BOOK CLUB

Is Jesus Real?

Group Leader's Guide

Albert Wolfe

Foreword

By Dr. Edward Wolfe

My son, Albert, led a highly successful book club that met weekly to discuss my book *Is Jesus Real?*, so I asked him to put together this guidebook for anyone interested in hosting a similar group discussion.

I could imagine this may be appealing for:

- Church-based small groups or life groups.

- Neighbors (in homes or dorm rooms).

- Book clubs.

If you are a professor of apologetics at a university, you may find the compilation of the discussion questions here to be a useful reference for topics you could give your classes as interactive or writing exercises.

Enjoy!

Is Jesus Real? may be purchased wherever books are sold or through the author's website: wolfemusiced.com

Why read as a group?

In the summer of 2021, I invited a few friends to join me in reading *The five Languages of Apologetics* as a "book club." The reasons I told them I wanted to read it together were:

- To engage with the book more thoughtfully (I had already finished reading it).

- To share the content with my friends (I thought they would be interested in it).

- To improve our relationships (I looked forward to learning more about those who joined).

If any of those reasons resonate with you, then you may want to consider reading not only *The Five Languages of Apologetics* with a group, but other books in the future as well. Group members have come and gone (and we're well onto other books now), but book club meetings have become one of the highlights of my week.

Why I suggest a "structured" group

A structured meeting simply means that there are explicitly stated roles and rules that serve as clear expectations for the group participants.

I have some very good friends who do not like highly structured group meetings. They feel having set "roles" and "rules" gives participants a lot of pressure, limits how free people feel, and just feels generally unfriendly. They prefer less structured group meetings where basically anyone can say anything at any time, and even the beginning and end times of the meeting are quite flexible.

I would like to suggest that *both* styles of groups are good, and that both types have "rules." The less structured one simply has more "implicit" (unspoken) rules, such as "In this group we don't stop people who are speaking, even if the topic is unrelated to what we've been talking about." That probably hasn't been explained directly or written down in most groups, but participants will quickly figure out if that's a rule that a group expects to be followed.

Every book club will have their own roles and rules, as well as their own unique style, and I think that's a good thing! I'm simply recommending that you make your book club's rules more explicit. This will save participants time and energy needed to infer the rules and will let them just agree to them (or not) directly.

There are basically three "roles" we used in our meetings, and I suggest you consider them as well:

1. **Organizer:** usually the host of the group (it was in my home, so I was the organizer).

2. **Discussion Leader:** the person who leads each individual meeting (I also did this every time, but it could be rotated).

3. **Participants:** everyone who attends each meeting.

You may want to include a meal together or connect other activities to the group meeting, which may imply other roles. However, the list above should serve as a good starting point.

Roles and Tasks

Organizer

1. **Invite** people to join the book club *individually* (no one likes group messages, right?).

2. **Decide how the group will communicate** in the future (this is where you could have a Facebook group, email group, chat group, etc.).

3. Prepare to be **the first Discussion Leader** (see jobs below).

4. In the first meeting:

   a. **Explain how the group works** (including how to invite new people, if that's allowed).

   b. **Explain or facilitate a discussion** about the role of Discussion Leader. Will it rotate each time or will it be the same person multiple times?

   c. **Lead the first discussion**.

5. (Feel free to share this eBook with everyone.)

Discussion Leader(s)

1. **Decide** how many chapters will be "assigned" reading for the next meeting and **send** that information to the group in advance. Some groups go slowly. Some finish the whole book before the only meeting.

2. **Read** the assigned reading twice.

3. **Decide the order** you want to ask the discussion questions. Time usually runs out before all questions have been answered. So by choosing the order you can ensure that the most interesting content to you and the group gets covered.

4. **Actively listen** to participants and **ask them clarifying questions** to help them think about and engage with the text.

Participants

1. **Prepare** for the discussion by doing the following:

   a. **Read the assigned chapter(s)** in advance.

   b. **Write down your answers** to the discussion questions in advance.

   c. **Jot down any questions** you have about the text that you want to ask the group.

   d. **Make any other notes** that will help you participate actively.

2. **Come on time** to the meeting, **bring your notes,** and **actively participate** in the discussion.

