

# World Religions Overview

A Religion Profile from International Students, Inc.

## World Religions: An Overview

### Purpose

The purpose of this profile is: 1) to help you make sense of what can be a confusing array of religions; 2) to give you an appreciation for the uniqueness of Christianity; and 3) to suggest some principles to keep in mind for evangelizing those in the non-Christian religions.

### The Spectrum of Religions

The spectrum of religions shown on page 2 of this overview can be viewed as a continuum with certain patterns. On the far left side are the religions that say God is the transcendent Creator of the world, and, as such, He is distinct and separate from His creation. On the right side of the continuum are the monistic religions that emphasize God's immanence; they believe that God's essence and the world's essence are one and the same. On the far right side are those atheistic world-views and religions that deny God's existence. Yet atheism is similar to monism where the substance is spirit; with atheism, the substance is matter (or energy).

In between the two extremes of the continuum are the dualistic and polytheistic religions. There are two kinds of dualistic religions: competing and balancing. The competing dualistic religions share affinities with the monotheistic religions, and the balancing dualistic religions are similar to monism.

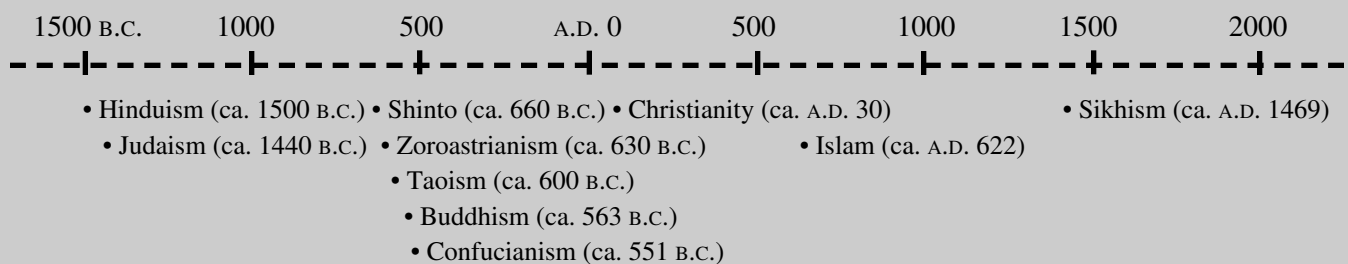
Usually, the gods of the dualistic and polytheistic religions are more like intermediaries than supreme gods. The supreme gods are either monotheistic or monistic in nature. Conversely, though, for reasons that will be explained later, the "folk" or "popular" forms of the monotheistic, monistic, and, to some extent, the atheistic religions, resemble polytheism.

Other patterns are also present in the continuum pictured on the next page. To the left, where God is separate from His creation, there is more of an appreciation for the unique value of humanity compared to the rest of creation. To the right, there is less of a sense that humanity is unique and of special value.

With respect to humanity's primary problem (i.e., sin), to the left of the continuum there is the sense that humanity fails to live up to the moral precepts of a holy God. To the right, though, the issue of "sin" has to do with ignorance, whether of one's true divinity (Hinduism) or of a rational solution to humanity's problems (Secularism).

With respect to the afterlife, in the monotheistic and competing dualistic religions, the person continues to exist as a conscious individual after death, either in a heaven-like or a hell-like place. Toward the right of the continuum, the goal is for the individual to lose his individuality by merging into the oneness of ultimate reality. At the extreme right, in atheism, because the person consists only of matter, at death he or she ceases to exist as a conscious entity altogether.

