues for their destruction.

Nihilism has been related to the belief that life is meaningless, and in its existential form it concludes that existence itself — comprised of any action, suffering, feeling — is senseless and empty.

Read the bullet points from the first paragraph of this section on nihilism.

- *Nihilism questions the validity of knowing truth and moral values.*
- *Our former, nonreflective, animal brain clouds any certainty of knowledge.*
- *In many ways, nihilists are “anti-philosophy activists” who seek to debunk what others affirm.*
- *In response to religion, [nihilism] repudiates previously held morality and spiritual belief.*
- *A nihilistic view is skeptical about moral values.*

Ask if someone in the group can summarize what you have discovered so far about nihilism.

- *Ask if someone can present some differences between nihilism and a Christian worldview.*
- *What do group members think a completely nihilistic culture would look like?*
- *Would they prefer living in a nihilistic world or a monotheistic world?*
- *Explain why they chose as they did.*

Ask group members if nihilism adds to or subtracts anything from their view of the “Elephant.”

Existentialism: Life has no objective meaning, so significance must be subjectively created within.

Additional Material: Existentialism focuses on the question of human existence. Since there is no God or other higher force that defines purpose or meaning, each of us must define our own meaning in life and live rationally in an irrational universe. This worldview emphasizes our individual existence and freedom to choose.

Humans are free from external responsibility, and each must be responsible for his or her life.

The exercise of personal freedom and responsible choice is the only escape from humanity’s absurd condition.

Read the description of existentialism given in Lesson 1.

Life has no objective meaning, so significance must be subjectively created within.

Ask if someone can explain what the statement means.

- *What’s the difference between objective and subjective?*
 - ◊ *Objective is based on a clear, authoritative standard, which we agree to follow.*
 - ◊ *Subjective places authority on each individual’s personal preference.*

Read the following statements from Lesson 1’s explanation of existentialism and discuss each, using the questions that accompany the statement.

There are various existentialist philosophies. Whether atheistic or theistic, each emphasizes the meaninglessness of life and the isolation of the individual.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask how comfortable the group would be to live as an isolated individuals who had to create their own meaning.*
- *Ask if any group members ever struggle with feelings of meaninglessness and isolation.*
- *How would group members counsel an existentialist to find meaning and to dispel the isolation?*

“The committed existentialist must rebel against the objective world and subjectively create his own meaning.”

Ideas for Discussion

- *How capable do group members think most people are at creating their own meaning?*

“That which ‘authenticates’ the individual is strictly a personal choice. An act that is meaningful to you may be absurd to me.”

Ideas for Discussion

- *How would you discuss right and wrong with an existentialist?*
- *Ask the group what they think life would be like if they were married to and lived with a practicing existentialist.*
- *How would they describe existentialism in their own words to a high school student?*

Ask group members if existentialism adds to or subtracts anything from their view of the “Elephant.”

Pantheism: Everything that exists is God (Spirit). Matter is an illusion.

Additional Material: The word *pantheism* is constructed from two Greek words, *pan* (all) and *theism* (God), and means “God is all” or “all is God.” Basically, pantheism means that God is everything and everyone; therefore, everyone and everything is God. It reveres the universe as the ultimate focus of reverence and views the natural earth as sacred.

- *Pantheists see the natural universe as divine and as the proper object of reverence. We need not look to anything other than the universe for an object of ultimate respect.*
- *For the pantheist to say the universe is divine is similar to a monotheist saying that God is divine.*
- *Pantheists relate to the universe in much the same way as those who believe in God relate to Him.*

There are many ways to understand pantheism, and it is nearly impossible to capture its teachings in one description or even in a basic course on worldviews.

Read the bullet points that summarize the explanation from Lesson 1 on pantheism.

- *Pantheism is taught by some of the most ancient religious texts in the world.*
- *Hinduism and some forms of Buddhism are pantheistic.*
- *Through these two religious traditions, pantheism has spread into the Western world.*

Ask group members if they know or have had conversations with a pantheist.

If so, has the topic of how they view the world as a pantheist ever come up?

How prevalent do group members think the practice of pantheism is in their community?

Read the following statement from the first paragraph in Lesson 1's section on pantheism

A starting premise of pantheism is that man's spirit is part of the Soul of the universe. God is Spirit and is all that exists.

- *Ask what the two parts of "a starting premise of this kind of pantheism" are:*
 - ◊ *"Man's spirit is part of the Soul of the universe."*
 - ◊ *God is spirit and is all that exists.*

Therefore, the external world we experience is an illusion.

- *Ask if anyone can explain what it means that all is an illusion.*
 - ◊ *Our world has deceived us into thinking that what matters most is what is outside of us, but what is most real is the god-connection that exists inside each of us. Our task is to connect our god-essence with the One unifying force in the universe.*

The path that leads to the connection of one's personal self with the Soul of the universe is meditation.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Does this mean that meditation is a bad or dangerous practice?*
 - ◊ *How does Psalm 1:2 influence your view of meditation?*

Note: There are some Christians who are uncomfortable with meditation because of its popularity among pantheist religions even though it is a process the Bible encourages in numerous places. If someone wants to debate its value, avoid debating if possible. The major difference between pantheistic and biblical teaching on meditation is the focus of what one meditates on and why one meditates. The Bible encourages us to meditate on God and His Word, and the purpose is to know Him better and experience our relationship with Him more deeply.

Read the following statement from Lesson 1.

Ideas for Discussion

A proponent of this view has been Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Born in India in 1917, he became a proponent of the relaxation technique called "transcendental meditation."

- *Does transcendental meditation's roots nullify any helpful results of its use?*
- *If someone finds its practice beneficial, should they avoid it because it is pantheistic?*
- *If someone argues that its roots don't matter and wants to use it for its benefits, are there any cautions associated with its use?*

Ask group members if pantheism adds to or subtracts anything from their view of the "Elephant."

Personal Combinations

Some people combine various parts of a number of worldviews to form their own.

(Listening Guide question 50)

Ideas for Discussion

- *Now that you've reviewed and prioritized the various worldviews in this lesson, what elements would you include in forming a personal worldview?*
- *Of the six worldviews presented here, do any of them provide a safer, more stable way to shape our worldview than the others? Why?*
- *What is it about any worldview you selected that, in your mind, makes it stand out?*
- *If you were looking for a worldview to accept, how would you prioritize these six from most to least acceptable to you?*

Conclusion

The final paragraph of Lesson 1 begins with the following sentence and question:

Ideas for Discussion

Yet, in spite of their inconsistencies, people hold on to their perception of reality with strong conviction. Why?

- *How would group members answer the question?*
- *Do they agree with the lesson's answer to the question given below?*

The answer may lie in how much is at stake in our own attempts to answer some of life's most heartfelt questions.

- *Ask someone to explain what the lesson's answer means.*
 - ◊ *We hold on to our worldview because it is the lens through which we look at our world and our place in it. Though parts of it may be right and parts wrong, until we are convinced that something needs to change, we desperately cling to what we believe.*
- *Ask the group what they think some of "life's most heartfelt questions" are.*
 - ◊ *What do people they know define as life's most heartfelt questions?*
 - ◊ *Are they different from or similar to your group members' heartfelt questions?*
 - ◊ *Read the six questions that Lessons 2 and 3 discuss and ask if the group agrees that these are life's most heartfelt questions. Are there any they would add?*

Summarize the session with a review of how the Worldviews course is organized.

This course will focus on asking how six different worldviews...

- *Monotheism*
- *Deism*
- *Naturalism*
- *Nihilism*

- *Existentialism*
- *Pantheism*

...answer six of life's most important questions:

- *What is real?*
- *Who am I?*
- *Where did I come from?*
- *Why am I here?*
- *What is the basis of my values?*
- *What does the future hold?*

Additional Material: The following questions are frequently posed as essential for a worldview to answer. The Worldviews Basics course has combined some of them and focuses on six questions that incorporate these.

- *Ultimate Reality: What kind of God, if any, actually exists?*
- *External Reality: Is there any kind of higher power beyond the visible?*
- *Knowledge: Can anyone know anything "absolutely"? If so, what?*
- *Origins: Where did it "all" and especially I come from?*
- *Identity: Who am I?*
- *Purpose: Why do I exist?*
- *Ethical/Moral Standard: How should I live my life and why?*
- *Values: What should I consider important or non-negotiable?*
- *Ultimate Issues: Does humanity live with an overriding problem, and is there a solution?*
- *Final Issues: What happens after we die, and can anyone know the answer?*

Application

Ask the group to write down an initial statement of their own worldview.