Bonus Tips

- If you're going to go chapter by chapter, a good first assignment would be **Preface + Chapter 1 — How This Book Works**.

- It may be good to open the first meeting with a discussion about what participants hope to get out of the book. I found everyone's goals to be quite different and it helped the group to hear what everyone else was looking forward to most about reading this book.

- Read the 4 appendices after reading Chapter 1. These may be of interest to your group, so you could "assign" them before reaching the end of the book.

- The scriptures listed at the end of each chapter may easily get overlooked if you don't specifically structure the discussion to include them.

- Keep the group focused on the text as much as possible. Besides the discussion questions, which are designed to help people connect personally to the text, a good rule of thumb is to watch for how closely the group is staring at and referring to the text in their discussions. One way to remember this is: you want people pointed at the page, not each other (or themselves). You could remind them of this by simply asking, "Which page?" when a topic comes up.

- Don't be afraid of silence. When the group is quiet and thinking, that's a good thing! Of course, if they're stuck, you might want to ask a different question, or summarize what you've heard to get the ball rolling.

- Don't get too lost in the details. It's important to keep the group moving forward and everyone feeling they can participate. If a discussion of one topic goes too deep, be sure to pay attention to the group's body language and even pause to ask everyone directly, "Is this a topic we want to continue discussing in such detail at this time?" It could be that the group is very interested and they'll confirm that they *do* want to continue. However, it's also possible that only one or two people are interested and the other glassy-eyed participants would be happier to move on.

- Don't feel pressure to *answer* anything, especially if a question is beyond your expertise. If a participant has a question about something in the text, a possible answer to is to ask a follow up question, such as "That's a great question. Would you consider doing a little research on that and reporting back to the group next meeting?"

- For an even more structured book club format, you may be interested in the Great Books Foundation's "Shared Inquiry" method. They have a free handbook available for **download here**.

Summary of All Discussion Questions

Chapter 1 — How This Book Works

1. Have you ever changed your belief in something after a period of doubt? Through what process did you go? Examples might be the coronavirus pandemic; the benefits or disadvantages of a college or high school class; the value of a medical procedure; pleasure or remorse at a major purchase such as a car or home; pleasure or regret at finding a spouse; or embracing or abandoning a religious belief.

2. What are the uses and limitations of Christian apologetics?

1. What **human experiences** support the truth of Christianity, that Jesus is real and the Bible is true? This can include the reader's own personal experiences and the experiences of people we know, as well as people about whom we've read. What is the power of such evidence, and its limitations?

2. What **objective evidences** support that Jesus is real and the Bible is true? These can include scientific evidences from cosmology and biology that demonstrate the overwhelming appearance of design; human exceptionalism; archaeological evidences; and historical evidences that tend to corroborate the Bible and that support the resurrection of Christ. God has left clues to his existence and character in the cosmos, in life, and in history. Is there contravening evidence along these lines as well?

3. What **philosophical evidences** support that Jesus is real and the Bible is true? These might include the cosmological argument, teleological evidences, evidences from the non-material world, including the appearance of the universe from nothing, Anselm's ontological argument, and the fact that the major doctrines of Christianity apparently present no insurmountable philosophical problems. These are philosophical issues, often inspired by scientific observation, which is why I consider them to be philosophical evidences. Why do so many philosophers embrace atheism and agnosticism?

4. What **pragmatic evidences** support that Jesus is real and the Bible is true? Does the reader know of evidence to support this statement: to the extent that we follow Jesus's commands, we find our lives to be abundant, meaningful, and transcendently satisfying? This type of evidence is related somewhat to the human experiences type of evidence. Does it also share its power and limitations?

5. What **aesthetic evidences** support that Jesus is real and the Bible is true? Some people remain unconvinced by the other four types of evidence. To some people, what is beautiful is that which is most convincing. Does the reader know examples of evidence that the Bible in general and the life of Jesus in particular are beautiful and fitting? Do you think you would find such evidence compelling or irrelevant?

Chapter 2 — Human Experience Is Important

1. Do you know anyone who would claim that Jesus is real and the Bible is true? What, do you suppose, is the basis for their claim?