### A Timeline of the World Religions



The Spectrum of Religions					
Monotheism	Competing Dualism	Polytheism	Balancing Dualism	Monism	Atheism
<b>Concept of God</b>					
One transcendent God	Two opposing gods	Many gods	Two interacting forces	Impersonal oneness	No god
<b>View of Humanity</b>					
Part of creation, but a level above the animals	Made to battle evil	Can be influenced and even possessed by the spirits	A microcosm of the two forces	Caught in the illusion of separateness, but identical in essence to the oneness	A complex form of matter
<b>Humanity's Primary Problem</b>					
Breaking God's law; rebellion against God; failing to seek God's guidance	Choosing to do evil	Angering the gods	Living out of harmony with the ways of nature	Ignorance of one's innate divinity	Superstition and irrational thinking
<b>The Solution</b>					
Being Justified before God; living according to God's law; seeking His guidance.	Choosing to do right	Appeasing the gods	Living in harmony with the ways of nature	Realizing that our essence is the same as the oneness (enlightenment)	Applying rational thinking
<b>The Afterlife</b>					
Personhood continues in either heaven or hell	Personhood continues in either heaven or hell	Spirit world	Usually some form of the spirit world	Either to be reincarnated or to lose one's individuality by merging into the oneness	Nonexistence

## A Summary of Some Selected Religions

### Monotheism (One God)



#### Islam

*As the moon reflects the glory of the sun, so we are to give witness to the singular glory of Allah.*

Islam was founded by Muhammad. Its sacred scripture is the Qur'an. The five beliefs (*iman*) of Islam are 1) the singularity of God, 2) the existence of angels, 3) the prophets, 4) the holy books, and 5) the day of judgment. The five obligations

(*deen*) of Islam are 1) to recite the *shahadah* with sincerity ("I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger"), 2) to pray five times a day (or three times for the Shi'ites), 3) to fast during the month of Ramadhan, 4) to give alms to the poor, and 5) to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Humanity's primary problem is that we fail to follow the right guidance of Allah as revealed in the Qur'an. We must choose to submit to the will of God; "Islam" means "submission." Our good and bad deeds are being recorded, and on the Day of Judgment they will be weighed on a balance. If the good outweighs the bad, we will go to paradise, but if the bad outweighs the good, we will be banished to hell.

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## Competing Dualism (Two Opposing Gods)



### Zoroastrianism

*Fire is a sign of moral purity and of the divine spark within.*

Zoroastrianism was founded by Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra) around 630 B.C., but the date is disputable. The *Avesta* is their sacred scripture.

Zoroastrians believe that the supreme god, Ahura Mazda (“the Wise Lord”) created two Spirits. The one, Spenta Mainyu, is goodness and light; the other, Angra Mainyu, is evil, darkness, aggression, and death. Spenta Mainyu created the material universe to serve as a battleground between himself and Angra Mainyu. He also created humanity so we could assist him in defeating the principle of evil. We do so by choosing to practice good thoughts, words, and deeds.

At death we are judged by our deeds, whether good or bad. If a person’s good deeds outweigh the bad, he or she is able to cross over the “Chinvat Bridge” to heaven. If the bad deeds outweigh the good, then he or she will fall into hell. Such punishment is not eternal, though, for at the end of time a Savior, named Saoshyant, will appear and resurrect all bodies, reunite them with their souls, and purify them of all evil.

## Polytheism (Many Gods)



### Shinto

*One enters sacred ground through the torii, or gate.*

Japanese tradition dates Shinto’s beginning from the first emperor, Jimmu Tenno, who began his rule over Japan in 660 B.C. Shinto’s sacred scriptures include the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters), the *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan), the *Kogoshui* (Gleanings from Ancient Stories), and the *Engi-shiki* (collection of Shinto traditions).

The Japanese term for Shinto is *Kami-no-michi*, which means “the way of the *kami*.” The *kami* are spirits said to inhabit natural objects as well as relationships and businesses.

Shrines commemorate ancestors and national heroes who are considered to have been especially invested with the powers of the *kami*. People visit the shrines in order to seek the *kami*’s protection and good fortune in their respective areas of power (e.g., harvest, fishing, etc.). The shrines do not house images of the *kami*, but the spirits are believed to inhabit the shrines themselves or objects within the shrine, such as a mirror or sword.