- *Parts of their worldview may be like wet cement at this point, and the rest of the discussion sessions will help them interact with and clarify their worldview.*
- *After each discussion session, they should revisit their worldview and rethink it.*
- *It will be helpful as a group to discuss each other's worldviews, so we hear how others view our "Elephant" and can contribute to others' "Elephant" by adding our views of what they are constructing.*

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Questions a Worldview Seeks to Answer (Part I)

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading the “Introduction” of Lesson 2. “In Lesson 2 we will examine the first of three of the six most commonly asked questions by every worldview: “What Is Real?” “Who Am I?” and “Where Did I Come From?””

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study, you should be able to

1. Explain how each worldview answers these questions: “What is real?” “Who am I?” and “Where did I come from?”
2. Discern comparisons and contrasts between each worldview on the topics of reality, identity, and origins.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

Review

This course focuses on asking how seven different worldviews...

- Monotheism
- Deism

- Naturalism
- Nihilism
- Existentialism
- Pantheism

and answer six of life's most important questions...

- What is real?
- Who am I?
- Where did I come from?
- Why am I here?
- What is the basis of my values?
- What does the future hold?

In Lesson 1, you were briefly introduced to each of the seven worldviews and briefly evaluated them by prioritizing them. Briefly review the basic tenet of each worldview with the exercise below.

Ask if someone can explain what a worldview is in light of the previous lesson's discussion.

Can anyone give their personal definition of a worldview?

List the worldviews discussed in the course, and ask if someone can state what each one believes about ultimate reality.

- Monotheism: One God exists who is separate from but involved with the universe.
- Deism: God created an orderly universe to operate on its own.
- Naturalism: Matter is all that exists and is best understood through science.
- Nihilism: We must question objective truth and positive values.
- Existentialism: Life has no objective meaning, so significance is individually created.
- Pantheism: Everything that exists is God (Spirit). Matter is an illusion.
- Personal Combination: This isn't a worldview, but some combine elements of other worldviews to shape fit their own perspective.

In this section of the group session on Lesson 2, you will explore how each of the seven worldviews would "answer" the first three commonly asked questions and briefly discuss a biblical view of how to answer each question.

Because this is a basics course in Worldviews, it only introduces how each of the worldviews answers the six questions a worldview should explore. To help students process how a person from each of the seven worldviews might answer each of the six questions, this exercise is designed as a role play where students attempt to answer the question as if they were a believer in one of the worldviews. Proceed through the group session as described below.

- *Tell the students who completed Lesson 2 with its Listening Guide that the listening guide was designed to help prepare them for the role playing they will participate in during this session. Tell those who didn't complete the lesson or the listening guide that they can successfully complete the exercises during the group session but may need a minute or two longer to prepare their responses.*

- *The instructions for this exercise are easy to follow.*
 - ◇ *Each group member will assume the role of a person who believes one of the seven worldviews discussed in the Worldviews course.*
 - ◇ *For question 1, “What Is Reality?” assign each member of your group to one of the worldviews. If you have fewer than seven members, assign each member to one worldview, complete a discussion of the worldviews the members were assigned, and then assign a second group of worldviews and discuss the question using the second round of worldviews. If you have more than seven, assign multiple group members to the same worldview.*
 - ◇ *After assigning members to a worldview, give them five minutes to study how that worldview answers that question. (See the Group Members’ Handout at the end of this session of the Group Leaders’ Guide.)*
 - ◇ *Using the prompt at the beginning of each question, prepare a brief answer (e.g., the prompt for the “reality” question is, “Taking the role of your selected or assigned worldview, complete the sentence, ‘In my view, ultimate reality is ... and I can know it by ...’”).*
 - ◇ *Each of the three questions is introduced with a brief summary of what the question deals with and a prompt (see below).*
 - ◇ *At the end of each question there is a section called “Biblical View” and a list of two or three Bible passages that introduce how the Bible talks about the question under discussion. Ask a group member to read the passage from the Bible and discuss how it helps us answer that question from the Bible.*
 - ◇ *Repeat the process for each of the three questions covered in Lesson 2.*
- *You will see two documents you are to use to conduct this group session.*
 - ◇ *The Group Members’ Guide contains the material from Lesson 2 that describes how each worldview answers that question. Students will use this to provide the information they need to complete the exercise.*
 - ◇ *The Group Leader’s Guide contains a brief summary of the “answers” if needed. Although most group leaders are competent to answer most of the questions, some of them are a bit confusing. If there is discussion over whether the group member’s response was accurate or not, the Group Leader’s “Answers” can serve as a source to resolve confusion.*
- *If possible, make a copy of each of the three “Group Members’ Guides” for each group member. Or you may prefer to email them to the students and ask them to print a copy and bring it with them to the session.*

Guide the Group Through the Discussion of Questions 1 – 3

Group MEMBERS' Guide for Question 1: "What Is Real?"

Reality: What or Who exists whether or not anybody believes or desires it (*Philosophical Dictionary*). What is the source of ultimate matter(s)?

Prompt: Taking the role of your selected or assigned worldview, complete the sentence:

In my view, ultimate reality is ... and I can know it by ...

Monotheist: All three monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—see reality in terms of a sovereign Creator who is involved with His world. Each assumes the existence of God, an eternal Spirit being, who has created both a material and a spiritual reality. The objective world of matter is there to be observed. God's special revelation, however, is required in order for us to know about the spiritual realities of heaven, angels, the devil, and the afterlife. Monotheists regard as real what they observe in nature and understand from their religious writings.

Deist: Deists proceed from the assumption that an orderly universe exists. They see its First Cause as a Creator who does not guide its movements, intervene in human affairs, or answer prayers. Their pursuit of what is real comes through reason and sound inquiry. They do not take seriously any revelation that portrays the miraculous. Their reality is limited to nature.

Naturalist: The naturalist assumes that matter is all that exists and is best investigated through the scientific method. Unlike deism, it does not hold to God as a First Cause for the universe. Because matter is the only thing that can be measured under repeatable laboratory conditions, it is the only thing we can be sure of. Naturalists believe that matter is real and that spirit is not.

Nihilist: The nihilist believes that we cannot know objective truth or moral values with any certainty. Adopting a strong skepticism, the nihilist rejects what are traditionally held as truth-claims about reality. At best, even scientific experiments and the records of history are inaccurate and irrelevant distortions of what is claimed to be "real."

Existentialist: Atheistic existentialists view the external cosmos as real. Their problem, however, is that they find it to be ultimately absurd and meaningless. Subjective experience is the only way to arrive at meaning that is relevant to the individual. Although the existentialist believes the objective world exists, he sees no objective reason for existing.

Pantheist: The term *pantheism* comes from the Greek words *pan* for "all or everything" and *theos* for God. In other words, "everything is God." Eastern pantheism, popularized by the New Age Movement, assumes that one impersonal spiritual force constitutes reality. Pantheists believe that Spirit is the ultimate reality and that matter is an illusion.

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what they say about a biblical view of reality: Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 19:1; 2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 1:20.

Group MEMBERS' Guide for Question 2: "Who Am I?"

Identity: What does it mean, if anything, to be human? And what, if anything, makes us valuable?

Prompt: Taking the role of your selected or assigned worldview, complete the sentence:

In my view, at the most basic and primal level I am...

Monotheist: Monotheists are in agreement that human beings are made in the image of God but are morally flawed and in need of redemption. For the Jew, this means keeping the law and its traditions. The Christian believes in redemption through faith in Christ's atoning death and resurrection. The Muslim advocates submitting to the will of Allah and obeying the Qur'an.

Deist: Deists believe that man is a personal being who is part of the "clockwork universe." He is not abnormal or fallen but is as he is supposed to be. Freedom to explore nature will lead to self-knowledge and understanding of the impersonal God who set up the universe.

Naturalist: Naturalists view humans as a highly developed animal who possesses self-consciousness, reason, and conscience. They believe that humans are highly complex biological "machines" who have physical and mental capabilities not yet fully known.

Nihilist: Awash in a sea of uncertainty, nihilists have no clear, lasting identity. Their own understanding is biased and limited. But they do assume that an identity applied to them by traditional institutions and religious values is bogus and to be rejected.

Existentialist: Because humans have self-consciousness and reason, we must define who and what we are. With no credible external source to give identity, we must subjectively invent who we are. No one else can do this for us.

Pantheist: The pantheistic view of identity is holistic. My little soul is part of the big Soul of the universe. Through meditation, each of us can experience becoming one with the cosmos. When we achieve this state of enlightenment, our personality and the external world of matter will disappear.

