

Hard questions

What kind of King?

“Christ is King”, Christian Britain, and the questions behind them. Some thoughts for talking it through.

St John’s Church, Woking

Workplace & Neighbourhood Evangelism

Cover photo: St John the Baptist’s Church, St John’s, Woking, by Hassocks5489 (Wikimedia Commons, public domain)

Contents

About this booklet 3

Before you start 4

1 “Christ is King.” So what’s wrong with shouting it at a march? 5

2 Hasn’t Christianity always been about power? 6

3 Do you think my Muslim friend is going to hell? Isn’t it arrogant to say Jesus is the only way? 7

4 This is a Christian country, and I’m C of E. Isn’t that enough? 8

5 I’ve never hurt anyone. Surely I’m good enough? 9

6 Why does the church seem more bothered about them than us? 10

7 Do you think my mum is somewhere? 11

A bit of context

These questions come up in the three “What kind of King?” conversations in the *Talking about Jesus at work and home* series: with a colleague at work, with a dad at Sunday lunch, and with a neighbour over the gate. Each conversation could only touch on them briefly. These notes go further, one question at a time, with a question to ask back, something you could say, and more for when someone wants to go deeper. None of it is a script. Take what fits the person in front of you.

About this booklet

Goes with

- *What kind of King?* (at work), *What kind of King? Sunday lunch* (at home) and *What kind of King? Over the gate* (on your street): the three conversations these questions come from
- *Nations and the kingship of Christ*: the Go deeper booklet on this theme. Questions 1, 2, 4 and 6 go further there (sections 6, 4 and 3)

How this booklet was made

This handout was written with the help of AI (Claude, made by Anthropic). The AI did the research and wrote the drafts. A member of St John's chose the topic, decided what it should cover, read it through, asked for changes and approved it.

AI can get things wrong, and it can sound very sure of itself when it does. So the handout has been through these checks:

- **Theology.** Separate AI reviewers read it against Scripture, the historic creeds and what Christians down the centuries have said. One reviewer was asked to hunt for error, for overstatement and for anything that might hurt someone who's struggling. Everything they found was put right and checked again.
- **Quotations.** Every quotation from another writer has been checked against its original source. Bible quotations have been checked against the NIV.
- **Facts and figures.** The research figures have been checked against the original reports.

It hasn't yet been reviewed by a trained theologian or a member of the clergy.

Please read it with care. Even after all these checks, some mistakes may remain. Test what you read against Scripture, as the Bereans did: they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). If something doesn't look right, please let Tim Parr know at timparr40@gmail.com.

The views in this handout are the author's own. They don't necessarily reflect the views of the leadership of St John's Church.

The small print

What kind of King? Hard questions · Talking about Jesus at work and home · October 2026.

Quotations from other writers are used for comment and discussion.

Scripture quotations taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, an Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica UK trademark number 1448790.

Before you start

These are rarely just ideas. Behind them there's usually something real: a town that feels ignored, a frightened friend, a past hurt by the church, or someone they've lost. Listen for that first.

A FEW THINGS THAT HELP

- **Agree where you honestly can.** People open up when they've been heard. Nobody listens to someone who's trying to win.
- **The Christian they know counts more than "the church".** In *Talking Jesus 2022*, non-Christians who know a practising Christian most often described that person as friendly (62%) and caring (50%); only 9% called them hypocritical. But asked what words they associate with the church, non-Christians in general most often said "hypocritical" (26%) and "narrow-minded" (26%). As the report puts it, "it is the individual Christian who is the best bridge for evangelism."
- **You don't need every answer.** Recent converts in *Finding Jesus* (2025) said the Christians who helped them were "patient" and "not pushy", and that they didn't mind when a question couldn't be answered: "Just having someone to share the question with was helpful."
- **Keep coming back to Jesus.** It's easy to get pulled into politics, statistics or history. They have their place, but the most helpful thing you can offer is Jesus Himself: what He's like, and what He's done.
- **One question at a time.** You don't need to cover everything. A good conversation often ends with a question still open, and that's fine.
- **Pray, before and after.** It's God who opens hearts. Our part is to be ready, and to speak "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).
- **Care comes first.** If someone is grieving, angry or frightened, being there for them matters more than answering their questions. The questions will keep.