## Balancing Dualism (Two Interacting Forces)



### Taoism

*The yin-yang symbol represents the balancing interaction between opposing forces.*

Tradition says that Taoism was founded by Lao-Tzu, but his historicity is questionable. Taoism’s sacred scripture is the *Tao te Ching*, which can be translated as “The Sacred Book of the Way and Its Virtue (or Integrity, or Character).”

The *Tao te Ching* says, “The Tao produced the One, the One produced the two” (Raguin, 33). This means that the Tao (non-Being) is beyond the One (Being), and that the One produced the dualistic principle of *yin* and *yang*.

The interaction between the *yin* (feminine, dark, cold) principle and the *yang* (masculine, light, hot) principle represents the natural flow of the Tao (the Way) within creation. A person can learn how this interaction affects his or her life through the *I Ching* (The Book of Changes) in which the various possibilities of the *yin/yang* relationships are charted.

A fundamental teaching in Taoism is *wu-wei* (literally, “not doing”). *Wu-wei* does not mean to do nothing, but it does mean to avoid aggression and to not force your will on others. Why not? Because they will only resist. The key is to work with the natural flow of things rather than against it.

## Monism (God is a Oneness)



### Hinduism

*The symbol for “OM” represents the primal vibration of the universe.*

Hinduism has no founder, but it resulted from the mixture of two cultures (Aryan and Dravidian) in the Indus valley around 1500 B.C. Hinduism’s sacred scriptures include the *shruti* (“that which is heard,” or revealed) literature, which are the four Vedas, and the *smrti* (“that which is remembered”) literature, which include the popular *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Ramayana*.

Although beliefs about God vary in Hinduism, the most common belief is that the ultimate reality, called Brahman, is an impersonal force of existence that is without separation. From this Brahman all existence emanates.

The essence of man is *atman*, which is identical in nature to Brahman. We have become ignorant of our true divine Self and are attached to our separatistic, individual selves. According to the law of *karma*, we continue to return (reincarnate) to this world in a way that is consistent with the consequences of our actions in previous lives. The only way

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to liberate oneself from this cycle of births and deaths is by realizing that the *atman* within is identical to the universal Brahman.



## Buddhism

*The Wheel Represents the eightfold path to enlightenment.*

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 B.C.), who became known as the Buddha (“enlightened one”). Buddha went beyond the divine oneness of Hinduism and taught that ultimate reality is a Void, an Emptiness.

Buddha also taught the four Noble Truths, which are 1) life consists of suffering, 2) we suffer because we desire that which is impermanent, 3) we can overcome suffering by ceasing to desire, and 4) we can cease to desire through the Eightfold Path. The ultimate goal is *nirvana* (“to extinguish”), which refers to the “extinguishing” of the self.

## Atheism (No God)



## Secularism

*The atom represents the belief that only matter exists and that science leads to truth.*

The most fundamental tenet of Secularism is to deny the existence of the supernatural. Matter is all that has ever existed. The evolutionary processes are sufficient to explain the existence of life and humanity.

Humanity’s problem is that we depend on the false hopes of religion rather than believing in our own potential as humans to rationally resolve problems. Secularists believe that the scientific method of inquiry is the only reliable method by which to discover truth. The moral code is based on social consensus, and it does not, they assert, need a transcendent basis.

After death, one’s influence may continue, but there is no sense in which the person continues to exist as a living, conscious entity.

## The Source of Religions

Coming from a Christian perspective, religions can be divided into two basic categories: those based on *general* revelation and those based on *special* revelation. In Romans 1:18-25, Paul describes the three-stage process that those who have received only general revelation have gone through with respect to their view of God (see Sproul, chs. 4-5).

## Awareness

The presence of religion in every culture gives evidence to

humanity’s innate sense that something exists beyond this physical world. Paul writes that the evidence for God in creation is in fact explicit and that it renders man without excuse for not knowing who God is (Rom. 1:20).