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what they say about a biblical view of human identity and worth: Genesis 1:27, Romans 3:23, and 1 John 4:10.

Group MEMBERS' Guide for Question 3: "Where Did I Come From?"

Origins: Where did everything, including humans, come from?

Prompt: Taking the role of your selected or assigned worldview, complete the sentence:

In my view, the universe and I originated from...

Monotheist: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe that a personal God created our universe. God created humans so they could relate to Him, but human sin has alienated us from God. We all need to be reconciled to God by obeying His revealed truth to us.

Deist: The orderliness of the known universe points to an intelligent designer as its First Cause. This God designed the universe to be governed by natural laws so it would run on its own. The deist believes that we trace our origin to an impersonal God.

Naturalist: Many naturalists believe that the universe likely exploded into existence and that the process of evolution began about five billion years ago. Naturalists believe that humans emerged from less complex life forms through an evolutionary process.

Nihilist: Because history is unreliable, even if evolution were true, it would only mean that humans have a highly developed monkey brain that is, at best, unreliable. Nihilists believe that origins are under “a great cloud of unknowing.”

Existentialist: Since there is no God, we are most likely conscious beings who are products of evolution. But unlike lower life-forms, we cry out for a meaning that does not exist. If we believe in some kind of creator, the past is still irrelevant to our personal significance. Even the texts of religion are filled with “paradoxes” that can complicate our current life experience.

Pantheist: Pantheism teaches that the soul that dwells within our human body has come from numerous reincarnations. Reincarnation (literally “to be made flesh again”) means that some essential part of a living being (soul or spirit) survives death to be reborn in a new body.

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss a biblical view of origins: Genesis 1:1, 31 and Hebrews 1:10; 11:3.

Group LEADER’S Guide for Question 1: “What Is Real?”

Reality: What or Who exists whether or not anybody believes or desires it (*Philosophical Dictionary*). What is the source of ultimate matter(s)?

Prompt: Taking the role of your selected or assigned world view, complete the sentence:

In my view, ultimate reality is... and I can know it by...

Monotheist: All three monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—see reality in terms of a sovereign Creator who is involved with His world. Each assumes the existence of God, an eternal Spirit being, who has created both a material and a spiritual reality. The objective world of matter is there to be observed. God’s special revelation, however, is required in order for us to know about the spiritual realities of heaven, angels, the devil, and the afterlife. Monotheists regard as real what they observe in nature and understand from their religious writings.

- *(Not the Christian's view, but the larger monotheists' view): God created everything in the universe including humans. He is involved with His creation, and we can know Him through nature and through His revelations to His prophets and apostles.*

Deist: Deists proceed from the assumption that an orderly universe exists. They see its First Cause as a Creator who does not guide its movements, intervene in human affairs, or answer prayers. Their pursuit of what is real comes through reason and sound inquiry. They do not take seriously any revelation that portrays the miraculous. Their reality is limited to nature.

- *God or a Higher Power created the universe with laws to govern it so He wouldn't have to be involved with its operation. We can know God by discovering Him through a study of His creation.*

Naturalist: The naturalist assumes that matter is all that exists and is best investigated through the scientific method. Unlike deism, it does not hold to God as a First Cause for the universe. Because matter is the only thing that can be measured under repeatable laboratory conditions, it is the only thing we can be sure of. Naturalists believe that matter is real and that spirit is not.

- *There is no God and no supernatural component to life. There is only nature, and we discover its complexity through the scientific method.*

Nihilist: The nihilist believes that we cannot know objective truth or moral values with any certainty. Adopting a strong skepticism, the nihilist rejects what are traditionally held as truth-claims about reality. At best, even scientific experiments and the records of history are inaccurate and irrelevant distortions of what is claimed to be “real.”

- *Reality is unknowable. None of the historical, religious, or scientific speculations are trustworthy, and we live in a world of uncertainty and mystery.*

Existentialist: Atheistic existentialists view the external cosmos as real. Their problem, however, is that they find it to be ultimately absurd and meaningless. Subjective experience is the only way to arrive at meaning that is relevant to the individual. Although the existentialist believes the objective world exists, he sees no objective reason for existing.

- *We cannot deny the reality of the external world we discover through our senses, but it has no meaning or sense. Each of us must create our own reality and meaning and try to make sense of our own life.*

Pantheist: The term *pantheism* comes from the Greek words *pan* for “all or everything” and *theos* for God. In other words, “everything is God.” Eastern pantheism, popularized by the New Age Movement, assumes that one impersonal spiritual force constitutes reality. Pantheists believe that Spirit is the ultimate reality and that matter is an illusion.

- *God is all and all is God. We are part of that great Oneness and that Spirit is all that is real. The physical world is an illusion.*

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what they say about a biblical view of reality: Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 19:1; 2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 1:20.

- *Deuteronomy 6:4 — There is one God and He is intimately related to the humans He created.*
- *Psalm 19:1 — God reveals His glory and character in nature.*
- *2 Timothy 3:16 — God reveals details of His nature and of His will in Scripture.*

- *Romans 1:20 — God holds humans accountable for what they know of Him in His natural revelation.*

Group LEADER'S Guide for Question 2: "Who Am I?"

Identity: What does it mean, if anything, to be human? And what, if anything, makes us valuable?

Prompt: Taking the role of your selected or assigned worldview, complete the sentence:

In my view, at the most basic and primal level I am ...

Monotheist: Monotheists are in agreement that human beings are made in the image of God but are morally flawed and in need of redemption. For the Jew, this means keeping the law and its traditions. The Christian believes in redemption through faith in Christ's atoning death and resurrection. The Muslim advocates submitting to the will of Allah and obeying the Qur'an.

- *(Not the Christian's view, but the larger monotheists' view): I am created in God's image so I can understand and relate to Him. But sin has distorted me so that I need to be reinstated into my relationship with God. He has made provision for that to happen.*

Deist: Deists believe that man is a personal being who is part of the "clockwork universe." He is not abnormal or fallen but is as he is supposed to be. Freedom to explore nature will lead to self-knowledge and understanding of the impersonal God who set up the universe.

- *I am a person created by God to be a self-sufficient and adequately functioning being. I am free to discover more about myself and about nature by exploring God's creation.*

Naturalist: Naturalists view humans as a highly developed animal who possesses self-consciousness, reason, and conscience. They believe that humans are highly complex biological "machines" who have physical and mental capabilities not yet fully known.

- *I am a highly evolved and sophisticated animal who is separated from lower animals by my more highly evolved intellect. I have the capacity to grow and learn through application of the scientific method.*

Nihilist: Awash in a sea of uncertainty, nihilists have no clear, lasting identity. Their own understanding is biased and limited. But they do assume that an identity applied to them by traditional institutions and religious values is bogus and to be rejected.

- *I have no way to know for certain who I am, but I will certainly not accept anyone else's equally distorted view of who I am.*

Existentialist: Because humans have self-consciousness and reason, we must define who and what we are. With no credible external source to give identity, we must subjectively invent who we are. No one else can do this for us.

- *I am free to be whomever I decide I want to be at any given moment in time. I exist in my own present reality.*

Pantheist: The pantheistic view of identity is holistic. My little soul is part of the big Soul of the universe. Through meditation, each of us can experience becoming one with the cosmos. When

we achieve this state of enlightenment, our personality and the external world of matter will disappear.

- *I am part of the One Spirit of the universe and am struggling to be released from the illusory physical existence I am currently experiencing.*

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what they say about a biblical view of human identity and worth: Genesis 1:27, Romans 3:23, and 1 John 4:10.

- *Genesis 1:27 — I am person created by God in His image and of inestimable value to Him.*
- *Romans 3:23 — I am a sinner in need of salvation.*
- *1 John 4:10 — I am so loved by God that He sent His Son to redeem me from my sinful condition.*

Group LEADER'S Guide for Question 3: "Where Did I Come From?"

Origins: Where did everything, including humans, come from?

Prompt: Taking the role of your selected or assigned worldview, complete the sentence:

In my view, the universe and I originated from ...

Monotheist: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe that a personal God created our universe. God created humans so they could relate to Him, but human sin has alienated us from God. We all need to be reconciled to God by obeying His revealed truth to us.

- *God created everything, including me. But since I am human, I was created with the capacity to know and obey God.*

Deist: The orderliness of the known universe points to an intelligent designer as its First Cause. This God designed the universe to be governed by natural laws so it would run on its own. The deist believes that we trace our origin to an impersonal God.

