

## Confronting Christianity | Rebecca McLaughlin Sermon Discussion Guide

**Purpose of Discussion:** To discuss the four roadblocks to Christianity that Rebecca mentioned and see how they can instead be seen as signposts for belief in Jesus.

**Sermon Refresher:** As followers of Jesus, when we look around at the religious and cultural landscape of our world today, we sometimes wonder if it would be best to just “batten down the hatches” and withdraw. Rebecca challenged the church however, to reclaim diversity, the University, morality and sexuality. And to begin to see these roadblocks as potential signposts for belief in Jesus.

**Icebreaker:** What is a roadblock to Christianity that you had before believing in Jesus or that you continue to have now? What has been helpful-or unhelpful-to you in your ability to see it less as roadblock and more as a signpost for belief?

**Transition:** Rebecca hit on four roadblocks to belief in Jesus that someone might have and how we might see those turned into signposts for belief. She stated that we must reclaim the diversity of the Christian faith, embrace the intellectual aspects of our faith, demonstrate that the Christian worldview gives us the starting point for moral claims and show that the Biblical ethic for human sexuality is grounded in love rather than hate. Let’s dive into each one of these using the discussion questions below.

# THE **crossing** **small groups**

## Discussion Questions:

1. Rebecca noted that 40 years ago, sociologists predicted that future interest in religion would eventually die out. They assumed that since interest in religion had declined in Western Europe, the rest of the world would follow. But what we are finding is that interest in religion is only going to increase over the next 40 years. What is your overall reaction to this forecast about the continued growth of religious interest? Does it surprise you? Is it hard to believe? Why or why not?
2. Rebecca stated multiple times that we need to address these potential roadblocks with humility. Read Philippians 2:1-11 as a group. Paul points us to the example of Jesus to show us what it looks like to live with humility and love toward others. What does Paul highlight from the life of Jesus that shows us His humility and love? How can these examples help guide us in our conversations with others as we discuss their potential roadblocks?

### Philippians 2:1–11

[1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (ESV)

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3. Far from being a white, Western faith, Christianity is the most diverse religion in the world. Jesus was someone who broke through racial and cultural barriers and commanded his disciples to preach the gospel to the world. In Revelation 7:9-10 we read, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Brainstorm ways in which we can grow in our understanding of the cultural diversity of Christianity and in our ability to relate to others who might come from a different cultural or ethnic background. If you have grown in your ability to relate to people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds in the last few years, share about that experience and what helped aid that growth.

4. In Mark Noll's book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* he says, "'The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.'" But Rebecca reminded us that the modern scientific method was founded on Theism and there have been many Christian intellectual heavyweights throughout the centuries in every field. What's one growth step you could take in your ability to engage your faith in an intellectual way?
5. When talking about our need to reclaim morality, Rebecca made the point that universal benevolence and human rights are not free-standing moral facts within the secular worldview. Rather, they are historically contingent beliefs growing out of the Judeo-Christian tradition. She cited Christian Smith's book *Atheist Overreach: What Atheism Can't Deliver*: "[Someone who] believes in a naturalistic cosmos is perfectly entitled to believe in and act to promote universal benevolence and human rights, but only as an arbitrary, subjective, personal preference—not as a rational, compelling, universally binding fact and obligation."

How does this build your own confidence in the Christian worldview? As a group, talk through how you might try to communicate this with gentleness and respect to someone from a secular worldview.

6. One of the most challenging roadblocks to Christianity that many people wrestle with relates to the Biblical sexual ethic. Rebecca stated that when our non-believing friends hear that we support a Biblical ethic for sex and marriage, in their minds “we move from being delusional to bigots.” Rebecca stated that one of the things we must do in order to see this roadblock be turned into a signpost for Christ is to accept and love our same sex attracted brothers and sisters. What are some practical ways we can grow in our love and acceptance of our same sex attracted brothers and sisters?
  
7. Sometimes we can feel the pull to want to “batten down the hatches” when it comes to engaging with the roadblocks Rebecca mentioned. She encouraged us rather to see these obstacles as signposts and opportunities for our own growth and in conversations with outsiders. For you personally, which tendency and feeling do relate to the most? Are you a “batten down the hatches” person or someone who sees the roadblocks as opportunities? What is one takeaway from what Rebecca said and/or what was discussed in your group that could help you not retreat, but instead lean in and engage with those who don’t yet know Jesus?

### **Sharing and Prayer:**

Spend time thinking those you know who don’t yet know and follow Jesus. Keeping the person anonymous, maybe share a little bit about their roadblocks. End the time praying for them and for yourselves as you seek to relate to them with an attitude of humility and love.