What does the evidence in creation tell us about God? The presence of *design* on every level of the universe—from the micro to the macro—points to an intelligent designer. The fact that the energy of the universe is finite and is dissipating shows that the universe is *contingent* with respect to its existence, which means that it needed a Creator who depends on no one for His existence. Our *conscience* indicates that a holy God is the source of our sense of right and wrong (Rom. 2:14-15). The *provision* received through nature shows that God is good and that He cares for those whom He created (Acts 14:17).

## Suppression

How has humanity responded to such revelation concerning God? We’ve suppressed it (Rom. 1:18). Ever since the Fall, it has been man’s nature to usurp God’s authority and to declare our independence from Him.

God made us in His image, which meant that we would be most fulfilled as we lived in an intimate, loving, responsive, and *dependent* relationship with God. But we are uncomfortable being dependent on God, so we suppress the knowledge of who God is and refuse to glorify God and to give Him thanks (Rom. 1:21).

Humanity has suppressed the truth of God in two ways:

### 1. Suppression of God’s Knowableness

In our rebellion against dependence on God, humanity has pushed Him away by making Him out to be distant, abstract, unknowable, and even inconceivable. Such a tendency can be seen in the world religions. In Hinduism, for example, ultimate reality—Brahman—is described as *nirguna*, which means “without attributes.” In Buddhism, the ultimate goal is to reach *nirvana*, which refers to the extinguishing of the self in the Void.

In Islam, the Qur’an says of Allah that “Nothing is like Him” (Sura 42:11). Of that statement, one Muslim commentator wrote, “So transcendent is the Divine Being [that He is] even above the limitation of metaphor” (Ali, 918). If Allah is above even metaphor, though, then nothing can be known about him.

### 2. Suppression of God’s Holiness

The God of the Bible is absolute in His holiness (Ps. 5:4; 1 John 1:5). Such a concept of God’s absolute holiness is unique among the world religions, though, in that they have either denied, diminished, or disregarded His holiness.

*Holiness denied:* In the monistic religions, God is a oneness

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that is beyond all differences, including those of good and evil. Thus, God's moral holiness is denied.

*Holiness diminished:* One indicator concerning the extent to which a religion upholds God's holiness is found in its means of salvation. In Islam, for example, each person's deeds will be weighed in the balance on the Day of Judgment to determine their fate. A person who is 51 percent righteous would then be sufficiently righteous to attain Paradise. But the Bible says that God's holiness requires 100 percent righteousness (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). It would seem, then, that Islam does not uphold God's absolute holiness.

*Holiness disregarded:* There are other religions that disregard God's holiness. They say that finding inner peace is an issue of achieving harmony with something like the cycles of nature or with one's inner self. As such, finding inner peace never rises above the natural realm, and reconciliation with a holy God above never becomes a consideration.

## Replacement

Even though humanity suppresses the truth of who God is, we still have the urge to worship something, so we replace God with false gods. Paul writes, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:22-23).

Religions are dynamic; they change and develop over time. As we have seen, it is common for the world religions to make God out to be distant, abstract, and inconceivable. Obviously, such abstract concepts of God are difficult for people to relate to, which leaves a large gap between us and whatever is out there. So humanity fills that gap with something that is usually of a more personal—therefore, knowable—nature. Typically, the gap is filled with intermediate spiritual beings. Considering Paul's words, it's not surprising that the intermediate spirits often appear in the form of animals (e.g., totem poles).

## Is There Truth in Non-Christian Religions?

All religions contain some truth, and Christians should be encouraged to recognize and appreciate that truth. Islam, for example, is strong in its appreciation for the greatness of God. Zoroastrianism emphasizes the purity of God, which demands that we, too, are to be pure. Spiritism helps us to appreciate the truth that our battle is not just against flesh and blood. Taoism encourages us to be sensitive to the ways of nature and of humanity. Paul's words that God "is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27) can help us appreciate Hinduism's emphasis on the immanence of God. And even atheism's hope of finding solutions through rational thinking can encourage us as Christians to be clear in our thinking and consistent in our living.

While we as Christians can acknowledge, appreciate, and respect the truth that can be found in other religions, that does not mean that such religions contain *saving* truth.