- *The universe, including me, was created by an impersonal Higher Power, sometimes referred to as God, who does not intervene in His creation.*

Naturalist: Many naturalists believe that the universe likely exploded into existence and that the process of evolution began about five billion years ago. Naturalists believe that humans emerged from less complex life forms through an evolutionary process.

- *The universe exploded into existence. Through an evolutionary process, life – including human life – emerged from the material in the universe and evolved to create the various organisms on earth today.*

Nihilist: Because history is unreliable, even if evolution were true, it would only mean that humans have a highly developed monkey brain that is, at best, unreliable. Nihilists believe that origins are under "a great cloud of unknowing."

- *No one can know where we came from and those who use their monkey brain to explain our origins are only kidding themselves and trying to mislead others.*

Existentialist: Since there is no God, we are most likely conscious beings who are products of

evolution. But unlike lower life forms, we cry out for a meaning that does not exist. If we believe in some kind of creator, the past is still irrelevant to our personal significance. Even the texts of religion are filled with “paradoxes” that can complicate our current life experience.

- *Since there is no God, evolution is the only logical answer to where we came from. Because of our advanced evolution, we seek answers from various sources and confuse ourselves with mock answers. It's best to just live in the moment.*

Pantheist: Pantheism teaches that the soul that dwells within our human body has come from numerous reincarnations. Reincarnation (literally “to be made flesh again”) means that some essential part of a living being (soul or spirit) survives death to be reborn in a new body.

- *Life and the universe have always existed, and my current life is one of many I have and will continue to experience until I am reunited with the great single Self.*

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss a biblical view of origins: Genesis 1:1, 31 and Hebrews 1:10; 11:3.

- *Genesis 1:1 — God created heaven and earth.*
- *Genesis 1:31 — All that God created was good.*
- *Hebrews 1:10 — God created the heaven and the earth.*
- *Hebrews 11:3 — God created everything we see out of what was unseen. He spoke physical matter into existence.*

Application

After you have completed the exercise for the three questions, do the following:

- *Divide your group into three smaller groups and assign each of the three groups one of the questions.*
- *Ask the groups to go back to the question they were assigned and discuss how they would explain what the Bible says about it. They should feel free to add other Bible passages if they desire.*
- *Ask each group to give a brief report.*

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Questions a Worldview Seeks to Answer (Part II)

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 3. “In Lesson 3, we will examine the last three of the six most commonly asked questions by every worldview: “Why Am I Here?” “What Is the Basis for My Values?” and “What Does the Future Hold?””

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study you should be able to

1. Explain how each worldview answers these questions, “Why Am I Here?” “What Is the Basis for My Values?” and “What Does the Future Hold?”
2. Compare and contrast each worldview regarding meaning, ethics, and the future.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

In this section of the group session on Lesson 3, you will explore how each of the seven worldviews would “answer” the last three commonly asked questions and briefly discuss a biblical view of how to answer each.

Because this is a basics course in Worldviews, it only introduces how each of the worldviews answers the six questions a worldview should explore. To help students process how a person from each of the seven worldviews might answer each of the six questions this study guide is

designed as a role play where students attempt to answer the question, as if they were a believer in one of the worldviews. Proceed through the group session as described below.

- *Tell the students who completed Lesson 2 with its Listening Guide that the listening guide was designed to help prepare them for the role playing they will participate in during this session. Tell those who didn't complete the lesson or the listening guide that they can successfully complete the exercises during the group session but may need a minute or two longer to prepare their responses.*
- *The instructions for this exercise are easy to follow.*
 - ◇ *Each group member will assume the role of a person who believes one of the seven worldviews discussed in the Worldviews source.*
 - ◇ *For question 1, "What is reality?" assign each member of your group to one of the worldviews. If you have fewer than seven members, assign each member to one worldview, complete a discussion of the worldviews the members were assigned, and then assign a second group of worldviews and discuss the question using the second round of worldviews. If you have more than seven, assign multiple group members to the same worldview.*
 - ◇ *After assigning members to a worldview, give them five minutes to study how that worldview answers that question. (See the Group Members' Handout at the end of this session of the Group Leaders' Guide.)*
 - ◇ *Using the prompt at the beginning of each question, prepare a brief answer (e.g., the prompt for the "reality" question is, "Taking the role of your selected or assigned worldview, complete the sentence, 'In my view, ultimate reality is ... and I can know it by ... '").*
 - ◇ *Each of the three questions is introduced with a brief summary of what the question deals with and a prompt (see below).*
 - ◇ *At the end of each question there is a section called "Biblical View" and a list of two or three Bible passages that introduce how the Bible talks about the question under discussion. Ask a group member to read the passage from the Bible and discuss how it helps us answer that question from the Bible.*
 - ◇ *Repeat the process for each of the three questions covered in Lesson 3.*
- *You will see two documents you are to use to conduct this group session.*
 - ◇ *The Group Members' Guide contains the material from Lesson 2 that describes how each worldview answers that question. Students will use this to provide the information they need to complete the exercise.*
 - ◇ *The Group Leader's Guide contains a brief summary of the "answers." Although most group leaders are competent to answer most of the questions, some of the questions are a bit confusing. If there is discussion over whether the group member's response was accurate or not, the Group Leader's "Answers" can serve as a source to resolve confusion.*
- *If possible, make a copy of each of the three "Group Members' Guides" for each group member. Or you may prefer to email them to the students and ask them to print a copy and bring it with them to the session.*

Guide the Group Through the Discussion of Questions 4 – 6

Group MEMBERS' Guide for Question 4: "Why Am I Here?"

Meaning or Purpose: "Why am I here and what difference does it make?"

Prompt: In my view I am here to ...

Monotheist: The monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would all agree that we derive meaning from our Creator. Having been made for a relationship with God, we can only find lasting purpose in honoring Him and finding joy in His presence.

Deist: Deists do not believe we derive our meaning from a personal Creator. Instead, they believe we make use of our intelligence, conscience, community, and creativity to find meaning in nature.

Naturalist: Many naturalists find meaning in "progress." They believe that the human race developed into a modern society from its primitive beginnings. This leads them to believe that we are capable of improving our behavior and living conditions. We therefore should skillfully use science and technology to benefit mankind.

Nihilist: The nihilist feels that traditional theories of meaning may satisfy the masses but are all built on foundations of sand. Because the nihilist sees the flaws in existing institutions, he often views himself as an activist who must challenge the superficial meanings provided by tradition.

Existentialist: Existentialists believe the cruel joke of our world is that each of us comes into the world without any overarching purpose. No objective meaning exists in the external cosmos. The existentialist must subjectively invent his own "reason for being" through the exercise of free will.

Pantheist: As the pantheist cooperates with good moral choices of "karma," he will later be reincarnated into a higher station. His ultimate meaning will be realized when he becomes one with the universe.

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what they say about about our purpose as humans: Genesis 1:28; Matthew 22:37–39; Matthew 28:18–20.

Group MEMBERS' Guide for Question 5: "What Is the Basis for My Values?"

Ethics: What is my basis for choosing right and wrong, good and evil?

Prompt: In my view, I define what is right by ...

Monotheist: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all agree that God has placed a conscience in human personality. They are divided, however, on what specific special revelation informs that conscience. The Jews derive their moral code from the Torah and the Jewish commentaries on it. The Christians go to the Old and New Testaments for ethical guidance. Muslims build their ethical systems on select parts of the Old and New Testaments, the Qur'an, and teachings of their respective Islamic sects.

Deist: Since God does not tamper with His universe, “special revelation” should not be the basis of moral values. Instead, the deist believes that we should pursue general revelation (nature) because it is there that we will find the self-evident moral values to inform our conscience by reason and free inquiry.

Naturalist: According to naturalists, social groups are the sole source of ethical systems. Because of this, we must realize that there are no ethical absolutes from one culture to another. The moral consensus of a group, however, can provide helpful guidelines for ethical decisions. Most often it is easier to live in conformity with the laws and moral guidelines of the culture in which one lives.

Nihilist: Those with this worldview have no binding moral values to judge behavior. Nihilists believe that values promoted by traditional institutions coerce and confine human potential. Because of this, these institutions must be challenged and in some cases even destroyed.

Existentialist: Those looking through this window believe that human societies not only provide superficial consolation for meaning but also artificial moral guidance. Existentialists think that most of us fail to see that “morally good behavior” is a simplistic kind of cultural conformity. The existentialist believes that the highest value is for the individual to choose an act that makes his subjective existence meaningful.

Pantheist: According to pantheism, building up the merit of “good karma” is best guided by dharma. This term refers to the unchanging universal law of order, which decrees that every entity should behave according to its own particular nature. Pantheism is found in many Eastern religious writings.