Question 1

"Christ is King." So what's wrong with shouting it at a march?

Sometimes this comes from sympathy ("At least someone's standing up for Christianity"). Sometimes it comes from fear ("Is that what Christians are like?"). Either way, the best start is to agree with the words.

Ask back first

"What do you think the people chanting it meant by it? And what do you think Jesus would make of it?"

What you could say

"Nothing's wrong with the words. I believe them. Jesus is King, of every nation, not just ours. The question is what kind of King He is. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, washed His friends' feet, and prayed for the people nailing Him to a cross. If His name is used to frighten people, or as a flag for one side against another, someone's missed who He is."

Going deeper

- **He's King of everyone.** Jesus has "all authority in heaven and on earth", and one day every knee will bow to Him. His people come "from every nation, tribe, people and language". He isn't the mascot of any one country.
- **His kingdom doesn't come by force.** When two of His closest friends wanted to call down fire on a village that had turned Him away, Jesus rebuked them. He spreads His kingdom by His Spirit, through people telling the good news and living it out, not by intimidation.
- **Loving your country isn't wrong.** The Bible sees nations as part of God's world, and governments as having a God-given job to keep order. It goes wrong when the nation becomes what we really live for, or when Jesus becomes a badge for "us" against "them".
- **Christians have faced this before.** In 1930s Germany, a movement called the "German Christians" tried to fuse Jesus with nation and race. Other Christians, in what became the Confessing Church, refused. In 1934, in the Barmen Declaration, they said that Jesus Christ, as the Bible shows Him to us, is the one Word of God we must hear, trust and obey, in life and in death. That isn't to say today's marchers are Nazis. It's that Christians have had to say before that Jesus can't be fused with any nation, including ours.

In the Bible: Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9–11; Revelation 7:9; Zechariah 9:9; John 12:12–15; John 13:1–17; Luke 23:34; Luke 9:51–56; Acts 17:26; Romans 13:1–7.

Go deeper: *Nations and the kingship of Christ*, section 6, "Marches, flags and your neighbour".

To read next

Short reads (free online)

- "Flags, marches and 'Christ is King!'", Jamie Sewell, Premier Christianity (about 5 minutes). A vicar hears the chant through a Nigerian friend's fear and through working-class men's frustration. If Christ is King, we can't skip "love your enemies".
- "Our King Has Come", Jen Wilkin, Crossway (about 3 minutes). The King on a donkey, not a warhorse.

Longer

"Christianity and Nationalism in the UK", Evangelical Alliance (about 12 minutes). Healthy patriotism, and where it goes wrong.

A book

Tim Keller, *King's Cross* (Hodder), through Mark's Gospel. Amazon UK · 10ofthose

Question 2

Hasn't Christianity always been about power?

People usually have something specific in mind: the Crusades, empire, the slave trade, or abuse covered up by churches. Sometimes it's personal. The best start is to agree that terrible things have been done.

Ask back first

"Which bits of history are you thinking of?" And, if it seems right: "Has a church ever hurt you, or someone you love?"

What you could say

"Christians have done terrible things with power, and we should say so straight. But whenever they did, they were going against Jesus, not following Him. When one of His friends drew a sword to defend Him, Jesus told him to put it away. And what's drawn people to Him for two thousand years isn't Christianity being strong. It's a King who died for His enemies."

Going deeper

- **Own it.** Don't explain it away. Massacres in the Crusades, forced conversions, Christians (the Church of England among them) profiting from slavery and some defending it from the Bible, and churches covering up abuse: all of it was real, and all of it was wrong. Being honest about it takes the heat out of a conversation far faster than defending it. People already think more warmly of the Christians they know than of "the church".
- **Jesus is the measure, not His followers.** He told His friends that the world's rulers lord it over people, but "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant", because He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".
- **There's another side to the story too.** In the plagues of the third century, many Christians nursed the sick when others fled. Many campaigners against the slave trade were Christians, among them William Wilberforce and Olaudah Equiano, who had been enslaved himself. Many schools and hospitals across the world were started by Christians. Mention it gently, and only after you've owned the failures.
- **Power was never the point.** The cross looks like weakness, yet the Bible calls it "the power of God". Whenever the church has forgotten that, it has gone wrong.