## The Distinctives of the Gospel

What sets Christianity apart from the other world religions? Simply, the Person of Jesus Christ. But what precisely is it about Jesus Christ that makes Christianity unique? Much of what is unique about Jesus Christ and His Gospel is given, at least by implication, in 1 John 4:9-10.

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

### 1. Jesus Lived in History

John emphasizes the historical nature of Jesus' life through the words "among us" and "into the world." The events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are historical, not mythical. While this uniqueness does not deny that the founders of other religions lived in history or that specific events in those religions are historical, it is to say that their being rooted in history is not as essential to their truthfulness as it is to Christianity (with the possible exception of Judaism). Why? Because the other religions are oriented primarily toward *teachings*, whereas Christianity is oriented toward the actual *saving* work of a particular person: Jesus Christ. If Jesus did not live, die on the cross, and rise from the dead *in history*, then Christianity is without foundation (1 Cor. 15:17). (For addressing questions concerning the historicity of Christianity and other objections, see Geisler and Brooks.)

### 2. God Himself Became Flesh

John writes that God sent "his one and only Son." Through the words "one and only" it is clear that John is not saying that Jesus is the Son of God in some mystical sense where, being part of the divine oneness, we are all sons of God. Instead, Jesus is the Son of God in a unique way. The reason Jesus is unique is because He is God's *son*. The word "son" means one who is of the same nature. So, Jesus is *of the same nature* as God. This means that Jesus is not a mere appearance or manifestation or representative of God, but an incarnation of God—God who *had become* man in the flesh.

### 3. Humanity Is Spiritually Dead

The words "that we might live" and "atoning sacrifice for our sins" indicate that Christianity considers humanity in its sinful condition to be spiritually dead. Humanity's spiritual condition is far worse off in Christianity than in any other religion (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13). While non-Christian religions acknowledge that humanity has problems, they also teach that man has the innate ability to fix them—it might not be easy, but we're still fixable. Only Christianity says that man is spiritually *dead* and that without God's transforming power we have no hope (Rom 8:6-9).

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#### 4. God Is Absolutely Holy

The implication behind God requiring the severest of all penalties—death—as the payment for sin is that God is absolute with respect to His moral holiness (Ps. 5:4-5; Hab. 1:13; 1 John 1:5). Many people are of the opinion that God's love cannot be reconciled with God's justice (moral holiness). But John indicates that through Christ's sacrificial death, both God's love and justice are fully satisfied, without diminishing either.

#### 5. Jesus Conquered Death

Thankfully, Jesus' story doesn't end in defeat, with death having the final word. Instead, it ends in victory, with Jesus rising physically from the dead (John 20-21; 1 Cor. 15:3-8). No other founder of a religion even considered making such a claim. Jesus' resurrection, moreover, is why John could write, "that we might live through him." For, as Paul wrote, just as "we have been united with him...in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5).

#### 6. Salvation Is a Free Gift

John writes that it's "not that we loved God, but that he loved us." Notice that the direction of love is entirely *from God to us*, not from us to God. Salvation is not based in the least on the individual's merit, but entirely on the freely given grace of God (see also Rom. 1:17; Eph. 2:8-9).

Is the concept of grace present in the non-Christian world religions? Grace is mentioned, but it is redefined to include human effort. In Islam, for example, the phrase "those who believe" appears frequently in the Qur'an and sounds similar to the Christian phrase "salvation by faith." But the phrase "those who believe" is usually accompanied with "and do good deeds." The emphasis is placed on salvation being earned through human merit.

### Suggestions for Evangelism

Besides seeking to understand and respect the student's worldview, the Christian should also attempt to stimulate his or her thinking with respect to who God is. This should be done on several levels: the intellectual, interpersonal, spiritual, and emotional.

#### The Intellectual Level

The many variations of world religions can be summarized into three basic worldviews:

*Naturalism* (atheism): 1) ultimate reality is physical matter; 2) the physical universe is eternal, closed (no supernatural influence), and operates according to natural laws; and 3) man is a physical being that resulted from evolutionary forces.