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what the Bible says about an ethical worldview: Micah 6:8; James 1:21–22; Matthew 7:12.

Group MEMBERS' Guide for Question 6: “What Does the Future Hold?”

Future: What happens to us after we die?

Prompt: In my view, what happens to us after we die is ...

Monotheist: The major monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe that human consciousness survives physical death either to be welcomed into God's eternal presence or to be turned away from Him. But the means of attaining eternal life differs in each belief

system. Judaism looks to faith and obedience to the Torah. Christianity teaches that faith in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ provides salvation. Muslims believe that submitting to Allah may merit a paradise of sensual delight.

Deist: The deist does not know if the soul survives death. Although it seems the universe functions like a wind-up clock that will eventually wind down, we should concern ourselves only with the present and the foreseeable future in improving the human condition.

Naturalist: The naturalist believes that the consciousness and personality of the individual is forever terminated at physical death. The future of the known universe will be the extinction of all the stars and the end of all life.

Nihilist: In this view, the positive ideal of human “progress” and the belief in an afterlife have no credibility. The nihilist is also pessimistic about what is to come. We really can’t postulate what the future holds for us or our universe.

Existentialist: For the existentialist, there is no purpose to existence. One’s ultimate destiny is to die and never be remembered. The future of the universe is doomed to death and extinction.

Pantheist: Pantheism teaches that the ultimate destiny of “enlightened ones” is to leave the world of material illusion and transcend to become one with the universe. In the meantime, we must experience numerous reincarnations in this universe, which is eternal.

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what the Bible says about our future when life here is finished: John 5:28–29, Romans 6:23, and Luke 23:40–43.

Group LEADER’S Guide for Question 4: “Why Am I Here?”

Meaning or Purpose: “Why am I here, and what difference does it make?”

Prompt: In my view I am here to ...

Monotheist: The monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would all agree that we derive meaning from our Creator. Having been made for a relationship with God, we can only find lasting purpose in honoring Him and finding joy in His presence.

- *I am here to honor, worship, and serve the God who created me.*

Deist: Deists do not believe we derive our meaning from a personal Creator. Instead, they believe we make use of our intelligence, conscience, community, and creativity to find meaning in nature.

- *I am here to find meaning in our universe by diligently applying my intelligence and creativity to the study of God’s creation.*

Naturalist: Many naturalists find meaning in “progress.” They believe that the human race developed into a modern society from its primitive beginnings. This leads them to believe that we

are capable of improving our behavior and living conditions. We therefore should skillfully use science and technology to benefit mankind.

- *I am here to improve life in our universe by scientifically studying it and applying my findings to benefit mankind.*

Nihilist: The nihilist feels that traditional theories of meaning may satisfy the masses but are all built on foundations of sand. Because the nihilist sees the flaws in existing institutions, he often views himself as an activist who must challenge the superficial meanings provided by tradition.

- *I have no idea why I exist or why I'm here and neither does anyone else.*

Existentialist: Existentialists believe the cruel joke of our world is that each of us comes into the world without any overarching purpose. No objective meaning exists in the external cosmos. The existentialist must subjectively invent his own “reason for being” through the exercise of free will.

- *It is absurd to identify any overarching purpose for life. I must invent and reinvent my purpose in the moment and live it.*

Pantheist: As the pantheist cooperates with good moral choices of “karma,” he will later be reincarnated into a higher station. His ultimate meaning will be realized when he becomes one with the universe.

- *I am here to advance my progress toward Nirvana, the absorption of my self into the universal Self, by carefully making choices that enhance my karma.*

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what they say about about our purpose as humans: Genesis 1:28; Matthew 22:37–39; Matthew 28:18–20.

- *Genesis 1:28 — We are here to repopulate the earth and to be stewards of its creatures and natural resources.*
- *Matthew 22:37–39 — I am here to love the Lord my God and my neighbor.*
- *Matthew 28:18–20 — I am here to bring people into an intimate personal relationship with Jesus Christ.*

Group LEADER’S Guide for Question 5: “What Is the Basis for My Values?”

Ethics: What is my basis for choosing right and wrong, good and evil?

Prompt: In my view, I define what is right by ...

Monotheist: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all agree that God has placed a conscience in human personality. They are divided, however, on what specific special revelation informs that conscience. The Jews derive their moral code from the Torah and the Jewish commentaries on it. The Christians go to the Old and New Testaments for ethical guidance. Muslims build their ethical systems on select parts of the Old and New Testaments, the Qur’an, and teachings of their respective Islamic sects.

- *By reading God's revealed will as spoken through His inspired prophet(s) and obeying what it teaches.*

Deist: Since God does not tamper with His universe, “special revelation” should not be the basis of moral values. Instead, the deist believes that we should pursue general revelation (nature) because it is there that we will find the self-evident moral values to inform our conscience by reason and free inquiry.

- *By studying how God has revealed Himself in the universe He created and forming ethical/moral principles from it.*

Naturalist: According to naturalists, social groups are the sole source of ethical systems. Because of this, we must realize that there are no ethical absolutes from one culture to another. The moral consensus of a group, however, can provide helpful guidelines for ethical decisions. Most often it is easier to live in conformity with the laws and moral guidelines of the culture in which one lives.

- *By studying whatever social group I am in at the moment and abiding by the subjective moral norms they have adopted for themselves.*

Nihilist: Those with this worldview have no binding moral values to judge behavior. Nihilists believe that values promoted by traditional institutions coerce and confine human potential. Because of this, these institutions must be challenged and in some cases even destroyed.

- *No one has the intelligence or authority to impose moral standards on me so I am free to create my own.*

Existentialist: Those looking through this window believe that human societies not only provide superficial consolation for meaning but also artificial moral guidance. Existentialists think that most of us fail to see that “morally good behavior” is a simplistic kind of cultural conformity. The existentialist believes that the highest value is for the individual to choose an act that makes his subjective existence meaningful.

- *“If it feels good, do it.” I am free to do what, in the moment, most pleases and feeds my own existence.*

Pantheist: According to pantheism, building up the merit of “good karma” is best guided by dharma. This term refers to the unchanging universal law of order, which decrees that every entity should behave according to its own particular nature. Pantheism is found in many Eastern religious writings.

- *What is right is whatever response to a given situation will produce the effect that advances my karmic state and releases me to the universal Soul. (Dharma is Sanskrit for “duty” or “the way things are intended to be.” It may also be translated as “law.”)*

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what the Bible says about an ethical worldview: Micah 6:8; James 1:21–22; Matthew 7:12.

- *Micah 6:8 — “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*
- *James 1:21–22 — “Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only.”*
- *Matthew 7:12 — “Do to others what you would have them do to you.”*

Group LEADER'S Guide for Question 6: "What Does the Future Hold?"

Future: What happens to us after we die?

Prompt: In my view, what happens to us after we die is ...

Monotheist: The major monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe that human consciousness survives physical death either to be welcomed into God's eternal presence or to be turned away from Him. But the means of attaining eternal life differs in each belief system. Judaism looks to faith and obedience to the Torah. Christianity teaches that faith in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ provides salvation. Muslims believe that submitting to Allah may merit a paradise of sensual delight.

- *I will live on after this life is over either in heaven or in hell, depending on my response to God's revealed will.*

Deist: The deist does not know if the soul survives death. Although it seems the universe functions like a wind-up clock that will eventually wind down, we should concern ourselves only with the present and the foreseeable future in improving the human condition.

- *It is more important to focus on building the immediate future since no one can know or control what happens when life on earth ends.*

Naturalist: The naturalist believes that the consciousness and personality of the individual is forever terminated at physical death. The future of the known universe will be the extinction of all the stars and the end of all life.

- *We cease to exist. Eventually the whole universe will "die."*

Nihilist: In this view, the positive ideal of human "progress" and the belief in an afterlife have no credibility. The nihilist is also pessimistic about what is to come. We really can't postulate what the future holds for us or our universe.

- *No one can know so it's basically a nonsense question.*

Existentialist: For the existentialist, there is no purpose to existence. One's ultimate destiny is to die and never be remembered. The future of the universe is doomed to death and extinction.

- *Since there is no purpose for existence, we will all die and be forgotten. Eventually the universe will die as well. Don't worry about it, and live in the moment!*

Pantheist: Pantheism teaches that the ultimate destiny of "enlightened ones" is to leave the world of material illusion and transcend to become one with the universe. In the meantime, we must experience numerous reincarnations in this universe, which is eternal.

