



EXPLORING OPEN CHRISTIANITY

Presented by the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria Inc.

A series of DVDs for study groups and individual reflection exploring Christianity open to contemporary scholarship and new ways of understanding Christianity in our time

1. Exploring doubt and faith with Dr Val Webb

- Embracing doubt
- Thinking theologically
- Rethinking the Bible

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE DVD

After a brief introduction to the series, the DVD provides three interviews of approximately 10 minutes each. The DVD could be used in one session of approximately an hour and a half, providing time for discussion after each of the three interviews. Alternatively it could be used over two or more sessions to provide increased discussion time. In either case, select the questions that are most appropriate for your group.

PREPARATION

The venue should be arranged so that everyone can see and hear the DVD interview and then easily move to discussion – sometimes in small groups of 3 or 4 people.

Allow time for introductions, getting to know names of participants, and to describe procedures and times.

Some of the questions are about personal experiences and life journeys. They are best discussed in groups of three, or at most four, people. Trying to discuss them in larger groups will exclude some people from an opportunity to reflect on and talk about what is important to them. In the following discussion guide, these questions for groups of three or four people are marked with the symbol ✚

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER ANY INTERVIEW

There are three questions that can be used after each viewing of an interview. Each recognises and affirms the different points people are at in their faith journey.

- What stands out for you from that interview? Was there something the speaker said that is particularly important for you?
- Was there something in the interview that raises questions for you or that you would like clarified?
- What would you like to follow up?

These questions are likely to result in a number of different responses. You can say, “Let’s hear from a number of people and then discuss some of the ideas”. Invite a flow of brief responses from as many in the group as would like to comment before moving to discussion. Having someone list key words on a whiteboard to note the responses will give you a topic list for the following discussion.

Following are some additional specific questions that may focus discussion after each of the interviews.

DISCUSSION AFTER “EMBRACING DOUBT”

Val Webb said that she had questions and doubts early in her life but thought it was her fault - that she needed to be a better Christian. She said it was a long journey to feel she had permission to ask questions.

- ✦ What has been your experience of having questions and doubts about your faith?

Val Webb said that she was waiting for someone to “open the window” and say that there is another way to think about being Christian. “In every other thing we do in life we use doubt to move us from the status quo to fresh ideas.”

- Do you think there is enough encouragement to embrace doubt and welcome fresh ideas?
- What more could be done to help people with their questions so that doubt is a positive experience?

DISCUSSION AFTER “THINKING THEOLOGICALLY”

Val Webb said that people need to be encouraged to do their own theology, to adapt their beliefs to where their faith is and to find language and metaphors that work for them today. She said that what is important is having encouragement, having someone who will walk the journey with you.

- Have you experienced encouragement to find appropriate ideas and language for your faith?
- Are more opportunities needed to encourage people to do their own theology?

One example that Val Webb gave was how we understand prayer. She said that when we move away from an idea of God “out there” to an image of God within and everywhere, prayer becomes living to be fully human.

- How has your understanding and practice of prayer changed and developed?

DISCUSSION AFTER “RETHINKING THE BIBLE”

Val Webb said that we haven’t been honest about the Bible. We have tended to make the Bible into an idol. We have to rethink the Bible.

- ✦ What part has the Bible played in your faith journey? Do you think there is a need to rethink how the Bible is understood and used today?

Val Webb said that the Bible is the story of a people in touch with God, told in their culture, their language and their experience. We need to tell the story in our culture, our language and our experience.

- How important do you think this is for your faith journey and for your faith community?

CONCLUSION

- After seeing this interview, what are some of the ways it has encouraged you to be open to new ways of understanding Christianity in our time?

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1. Exploring doubt and faith with Dr Val Webb
2. Exploring the future of religion with Sir Lloyd Geering
3. Exploring the future of a faith community with Peter Kennedy
4. Exploring the Jesus and Paul with John Dominic Crossan
5. Exploring the future of the Bible with Dr Greg Jenks