*Monism*: 1) ultimate reality is spiritual, or immaterial, and usually characterized as being impersonal and undifferentiated; 2) the universe is an emanation from the spiritual and in

some sense less real (illusory); and 3) man is identical in his nature to that of ultimate reality.

*Theism*: 1) ultimate reality is an eternal, infinite, and personal God; 2) the universe was created by God out of nothing and is both material and immaterial; and 3) man was created by God in His image and is both material and immaterial.

How can a person tell which worldview is true? By testing them against three criteria for truth:

1. *Logical Consistency*: A true worldview will not contradict itself.
2. *Factuality*: A true worldview will fit the facts.
3. *Viability*: One can live consistently with a true worldview.

How do the three worldviews measure up to the above tests?

#### Naturalism

*Logical Consistency*: It is inconsistent for a naturalist to *argue* that the *evidence* for naturalism is *convincing* and that one *ought to choose* it. Why? Because a naturalist says that only matter exists. If that is true, though, then our thoughts are determined by biological stimuli, not by the evidence or by principles of reason. In addition, there is no "enduring 'I'" that is doing the reasoning or the arguing (Moreland, 96).

*Factuality*: Naturalism says that the universe is eternal; but astronomers have found evidence that indicates the universe had a beginning. The second law of thermodynamics, which says that energy becomes increasingly inaccessible, indicates that the universe began at a certain finite point in time, otherwise all the energy would have dissipated long ago. In other words, an infinite amount of time would already have outlasted a finite amount of energy.

*Viability*: Most people attach unique value to human life—at least to their *own* human life. But such a sense of value is inconsistent with naturalism because in naturalism there is no foundation for considering human life to be uniquely valuable compared to animal life. Why? Because humanity is nothing more than an advanced form of animal. Also, as witnessed by the fact that people judge immoral actions of other people and of various cultures, they live as though morality is based on some standard that is external to themselves and to culture. But naturalism cannot provide such an objective moral standard.

#### Monism

*Logical Consistency*: Monism leads one to say that there is no absolute truth. But the statement that there is no absolute truth is itself an absolute truth, and thereby self-refuting.

*Factuality*: Monism says that ultimate reality is without differentiation or separation. It is thus not a form of intelligence because intelligence makes distinctions between things. Such an undifferentiated source is inadequate as a First Cause for a

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reality that has distinctions and a humanity that has intelligence.

*Viability:* Most monistic worldviews say that one should act non-violently toward all life. But one cannot do so and also eat food, for even vegetarians kill plants, which are a form of life.

### **Theism**

*Logical Consistency:* Humanity lives with the sense that we have value as persons, that life has a purpose, and that morality has meaning. Such things are sufficiently founded only on the Creator-God who is personal, who created us to be in fellowship with Him, and who is holy.

*Factuality:* The theory that the universe was created by an intelligent Cause is consistent with the principle of causality, which says that every effect requires a sufficient cause.

*Viability:* Since we are made in the image of a personal God, it is natural for us to live consistently with the understanding that persons have value and that morality has meaning.

## **The Interpersonal Level**

### **God's Personal Nature**

One way to cut through the issues embedded in an objection or to stimulate a person's thinking is by keeping God's personal nature in mind. People often ask, for example, why Christians believe there is only one way to God. One possible response is to put the issue in the context of *interpersonal relationships*. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24) could be used here. In that parable, the son rebelled against his father and rejected everything about him—his financial advice, his morals, his religion, and even his physical presence. No matter how much the father longed to be in fellowship with his son, he could not do so because the son had separated himself from the father.

The question to ask is, How many ways were there for that relationship to be restored? The answer: *one way*—by the son returning to his father, not just physically but emotionally.

Such an illustration can stimulate a person's thinking and help him or her to see why there is only one way to God. For just as the Prodigal Son separated himself from his father, so we have separated ourselves from our heavenly Father through our rebellion and sin (Col 1:21). That relationship can be restored only as we return to the Father through confessing our sin and receiving the forgiveness He offers in Christ.