- *We will be reincarnated in a state determined by how well or how poorly we have lived in this life. The cycle will continue until we have achieved absorption into the single Soul of the universe.*

Biblical: Read the following Bible passages and discuss what the Bible says about our future when life here is finished: John 5:28–29, Romans 6:23, and Luke 23:40–43.

- *John 5:28–29 — A time is coming when all who have died will live again; some to eternal life and some to eternal condemnation.*
- *Romans 6:23 — “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life.”*
- *Luke 23:40–43 — Jesus told the thief on the cross who accepted His claim to be God’s Son that he would be with Him in paradise that very day.*

Application

After you have completed the exercise for the three questions, do the following:

- *Divide your group into three smaller groups and assign each of the three groups one of the questions.*
- *Ask the groups to go back to the question they were assigned and discuss how they would explain what the Bible says about it. They should feel free to add other Bible passages if desired.*
- *Ask each group to give a brief report.*

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Distinctives of a Biblical Worldview

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 4. “In Lesson 4, we will examine the distinctives of a biblical worldview. As we do, special attention will be given to exploring internal consistency in contrast to each of those worldviews already examined.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study, you should be able to

1. List the six distinctives of a biblical worldview.
2. Explain to someone else the internal consistency of a biblical worldview in contrast to the other worldviews examined.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Discussion

The opening paragraph of Lesson 4 poses an interesting question we need to explore a little (and it will provide a helpful review of previous discussions on worldviews).

“Like the analogy of the blind men and the elephant, might it be possible that every worldview is at least partially right?”

List the six worldviews for the group, and ask if they can find anything right in each. Does each see a part of the elephant?

- *Monotheism: There is One God who created the universe and is integrally involved in its functions.*
- *Deism: There is a Higher Being who created our universe with predictable laws.*
- *Naturalism: The scientific process can help us identify how our universe works.*
- *Nihilism: Much of history and religious thinking is not accurate and we are wise to be skeptical.*
- *Existentialism: We have to take responsibility for our life.*
- *Pantheism: Our creation is sacred and we must honor and take care of it.*

Ask what the group members see as the greatest (or a real) caution with each worldview.

- *Monotheism: We become smug and arrogant because we have the truth. Judaism and Islam deny Jesus' deity.*
- *Deism: God isn't involved in daily life so prayer is a useless activity.*
- *Naturalism: There is no God and humans are only physical, highly developed machines.*
- *Nihilism: Life is a hopeless, meaningless existence.*
- *Existentialism: There is no purpose to life beyond the immediate moment, so live to satisfy yourself now.*

The Bible and Reality

A serious contemplation of our natural universe, including the complexity of our own body, leads one to at least wonder about how it all came to be.

Read Romans 1:20 and talk about the idea that God's created universe provides evidence of His existence.

- *What are two or three "evidences" from nature that help us affirm our view of God?*
 - ◊ *Consistency in nature (days, months, seasons, etc.); design of our universe (if the earth was not positioned exactly where it is in relation to the sun, no life could exist); beauty and intricacy of nature, including humans' physical, emotional, and intellectual complexity.*
- *Are there any "evidences" that cast doubt on it? If so, what are they?*
 - ◊ *"Cruelty" among animals (the lion eating the zebra, etc.), disease, storms, drought, etc.*

Read Psalm 19:1–6, which also states that God reveals Himself to us in His creation.

- *God's general revelation is marvelous, but God wants us to know more.*

Read 2 Peter 1:20–21 and discuss Peter's claim.

- *What does it actually say about the Bible?*

Ask if anyone can name other similar Bible passages that teach the same truth about God's special revelation in the Bible.

- *2 Timothy 3:16*

- *Psalm 19:7–11*
- *Repeated references in the prophets that “This is the word of the Lord.”*

Ask the group members if they believe these claims and, if so, what influence should those claims make on a person’s response to Scripture?

Read Hebrews 11:3 and discuss the fact that God created our universe out of nothing.

- *The biblical view of reality must take account of a Spirit Being behind all that exists, and that Spirit Being is the God of the Bible.*
- *Genesis 1:1 is the foundational statement for a biblical view of reality. “In the beginning **God**.”*
- *How would someone who rejected God’s existence understand the Bible’s claims?*
- *Read and discuss Colossians 1:16, and ask what that statement adds to our view of reality.*

Read this sentence from Lesson 4, which says that God reveals Himself to two parts of our awareness.

(Listening Guide questions 9, 10, & 11)

“The Bible describes the existence of both physical and spiritual realms. The first is open to the five senses. The second requires divine revelation to learn of its reality.”

- *Ask someone to name the two realms of reality and how God reveals Himself to each.*
- *Ask group members which of those types of revelation speaks more powerfully to them.*
- *How do they, personally, learn about God through each medium?*
- *How often do they participate in each of those efforts to know God better?*

The Bible and Identity

Read or summarize the content of the following paragraph from Lesson 4:

The various perspectives of major worldviews suggest that knowing who we are isn’t that easy. We are complex and, at times, contradictory beings. Accordingly, we have built institutions of commerce, developed medicines to bring health to millions, and launched space probes. Yet as a race, we have also built concentration camps, used instruments of torture, and implemented policies of genocide. Why would there be such a contradiction in attitudes and behavior?

Ask the group how they would answer the final question of this paragraph. (The lesson’s following paragraph addresses the question.)

(Listening Guide question 12)

Read Genesis 1:26–27 and ask the group to summarize in a sentence or two what difference they think it makes that we are created in God’s image.

- *Read the following sentences from Lesson 4: “Many biblical scholars believe the image of God includes reason, emotion, will, self-consciousness, creativity, and conscience. These attributes have enabled us to pursue the beautiful and creative aspects of the arts and sciences.” Then ask the following questions of the group:*

- ◇ *Although we all possess the aspects of God’s image listed in this paragraph, are one or two most apparent in you?*
- ◇ *How, specifically, do they show themselves in you?*

Read Genesis 6:5 and Matthew 15:19–20 and ask if these verses paint a realistic description of parts of our human race.

- *How strongly do you sense this “dark” side of your own humanity?*
- *Are there specific things any of the group members struggle with that lead them to agree with this description of humanity?*
- *Read Romans 3:9–18, 23 and remind the group that these dark struggles are universal, and the only difference among unsaved is that some are able to control their struggles better than others.*

What is your response to the final question of this paragraph: *“But where did this negative moral bent come from?”*

(Listening Guide question 19)

Ask the group if they think most people believe we actually have a negative moral bent.

(Listening Guide questions 21 & 22)

- *If so, where do they believe it came from?*
- *If not, how would they explain the fact that people do evil things?*

The following section of Lesson 4, “The Bible and Origins,” explains the Bible’s view of evil.

The Bible and Origins

Genesis 1 – 2 tells the reader that God created a good universe. Five times we read that “God saw that it was good.” And after He created man and woman in His own image and completed His creative work, Genesis tells us, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

The next paragraph in Lesson 4 tells us:

God had created a good universe and entrusted man and woman with an ideal environment to care for. They were completely innocent, but their moral character had not yet been tested. So, according to Genesis:

The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17).

Ask if anyone can explain why God gave Adam and Eve the choice to disobey His command.

The following paragraph contains the answer from Lesson 4:

To answer that we need to understand the backstory of Scripture. Earlier in God’s created order, Satan, a high-ranking angel, chose to rebel against God’s authority. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 seem to indicate that Satan was cast down from heaven and took on the form of a serpent in order to tempt the first man

and woman. By cleverly casting doubt on God's motives, the devil tempted the first couple to distrust their Creator and do the one thing He had told them not to do (Gen. 3:6–8).

(Note: The paragraph reads as if Satan was cast down and took the form of a serpent in order to tempt Adam and Eve. The two events were separated by a period of time. Satan was cast down from heaven [Isa. 14]. At a later time he took the form of a serpent [Gen. 3]. The paragraph didn't intend to link the two events, as the wording might suggest.)

Ask the group if there are circumstances or events in their own experience that stimulate doubt about God's goodness.

(Listening Guide question 24)

- *If so, how do they respond to them?*
- *Suggest the need for constant prayer and fellowship with God to sustain the strength we need to resist Satan's attacks.*
- *Read 1 John 3:7–10 and discuss the fact that Jesus has defeated Satan and his power over us.*
- *Also read 1 John 1:9 and assure the group that God is aware of our human frailty and has made provision for our failure.*

Note: The exercise on the last two pages of this Leaders' Guide helps students analyze Satan's tactics as he deceived Eve. You may want to insert it here or save it as an application exercise to close the session or not use it at all.