2. If their claims were true, would you suppose that their faith somehow would apply to you? Would you be inclined to embrace their faith, reject it, or take a "wait and see" posture?

   What objections have you heard or might you yourself raised to anyone who suggests that faith in Jesus is for everyone?
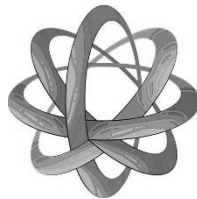
Chapter 3 — The Nature of Objective Evidence

1. In your belief system, how important is objective evidence as compared with your personal experience? Is there a difference between objective evidence and personal experience? If so, how would you describe the difference(s)?

2. How certain do you need to be of something before you take action? For example, how certain did you need to be about the effectiveness of mask-wearing during the COVID 19 pandemic before you were willing to wear one, if ever?

3. Agree or disagree with this sentence and give reasons: "I think that religion and science should be kept separate."

Chapter 4 — Objective Evidence from Cosmology

1. What features of our planet are remarkably and narrowly defined? Which of these allow for life here? (An example that people seem to know is the tilt of the earth's axis or perhaps its distance from the sun.)

2. Carl Sagan famously said in the book *Contact*, "The universe is a pretty big place. If it's just us, seems like an awful waste of space". Agree or disagree.

3. In your experience, what are some of the most precisely-designed items or processes? When you hear the phrase, "This required extreme precision," what comes to mind? Examples might include knee replacements, cooking a favorite recipe, and aiming a smart bomb.

4. Would you say that our solar system is designed, *appears* to be designed, or neither? Why?

Chapter 5 — Objective Evidence from Biology and Information Science

1. When you think about biology, what impresses and puzzles you the most?

2. Respond to this statement: "The most important idea in our study is that there is no distinction between animate and inanimate," Arto Annila told *PhysOrg.com*. "Processes of life are, in their principles, no different from any other natural processes" (Zyga, 2008).

3. Respond to this statement: "There is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties… All the differences are of degree, not of kind."

Chapter 6 — Objective Evidence from Archaeology and History

1. Respond to this statement: "As the Bible was compiled, organized, translated, and transcribed, many errors entered the text".

2. The Bible is the most accurately transmitted ancient document in existence. Agree or disagree and why.

3. The Bible is a collection of wonderful, moralistic tales with little or no historical corroboration. Agree or disagree.

Chapter 7 — Clearing away Some Philosophical Baggage

1. What do you think of the comparison my colleague reported (with approval) between belief in little green men and belief in God? Why?

2. Would you agree or disagree that our general culture supports the idea that no thinking person believes in God? Has this situation changed during your lifetime?

3. Agree or disagree with the following statement: "The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be." Give reasons for your opinion.

Chapter 8 — Philosophical Problems and Evidence

1. What problems in philosophy are the most puzzling to you?

2. Do you know of any thorny philosophical problems that you feel you've worked out?

3. What philosophical evidences for the reality of Jesus and the truth of the Bible make the most sense to you? The least sense?

Chapter 9 — The Coherence of Four Philosophically Difficult Christian Doctrines

1. Which basic Christian teachings are the most difficult or troubling or contradictory for you? For starters, consider the four listed in the paragraph that follows.

2. Have you worked through to your satisfaction any difficult Christian doctrines?

3. Are you convinced that God loves us? Why or why not?

Chapter 10 — Pragmatic Evidences are Meaningful

1. Is there a practical side to Christianity? Are there practical reasons for following Jesus? Are there practical reasons for not following Jesus's commands?
2. Do you know any believers who seem driven by strange forces? Believers who suddenly blurt out the most surprising—and yet the most insightful and appropriate—things? Is it possible that you were hearing the living person of Jesus in these utterances?
3. Have you done an informal cost-benefit analysis of following Jesus?

Chapter 11 — Aesthetic Evidences

1. How important is the beauty of a movie, a play, or a book to you?
2. Can something be true without being beautiful? Why or why not?
3. Is beauty merely in the eye of the beholder?

Chapter 12 — The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

1. How important do you imagine the resurrection of Jesus is to Christians? Why?
2. What are some techniques you know to establish the reality (or lack thereof) of historical events?
3. Does someone coming back to life seem like a categorically different type of miracle to you? Easier or harder to believe?