In the Bible: Matthew 26:52; Mark 10:42–45; 1 Corinthians 1:18–25. **See also:** the "Why does God allow war?" handout, on wars fought in God's name.

To read next

Short reads (free online)

- "Why are Christians such hypocrites?", Christianity Explored (about 2 minutes). Christians do fail. Look at Jesus.
- "Doesn't Christianity just cause conflict?", Christianity Explored (about 2 minutes). Names the Crusades and colonialism, then points to the Prince of Peace.

Longer

"Did Christianity spread by violence?", David Robertson, Solas (about 10 minutes). Honest about the evils, while questioning some exaggerated numbers: "not about power but about the way of the cross".

A book

John Dickson, *Bullies and Saints* (Zondervan): an honest look at the good and evil of Christian history. Amazon UK

Question 3

Do you think my Muslim friend is going to hell? Isn't it arrogant to say Jesus is the only way?

Often this is really a question about safety: "Is your faith safe for the people I love?" Answer honestly, and gently. In *Finding Jesus* (2025), 43% of recent converts said hard beliefs, such as hell and other religions, had been a challenge as they explored faith, and 25% said it was one of their two hardest things, more than any other answer.

Ask back first

"Is there someone in particular you're thinking of?" Or: "What would it mean to you if I said yes, or no?"

What you could say

"I don't get to decide who's in and who's out. God does, and He knows your friend far better than I do. What I believe is that nobody gets to God by being good enough, me included. Jesus said He's the way to the Father, so of course I'd love my friends to know Him. But it's a rescue, not a club, and I'm only in it because I needed rescuing."

Going deeper

- **Jesus said it first.** "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Christians didn't invent it. The question is whether He was right, and that rests on whether He rose from the dead.
- **It's the opposite of arrogance.** It would be arrogant if Christianity said good people get in and the rest don't. It says nobody can earn it, so God came to us: "it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast". The one way is open to anyone.
- **Don't pronounce on any one person.** Only God sees a person's heart, and He is perfectly just and merciful. And while someone is alive, their story isn't finished. Our job isn't to sort people out, but to point them to Jesus, whom everyone needs.
- **Respect means taking the differences seriously.** Saying "all religions are really the same" doesn't respect a Muslim friend, who believes his faith is true. Christians and Muslims honestly disagree about who Jesus is. For Muslims, He is a great prophet and the Messiah, but not the Son of God, and most believe He didn't die on the cross. For Christians, He is God the Son, who died for us and rose again.
- **Disagreement and love go together.** Jesus told us to love our neighbour, and made a religious outsider the hero of His most famous story. You can disagree about the deepest things and still love someone, and their family.

In the Bible: John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8–9; Genesis 18:25; Luke 10:25–37; 1 Peter 3:15–16.

To read next

Short reads (free online)

- "Aren't all religions basically the same?", Christianity Explored (about 3 minutes). Other faiths offer a prophet or a teacher; Christianity says God came in person, and rose.
- "Why Jesus Cannot Be One Truth among Many", Rebecca McLaughlin, Crossway (about 5 minutes). Why Jesus's own claims don't fit the idea of "many paths".

A book

Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity* (Crossway), chapter 3, "How can you say there is only one true faith?" Amazon UK · 10ofthose

Question 4

This is a Christian country, and I'm C of E. Isn't that enough?

For many people, "Christian" means belonging and memory: a christening (baptism), a wedding in church, carols, Remembrance, a mum or nan who prayed. That's real, and often precious. But it can be mistaken for faith itself.

Ask back first

"What does being a Christian mean to you?" Or: "Where did that start for you? Your mum? Your nan? School?"

What you could say

"I love that it matters to you. Your christening mattered. Promises were made for you, and it was a sign pointing you to Jesus. But nobody's a Christian by passport or by family. Jesus said we need to be 'born again': a new start that God gives when we trust Him for ourselves. The lovely thing is that anyone can start, any day."