Adam and Eve's sin had consequences. Read and discuss the following passages

- *Genesis 3:7 – The man and woman were estranged and alienated from each other.*
- *“Nakedness” – they focused on differences between them.*
- *3:12 – blaming and accusing rather than supporting and protecting each other.*
- *Genesis 3:8–10 – Adam and Eve were alienated from God.*
- *Genesis 3:17–19 – Creation would work against rather than support their existence.*

There were longer term and even eternal consequences. Read and discuss.

- *Genesis 2:15–17 – The consequences were death, both physical and spiritual.*
- *Romans 5:12, 18–19 – Adam's sin had eternal consequences. It condemned all his descendants to both physical and spiritual death.*
- *Romans 3:23 – All have sinned. Both by inheriting Adam's sin nature and by our own acts, we are guilty of transgressing God's will.*
- *Romans 5:18–19 and 6:23 teach that just as Adam's disobedience condemned all to eternal separation from God, so Jesus' obedience on the cross made it possible for anyone to receive God's free gift of salvation from sin.*

The Bible and Meaning

Ask if any group member can name worldviews that mourn the meaninglessness of life.

(Listening Guide question 26)

- *Nihilism and Existentialism*

Ask if they can succinctly state what gives meaning to their life.

(Listening Guide question 27)

- *Read Philippians 1:20–21 to discover Paul’s answer.*

Read Ecclesiastes 1:2 and ask if the group feels a majority or a minority of people in the world ever have this feeling. Ask group members if any of them ever struggle with it.

- *Read Ecclesiastes 1:3 and point out that this question, which follows the statement of futility in 1:2, is a key to the book of Ecclesiastes. The crucial point in 1:3 is “under the sun,” which refers to life on earth with no sense that there is anything “above the sun.” Is there any “gain” for us if our labors are limited to what happens “under the sun”? If we eliminate the spiritual, the relationship with God, life is ultimately futile and meaningless. Meaning can only be found if we correctly understand that life is not limited to “under the sun.”*
- *Read Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 where Solomon — after describing the frustrated wrestling with meaning experienced by someone explaining life with God eliminated from their worldview — gives his final conclusion about how to make sense of life.*

The lesson reminds us that meaning for those who believe the Bible is sourced in Jesus. He is more than a human teacher from Nazareth. Read Colossians 1:15–23, and discuss how He defines meaning for those who follow Him.

You may also want to read the following paragraph from Lesson 4 under “Meaning.” The paragraph states, in some detail, the most profound of all truths.

But according to the Bible, when we see what God did to bring us back to Himself, everything can begin to fall into place. If Jesus is not just a teacher from Nazareth, but actually our Creator, the Son of God, Mediator, Savior, King of kings, Lord of lords, and ruler of the age to come, then everything has meaning in relation to Him. When we see Christ as God’s offer of atonement, life, hope, peace, and immeasurable love, then everything we think or do is a step toward or away from Him.

Based on the Colossians passage and, if you choose, the paragraph above, lead a discussion of the following questions:

(Listening Guide questions 28, 29 & 30)

- *Does this description of Jesus resonate with your own understanding of Him?*
- *What are some ways it agrees and/or disagrees with your view of Him?*
- *In your own search for life’s meaning, what role does Jesus play?*
- *Read Colossians 3:1–4 and discuss Paul’s commands. The verbs “set your hearts” (v. 1) and “set your minds” (v. 2) are in the imperative mode, as is “put to death” in verse 5.*

This paragraph concludes from the lesson, “everything we think or do is a step toward or away from Him.” Discuss the following question:

(Listening Guide question 31)

- *As you consider the past few days, have your thoughts and actions been a movement toward or away from Him? How, specifically?*

The Bible and Ethics

Read Romans 2:14–15 and discuss the fact that God has created inside all humans a deep sense of right and wrong that provides a moral compass.

Read John 16:8–11 and discuss the source of God’s moral compass. The Holy Spirit is a living, active being who monitors and guides us. Ask,

- *How in tune to this inner sense do you think most people are?*
- *Do people close to you have a strong commitment to ethical behavior?*
- *What are some ways such a commitment influences your own life?*
- *How sensitive are you to God’s “inner voice”? Can you violate your sense of right and wrong without a struggle — or are you more in touch with your moral voice?*

The Bible and the Future

Read the opening paragraph of this section from Lesson 4:

The biblical worldview offers hope in a life to come. Because it tells us that we are made in the image of God, it offers us reason to believe that our identity and personality are eternal.

And discuss the following:

(Listening Guide questions 35 & 36)

- *How would this truth, if taken seriously, influence a person’s worldview and lifestyle?*
- *Does this truth have any influence in your life? If so, how?*

Read the first sentence of the next paragraph in Lesson 4

Yet, according to the Scriptures, everlasting fellowship with God after death is not automatic.

And ask,

(Listening Guide question 37)

- *Does anyone (in your group) not believe this is true?*
- *Can those who do believe that not everyone is going to heaven is true give a clear explanation from Scripture about why they believe it is true?*
 - ◊ *John 3:3–5; Romans 10:9–10*
- *Ask, “Have you accepted God’s gift of eternal life”?*

Read Romans 8:18–25 and discuss how much of God’s creation was impacted by Adam and Eve’s sin and how much of it was redeemed by Christ.

Read Revelation 21:1–4 and ask the group members:

- *How real this amazing truth is to the group members.*
- *If it influences their worldview in any specific way.*

The Bible has powerful statements to make about our eternal future. But take a moment to reflect with the group how a biblical worldview influences our near, day-to-day future.

Read and discuss Romans 8:26–30, especially the claim in verse 29 that we are being conformed to the image of His Son.

You may want to discuss how being the “light of the world” and “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13–14) and how being Jesus’ witnesses (Acts 1:8) influences how group members think about their future on the earth.

Application

The focus of this lesson was how the Bible influences a person’s worldview as it relates to reality, identity, origins, meaning, ethics, and the future. Ask if anyone would like to share thoughts about how the Bible shapes their personal worldview around any one of those topics and how it influences their life day to day.

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God’s Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone “sees” the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on

the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

Which Worldview Will You Choose?

Introduce the Lesson

Introduce the lesson by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 5. “In Lesson 5, special attention will be given to how a biblical worldview includes key concepts latent within each worldview already examined. We will discuss options and explore how we can choose a worldview each of us feels is most consistent with truth.”

Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.

Review the Lesson Objectives

Review the Lesson Objectives below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

By the end of this study, you should be able to

1. Explain what part of God’s truth can be found in each worldview.
2. Cite a key Bible verse to illustrate how each worldview has at least one concept contained in Scripture.
3. Make a decision concerning which worldview you feel to be the most consistent with truth.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.

Introduction

Explain that the purpose of this session is to explore the possibility that a biblical worldview is the most comprehensive of all the worldviews and is worthy of consideration for acceptance as a person’s foundational worldview.

Discussion

The following exercise is designed to introduce the idea that there is at least one truth that appears to be a universal one — the truth that certain actions are right and should be practiced and other actions are wrong and should not be practiced. The point of this lesson is that regardless of one’s worldview, there are beliefs that we all agree on.

Lead the group to compile a list of “universal” goods and evils: attitudes and actions that are generally accepted in every culture as being either good or bad, right or wrong.

1. List attitudes and then actions that group members believe people in any culture or with any worldview would agree are essentially right and good.

Use a piece of flip chart paper or a chalkboard and write the following categories on it. Then ask the group what actions and attitudes might fit under each category.

Good	
Attitudes/Values (The group may suggest things like: love, honesty, compassion, etc.)	Actions (Things like: helping other, truth telling, listening, teaching, etc.)
Evil	
Attitudes/Values (Things like: envy, hatred, jealousy, etc.)	Actions (Things like: murder, torture, rape, etc.)

2. Explain that similar lists come from people who adhere to just about any worldview. Discuss why the group thinks this is so. They are biblical, but people who reject the Bible’s claims or adopt another worldview would generate a similar list.
3. These are values or moral standards that Lesson 5 refers to as “Objective Moral Values.”

The first paragraph of Lesson 5 presents one of C. S. Lewis’s statements about objective moral values. Before discussing the content of the paragraph, read the following explanation of “objective moral values.” It is intended to clarify what Lewis and the first paragraph in Lesson 5 are talking about.

If you are uncomfortable with your understanding of objective moral values, the following statement, paraphrased from an article written by a philosopher, may be of some comfort.

The concept of “objective morality” is notoriously ambiguous. So much so that “philosophers have a moral obligation not to use that expression unless and until they first give a very nuanced definition of what it means”!