### **The Implications of God Having Personal Attributes**

It is also good to keep in mind the *implications* of God being by nature personal (i.e., has the characteristics of a person).

For instance, consider the fact that *only because God is personal...*

- can we have a relationship with Him,
- can He communicate with us,
- can He hear our prayers,
- can He love us,
- can He forgive us,
- can He empathize with our suffering
- can there be a sufficient foundation for our value as persons,
- can there be a sufficient foundation for moral judgment.

Such things would not be true if God were anything less than a personal being.

## **The Spiritual Level**

We were made to be in fellowship with God. As we have seen, though, the non-Christian world religions tend to make God out to be distant, abstract, unknowable, and inconceivable. Take a moment and imagine what it would be like to live in a world where God is abstract and unknowable. What kinds of spiritual needs would be left unfulfilled in your life?

The following are categories under which such spiritual needs fall. It is interesting to note how each Person of the trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is involved in a specific way in meeting these common needs.

### **The Need for Meaning in Life**

Speaking on a human level, we are most fulfilled when we are in loving relationships with other people (e.g., spouse, parents, children). Without such relationships, life is empty. The same is true when speaking on a spiritual level. Without a sense that God loves us, religion can lose its relevance, and life can lose its meaning.

In the Christian Gospel, life has meaning because we know that God loves us. And we know that He loves us because He has demonstrated His love in history through His Son (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:8-10). Plus, we can go beyond just knowing about God's love to having fellowship with God Himself through the Holy Spirit, who gives us "access to the Father" (Eph. 2:18; Gal. 4:4-6).

### **The Need for the Power to Change**

Humanity has come up with a myriad of ways by which we attempt to transform ourselves (e.g., Marxism). But the real problem goes much deeper than anything humanity can come up with because it goes to the human heart itself. Only a living and holy God can change the human heart, and He has done so through the indwelling and regenerating Holy spirit (Ezek. 36:26-27; Rom. 8:5-17; 2 Cr. 5:17). Share how God has changed your life.

### **The Need for Hope and Assurance**

That which lies beyond death is both unknown and fearful. But, as Christians, we can be assured of what will happen after death because Jesus Christ demonstrated in *history* His

victory over death. The historical fact of Jesus' resurrection gives us hope *in this life* and the assurance of being accepted with God *in the life to come*. The Holy Spirit has a role in this too, because God has "set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor. 1:22).

## The Emotional Level

"People need facts to know what decision to make," wrote one evangelist, "but emotion to get them to make the decision" (Innes, 125). The way to touch a person on the emotional level is through a testimony, story, or illustration. The following story illustrates how much God cared for us through the suffering of Jesus Christ.

Author Bob Stromberg tells of the time when he had broken his arm as a young boy. As his Dad drove him to the hospital, the numbness wore off and the pain suddenly shot through his newly injured arm. Bob pleaded, "Oh, please, Dad, can't you do something?" His Dad responded, "Son, I wish I could take the pain of that broken arm right out of your body and into my own."

Bob questioned whether his Dad would really want to do that, but his Dad responded, "Someday, Bob, you'll understand."

Years later, on a fall day, Bob watched helplessly as his son, distracted by his effort to launch a kite, tripped into a pile of burning leaves and sticks, severely burning his hands. As Bob drove him to the hospital, his son said, "Oh, Dad, it hurts so bad." At that moment Bob remembered and understood what his Dad had told him years before, and he responded, "Son, if I could, I would take the pain in your hands and put it right into my own."

Then it occurred to Bob that that is precisely what God had done through Jesus when Jesus took our sins upon Himself and paid the penalty of that sin on our behalf (Stromberg, ch. 4).

Such a story will stick in the mind of a student and stimulate his or her thinking.

## An Evangelistic Bible Study

One effective resource in bringing international students to the Lord is a six-lesson Bible study titled *How Will They Hear?* (Daeschner).

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