

242 Guide - Small Group Discussion Guide

This weekly guide has been created as a tool to help you study individually and/or in a small group and live what you are learning from the Bible and weekend services here at RiverGlen.

In Acts 2:42 we are told that the people in the first church were living out what they were learning from the apostles' teaching. **The purpose of this guide is to equip you to put into practice what you learn.**



Week 1: Finding Jesus

Big Idea: This week we begin a 4 week journey through the book Colossians. Entitled "Losing My Religion" we are learning how to lose religion and embrace a relationship with Jesus. Colossians was written by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome to confront and encourage the Colossians. Apparently the young church was mixing Christianity and other religions and trying to do things to get right with God. Paul teaches that Jesus Christ alone is supreme and sufficient. Jesus, not religion, is our bridge to God and what gives us eternal hope and comfort.

Ice Breaker: Close your eyes and picture a bridge that you have crossed sometime in your life. Share with the group when and where it was and what specific details and emotions you remember about crossing the bridge. (Such as.... "I crossed the Gold Gate Bridge on vacation as a child when I was about 10 years old. I remember being excited, scared & nervous because it was so big and over so much water!")

MIX AND MATCH? Perhaps you are familiar with the Garanimals children's clothing line. As stated on the company's website: "The kid-friendly Garanimals mix-and-match separates provide a simple, coordinated system that makes clothes easy to pair and fun to wear." 3 simple steps are also listed for using this system:

1. Just find your favorite Garanimals inside a top.
2. Find the same Garanimals inside a bottom.
3. Make a match for a perfect pair.

Sounds fairly simple, right? There are people in our society who choose to look at religion in the same manner. Simply find an aspect of religion that you like, find another aspect you think coordinates with the previous one, and you have yourself a simple and easy religion that fits you.

1. Where have you see this kind of approach to religion in your own life? What would be the "3 simple steps" to religion you have seen or practiced?
2. What is so appealing about being able to choose what you want, whenever you want it?

CONSUMER CHRISTIANITY? It is easy for us to gravitate to a mix-and-match religion because it is so amenable and convenient. But how does this consumer approach to religion affect those who seek to follow Christ?

Consider some of these thoughts on consumer faith. In his book *The Empty Church*, historian Thomas C. Reeves says: “Christianity in modern America . . . tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient, and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, an otherworldly outlook, a zeal for souls, a fear as well as love of God.” Efrem Smith, a pastor from Minneapolis said this: “I’m very concerned about the continual influence of consumerism Christianity and a Christianity that is very self-centered. . . . It limits the Gospel message and keeps us from kingdom community and reconciliation.”

3. Do you agree or disagree with the ideas presented in these statements? Why or why not?
4. How would you describe your attitude when it comes to faith, especially in Jesus? Explain.
 - a. **Bargain shopper.** I look for the best elements of all faiths, not just Christianity.
 - b. **Cheap.** I don’t buy into any form of religion because I’m skeptical of it.
 - c. **Clearance rack.** I only look for God when something bad happens to me.
 - d. **Disgruntled customer.** I tried God, but he really let me down.
 - e. **Loyal customer.** I try my best to trust and obey whatever Jesus says.
 - f. **New product.** I’ve grown to appreciate Jesus, but I’m still learning about him.
 - g. **Thrifty.** Church is good for me, but I’m not a fanatic who takes it too seriously.
 - h. **Other:** _____

Religion or Relationship? We must begin to recognize that Christ following is inherently about a relationship with God, through Jesus. It is not a set of rules that keep us doing the right things. The Bible actually shows a difference between consumer religion and true Christ-following by introducing an important relational concept: reconciliation.

Read Colossians 1:15-23

Webster’s dictionary defines “reconciliation” as the process of restoring to friendship. Christ-following is about our friendship with Jesus. It is personal and without pretense. It is motivated by our response to His loving sacrifice. Religion, however, is one-sided—motivated by what makes us feel good, what fits our lives, and how we can tip the scale for our earthly and eternal benefit. Religion leaves it up to us to define our way, our truth, and how we live. Religion is horizontal.

5. Can religion and following Christ co-exist? Why or why not?
6. In what areas are you guilty of being “religious?”
7. What are effective ways to change from a consumerist attitude to a relationship-with-Jesus attitude?

Reflection & Prayer

Lord God we have learned that there are no simple steps to religion to follow or a list of things to do to be right with you. There is only one way...through Your Son Jesus Christ. So Lord this week, help us to lose our religion and pursue a more personal relationship with you. Open our hearts through time with you in prayer, in your word and in your quiet presence. Reveal to us any areas of our lives where we are still standing on our side of the bridge...trying our own to do list. And teach us Father how to let go and accept what you have already done. In Your Precious Son’s Name. Amen.