The following “simple” definition of the term should be adequate for your group discussion. It is not intended to be philosophically exhaustive, but it will help all group members form the same idea as they discuss objective moral values.

Objective moral values are qualities that are morally good independent of human beliefs. An objective value is considered a fact of what is good or evil and not an opinion of what is good or evil. We can accept or reject an objective value as true or not true, but we cannot say we ignore an objective value because “in our opinion” it is invalid. A purported fact can either be true or false, but it is qualitatively different than an opinion, which is a matter of personal preference. To claim that an objective moral value like, “Murder is evil” exists is like the claim that, “There is a dog in my house” exists. We make statements about objective moral reality in the same way we make statements about objective physical reality. They both exist; and both are intended to be accepted as real.

In contrast to objective morality, if we said that “murder is evil” is a subjective moral statement, we would claim that it is relative to personal or cultural preference. For a relativist to say “murder is evil” is to express a preference like saying “beef tastes better than chicken” or “blue is prettier than red.” If objective moral values do actually exist, then statements like, “Murder is evil” can be objectively true. If objective moral values exist, then murder would still be evil even if a dictator convinced his subjects that murder serves the greater good and murder became legally accepted behavior. A moral relativist believes that moral statements like, “Murder is evil” are subjective, meaning they are only someone’s personal opinion. If some person or some society believes that others can be murdered because of their race or their religious belief, then the murder would be good “for them.” Others may disagree, but that is only their opinion. If there are no objective moral values to justify an argument against murder then Hitler’s Holocaust, Stalin’s gulags, and various ethnic cleansing initiatives cannot be condemned as evil; they can only be discussed as opinions of right or wrong that some cultures or individuals are free to agree or disagree with.

Read and discuss the first paragraph, sentence by sentence of Lesson 5 as follows:

Ideas for Discussion

In his book The Abolition of Man, C. S. Lewis cites common values that are shared by every major civilization.

- *Your previous exercise where you listed “right” and “wrong” attitudes and behaviors identified the fact that we generally agree with Lewis’s statement.*

At the core of each [value] is a set of ethics that affirm honesty, respect for parents, and care for the poor.

- *Can you add a few more to Lewis’s list from your discussion?*

These commonly recognized standards also prohibit lying, stealing, killing, and committing adultery.

- *Can you add a few more to Lewis’s list from your discussion?*
- *Ask your group if anyone can come up with a reason that would justify the negative behaviors Lewis listed. Could someone justify stealing or murder?*
 - ◊ *Many moral philosophers present moral dilemmas where lying is the more moral option than telling the truth — from sparing the feelings of a bad cook to protecting innocent life. But such situations always need careful justification, thereby affirming that they are universally accepted as negative objective values. To merely say, “I lied and it was okay,” is to raise immediate questions and the claim needs to be explained because most people immediately disagree with it.*

Lewis considers these standards for conduct a part of the doctrine of objective moral values. He reasons

that this common awareness of right and wrong is “not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgments. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained” (The Abolition of Man, Harper One, 2001, 43).

- *These sentences argue that this common understanding of objective morals across cultures is inviolable. We cannot waffle on whether or not there are objective moral values. It is saying, “The idea that there are objective moral values must be accepted as an objective fact.” We can’t conclude that it’s just a matter of opinion to believe that there are objective moral values. They exist or they don’t exist. Lewis has argued that they do exist.*

The point of Lesson 5 is that since people with different worldviews agree on something as important as an objective set of moral values, why do the same cultures and worldviews differ on other points of their worldview?

The answer takes us back to our friend from Lesson 1: the elephant. We each tend to view part of the truth as the whole truth.

It would help if, before the session, you posted the six questions and the seven worldviews on a chalkboard or a piece of flip chart paper so the group has ready reference to both.

(Listening Guide questions 2 & 3)

- *As an exercise to help your group members think through what these differences are, you may ask them, “What are some of the most foundational beliefs or principles the various worldviews hold in common?”*
- *“What are some of the most foundational differences between the worldviews?”*

Fragmenting What Is Right

The lesson states that, “The biblical worldview claims to offer a view and system of truth that is consistent with God’s character, the physical world, and the spiritual dimension of existence.”

Ask the group why the biblical worldview may, or may not, be seen as a valid universal truth that all people can accept.

- *Establish the fact that God clearly knows His own character and the physical world He created — the spiritual realm of existence He created and is part of — better than any person can know them (Isa. 46:9–10; 40:13; Ps. 139:15–16; Rom. 11:33; Heb. 4:13).*
- *Then establish the fact that God has revealed truth about each of these realms in the Bible, where He has revealed knowledge to us (2 Tim. 3:15–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21).*

We should not, therefore, be surprised that “the biblical worldview claims to be a comprehensive worldview. The omniscient God has revealed His truth about the world He created and governs in the Bible.

Read the next paragraph in the lesson (beginning with, “By attempting to take...”), which states that other ideologies adopt the parts of God’s whole truth they like and reject other parts that don’t support their own ideologies. Then they “swell” or blow up out of proportion the part of

God's truth they agree with and use it to support their worldview.

If, as Lewis observes, “new ideologies ‘take fragments of the truth to escape obligation to the whole,’” then...

(Listening Guide question 5)

- *What are some obligations of the biblical worldview that those who believe in other worldviews try to escape? (A few examples are listed below.)*
 - ◊ *We are committed to a personal God who created us and to whom we must bow in humble worship and obedience.*
 - ◊ *We are sinners and need to be saved.*
 - ◊ *Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God.*

What is it about the biblical worldview that makes it threatening or unattractive to people who prefer another worldview?

(Listening Guide question 6)

- *It must be accepted by faith and cannot be “proven” with empirical science.*
- *Many parts of it disagree with whatever part of the “elephant” their culture and religious beliefs have already convinced them is the only way to believe.*

The next paragraph states,

If Lewis is right, then we should be able to see in Scripture the whole picture and pattern from which others borrow.

The lesson then illustrates how other worldviews have “borrowed” from the biblical worldview. To help the group process how other worldviews have borrowed from the Bible, read the following verses and ask the group if they can identify which worldview has borrowed from it.

- *Genesis 1:1 – (Deism agrees and teaches that God is the first cause of the universe.)*
- *Ephesian 1:11 – (Theism teaches that creation is guided by a Higher Being – Adonai in Judaism, the triune God in Christianity, Allah in Islam.)*
- *John 4:24 – (Pantheism agrees and teaches that spiritual realities do exist and can be experienced by humans.)*
- *Ephesians 1:9 – (Nihilism teaches that skepticism is legitimate and a valid part of the human condition. Apprehending truth is often shrouded in mystery and uncertainty and can never be ultimately trusted.)*
- *Ecclesiastes 1:1–4 – (Existentialism teaches that life without God has no objective meaning; and existentialism rejects the existence of a higher being.)*

Ask if group members see any additional ways the other worldviews studied have borrowed from the biblical worldview.

(Listening Guide question 7)

Which Worldview Will You Choose?

Ask the students to discuss what the biblical worldview says are the consequences of being partially right but ultimately wrong when choosing a worldview.

(Listening Guide question 8)

- *Read John 14:6 and discuss the fate of those who reject Jesus' claim.*

Refer to the list of six beliefs you examined in the course and ask how the group would prioritize them in terms of importance.

Ideas for Discussion

- *Are any more important than the others?*
- *If so, what makes it, or them, stand out as more important?*

Review the seven worldviews you studied in the course.

- *List them from "most important" to "least important to agree with."*
- *On what criteria did you base your priorities? What makes a worldview important?*
- *Which worldviews are most and least like your own worldview.*
- *Which worldviews are most to least desirable, in their opinion, for a thirteen-year-old to embrace and why.*

Ask the group to consider the following questions:

(Listening Guide questions 12 & 13)

Ideas for Discussion

- *If you have not settled on a worldview yet, carefully consider the options. If you are not drawn to the biblical worldview, read John 3:1–3, 16–17 and weigh Jesus' own explanation of His purpose for coming to earth before you finally decide which worldview to choose.*
- *If you have accepted what the biblical worldview teaches about Jesus, you have entered into a relationship with Him. It's more than accepting a truth — it's a lifestyle. Read and carefully weigh the decision presented to all who have accepted the biblical worldview in Romans 12:1–3. A biblical worldview shapes the whole life of the one who adopts it.*

Application

You have completed the academic portion of the course, Worldview Basics. But notice the third objective for this final lesson.

Make a decision concerning which worldview you feel to be the most consistent with truth.

Don't leave the course until you have made a decision about your worldview.

Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

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