Going deeper

- **Honour what's there.** Britain's Christian heritage is real, and many of the values people care about, such as the equal worth of every person, care for the weak and forgiveness, have Christian roots. That's something to be grateful for.
- **Jesus said it to a very religious man.** Nicodemus was a respected religious leader, yet Jesus told him, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." Being a Christian is a new life from God, received by trusting Jesus, not something we inherit.
- **The christening points forward.** In a Church of England christening, promises to turn to Christ are made on the child's behalf, and the hope is that one day the child will make those promises their own. It's a good question to ask gently: "Have you ever made them your own?"
- **Christianity doesn't belong to any one country.** It began in the Middle East, and most Christians today live in Africa, Asia and Latin America. William Wilberforce put it like this: "Christianity is not a geographical, but a moral term."

In the Bible: John 3:1–8; John 1:12–13; Matthew 7:21; Romans 10:9.

Go deeper: *Nations and the kingship of Christ*, section 3, "Should a nation be 'Christian'?".

To read next

Short reads (free online)

- "You must be born again", St Stephen's and St Wulstan's, a Church of England parish (about 3 minutes). New birth is God's work, and it's what makes someone a Christian.
- "Cultural Christianity: The Good, the Bad, and the Inadequate", Thiago Silva, The Gospel Coalition (about 5 minutes). Loving the fruit of Christianity without its root.

Longer

"Why can't I be a cultural Christian?", Table Talk podcast with Glen Scrivener (38 minutes, to listen to). On Richard Dawkins calling himself a "cultural Christian".

A book

John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (IVP): who Jesus is, and what it means to respond. Amazon UK · 10ofthose

Question 5

I've never hurt anyone. Surely I'm good enough?

This often comes from decent, hard-working people, and Christianity can sound as if it's calling them bad. Sometimes it hides a quieter worry, such as "Was I a good parent?"

Ask back first

"Good enough for what, do you think?" Or: "How good would good enough have to be?"

What you could say

"You've worked hard and been kind to a lot of people, and that matters. But being good isn't how anyone gets to God, otherwise none of us would have a chance, me first. The Bible says the real problem is that we've all lived as if God wasn't King. Jesus didn't come for people who had it sorted. He died in our place, so forgiveness is a gift, not a reward, and it's there for anyone who turns to Him."

Going deeper

- **The question isn't only "Have I hurt anyone?"** Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. Sin is first of all living as if God isn't King, and that's true of all of us: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".
- **Comparing ourselves with others always flatters us.** Jesus told a story about a religious man who thanked God he wasn't like other people, and a tax collector who could only say, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." It was the second man, Jesus said, who went home right with God.
- **Grace is good news for good people too.** "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." Nobody has to keep score any more.
- **Good works still matter**, as a thank-you, not an entry fee. The same passage goes on to say that God has prepared good things for us to do.

In the Bible: Matthew 22:37–38; Romans 3:23–24; Luke 18:9–14; Mark 2:17; Ephesians 2:8–10.

To read next

Short reads (free online)

- "Why would a decent person like me need forgiveness?", Christianity Explored (about 2 minutes). Decent on the outside, but running the show ourselves.
- Two Ways to Live, Matthias Media (about 8 minutes). The Christian message in six steps, built around the question "Who will be king?"

Longer

"The Prodigal Sons", Tim Keller, a sermon (about 40 minutes, to listen to). The "good" older brother was lost too.

A book

Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God* (Hodder), short. Amazon UK · 10ofthose

Question 6

Why does the church seem more bothered about them than us?

This often comes from people who feel ignored: nobody asked the town before a hotel was used for asylum seekers, the GP waiting list is long, housing is tight. Real grievances and real fears can sit side by side, sometimes with prejudice mixed in. Listen before you say anything.

Ask back first

"What's been happening round you?" Or: "Who do you feel nobody's listening to?"

What you could say

"That's fair to raise, and if the church hasn't listened to you, I'm sorry. Jesus told us to love our neighbour, all of them: the people in our town who feel ignored, and the people who feel unsafe. Christians disagree about how many people should come here and how. But we can't love one lot by frightening the other."

Going deeper

- **Agree where you honestly can.** Towns often haven't been consulted, and pressures on services are real. Saying so isn't taking a side. It's being honest.
- **Love has no "us" and "them".** Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to a man who wanted to know where his duty to love stopped. The hero was from the group his listeners least expected.
- **God cares for the stranger, and for the town.** Israel was told to love the foreigner "as yourself", because they had been foreigners in Egypt. And when God's people were themselves exiles in Babylon, He told them to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city" they'd been taken to, and to pray for it. Wherever we live, we're to work and pray for the good of the place.
- **On policy, Christians can differ.** Numbers, borders and asylum systems are matters of judgement, and governments have a God-given job to keep order. What isn't up for debate is hatred, intimidation, or treating anyone as less than human, whether that's an asylum seeker or a neighbour who's worried about it. Every person is made in God's image.
- **Then come back to Jesus.** The best thing a Christian can bring to a divided town is the King who welcomed outsiders and insiders alike, and died for both.

In the Bible: Luke 10:25–37; Leviticus 19:33–34; Jeremiah 29:7; Romans 13:1–7; Genesis 1:27.

Go deeper: *Nations and the kingship of Christ*, section 3, "Immigration and borders".

To read next

Short reads (free online)

- "How does the Bible tell us to treat immigrants?", Evangelical Alliance (about 5 minutes). Welcome and integration, and frank about towns that have "shouldered that cost alone".

Longer

"Immigration: Two Christians debate what Jesus would do", Krish Kandiah and Nigel Scotland, Premier Christianity (about 12 minutes). Two evangelicals who differ on numbers, and agree on hospitality.

A book

Krish Kandiah, *God Is Stranger* (Hodder), on hospitality. Amazon UK

Question 7

Do you think my mum is somewhere?

This is usually grief, not a debate, and it may be asked quietly, years after someone has died. Sometimes it's harder still: "He didn't believe any of it. Where does that leave him?" Care comes before answers.

Ask back first

"Tell me about her." Or: "What makes you wonder about that?"

What you could say

"Only God can see into anyone's heart, so there's a lot I can't tell you. But I can tell you what Jesus said to His friends the night before He died: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.' He came back from the dead, so death doesn't have the last word. Everyone who trusts Him is safe with Him. And He invites us to trust Him too."

Going deeper

- **Don't rush.** When His friend Lazarus died, Jesus wept, even though He knew what He was about to do. Listening, and saying "You miss her," is often the wisest thing you can do.
- **The hope rests on the resurrection.** The first Christians said Jesus was seen alive by many people after He died, and called Him the "firstfruits": the first of all who belong to Him, who will be raised too. When someone dies trusting Jesus, Christians "grieve", but not "like the rest of mankind, who have no hope".
- **For those who trusted Jesus, death means being with Him.** Paul could say that to "depart and be with Christ" is "better by far". If you know someone trusted Jesus, you can say so with real hope.
- **If you don't know, don't pronounce either way.** We can't see anyone's heart. Even when someone said they didn't believe, none of us knows what passed between them and God at the end. We can trust the people we love to a God who is perfectly just and merciful: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The question that's ours to answer is Jesus' question to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life… Do you believe this?"
- **Practical help.** Cruse Bereavement Support (0808 808 1677) offers free support after a death. If someone is in a very dark place, Samaritans are there day and night on 116 123.

In the Bible: John 14:1–3; John 11:25–26, 35; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, 20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14; Philippians 1:21–23; John 10:28; Genesis 18:25.

To read next

Short reads (free online)

- "When a Loved One Dies", Ray Pritchard (about 2 minutes). Gentle, honest and hopeful, for when you don't know where someone stood.
- "Suffering with a Christian Worldview", Rebecca McLaughlin, Crossway (about 7 minutes). Jesus weeps at Lazarus's grave.

Longer

"How to Grieve in Hope", Matthew McCullough, Crossway (about 9 minutes), written for Christians.

A book

Tim Keller, *On Death* (Hodder), short and gentle. Amazon UK



“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Luke 23:34

St John’s Church, Woking

Workplace & Neighbourhood Evangelism

Cover photo: St John the Baptist’s Church, St John’s, Woking, by Hassocks5489 (Wikimedia Commons, public domain)