

WHAT THE LESSON IS ABOUT

The children will learn to appreciate the other religions and learn to approach the followers with the Gospel of Christ Jesus. This lesson will focus on Buddhism.

SCRIPTURE STUDIED

1 Kings 18:21; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Romans 5:8; 8:28; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:22; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; James 4:1-3; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:14; Revelation 21:4.

KEY PASSAGE

“Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

~ 1 Kings 18:21

AIMS OF THE LESSON

During this lesson the children will:

1. Learn the core teachings of Buddhism.
2. Learn how to evangelize their Buddhist friends.

INSIGHTS FOR THE LEADER

“Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

~ 1 Kings 18:21

“How many observe Christ’s birthday! How few his precepts! ‘tis easier to keep holidays than commandments.”

~ Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, 1757

This session focus understanding Buddhism and how we can share the Gospel with followers of Buddha.

Buddhism in Singapore

About 42.5% of Singaporeans are followers of Buddhism as at the year 2000. The majority of the followers are Chinese. The most popular form of Buddhism is the Mahayana branch. There are also other branches of Buddhism such as Theravada, Tibetan and Soka Buddhism.

Our census shows that in 1980 there were 27% of Singaporeans Buddhists, up to 31.2% in 1990 and 42.5% in 2000. There has been an increase interest in Buddhist teachings (Dharma), practices, and customs (i.e. chanting, meditation, and offering formality). The Buddhist community is also seeing more young people, and is seen as the most viable religion now.

General Introduction

Buddhism is the belief system of those who follow the Buddha, the Enlightened One, a title given to its founder. The religion has evolved into three main schools: **1. Theravada** or the Doctrine of the Elders (38%) is followed in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia

(Kampuchea), and Vietnam. **2. Mahayana** or the Greater Vehicle (56%) is strong in China, Korea, and Japan. **3. Vajrayana**, also called Tantrism or Lamaism, (6%) is rooted in Tibet, Nepal, and Mongolia. Theravada is the closest to the original doctrines. It does not treat the Buddha as deity and regards the faith as a worldview not a type of worship. Mahayana has accommodated many different beliefs and worships the Buddha as a god. Vajrayana has added elements of shamanism and the occult and includes taboo breaking (intentional immorality) as a means of spiritual enlightenment.

Core Beliefs

Buddhism is an impersonal religion of self-perfection, the end of which is death (extinction) not life. The essential elements of the Buddhist belief system are summarized in the **Four Noble Truths**, the **Noble Eightfold Path** and several additional key doctrines. The Four Noble Truths affirm that (1) *life is full of suffering (dukkha)*; (2) *suffering is caused by craving (samudaya)*; (3) *suffering will cease only when craving ceases (nirodha)*; and (4) *this can be achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path consisting of*

- a. **Right view:** rejecting unworthy attitudes and acts such as lying and gossip.
- b. **Right desire:** free from lust, ill-will, and cruelty, with wholesome zeal to achieve the highest ends.
- c. **Right speech:** Being gentle, soothing to the ear, useful, rightly timed and according to the fact.
- d. **Right conduct:** charity, abstaining from killing, from stealing, from unlawful sexual intercourse.
- e. **Right mode of livelihood:** free from luxury, taking up work which will be useful for his fellowman.
- f. **Right effort:** self-control, self-discipline etc.
- g. **Right thought:** dedication to Buddha's teachings.

- h. **Right meditation:** finally passing beyond sensation of pleasure and pain, into a state of transcending consciousness, the highest state of perfection, attaining 'Buddhahood'.

Other key doctrines include belief that nothing in life is permanent (*anicca*), that individual selves do not truly exist (*anatta*), that all is determined by an impersonal law of moral causation (*karma*), that reincarnation is an endless cycle of continuous suffering, and that the goal of life is to break out of this cycle by finally extinguishing the flame of life and entering a permanent state of pure nonexistence (*nirvana*).

Bridges for Evangelizing Buddhist

The gospel can be appealing to Buddhists if witnessing focuses on areas of personal need where the Buddhist belief system is weak. Some major areas include:

Suffering: Buddhists are deeply concerned with overcoming suffering but must deny that suffering is real. Christ faced the reality of suffering and overcame it by solving the problem of sin, which is the real source of suffering. Now, those who trust in Christ can rise above suffering in this life because they have hope of a future life free of suffering. We fix our eyes not on what is seen (suffering), but on what is unseen (eternal life free of suffering). For what is seen (suffering) is temporary, but what is unseen (future good life with Christ) is eternal (2 Cor. 4:18, NIV).

Meaningful Self: Buddhists must work to convince themselves they have no personal significance, even though they live daily as though they do. Jesus taught that each person has real significance. Each person is made in God's image with an immortal soul and an eternal destiny. Jesus demonstrated the value of people by loving us so much that He sacrificed His life in order to offer eternal future good life to anyone who trusts Him. God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8, NIV).

Future Hope: The hope of nirvana is no hope at all only death and extinction. The hope of those who put their trust in Christ is eternal good life in a new heaven and new earth in which God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things (suffering) has passed (will pass) away (Rev. 21:4, NIV).

Moral Law: Because *karma*, the Buddhist law of moral cause and effect, is completely rigid and impersonal, life for a Buddhist is very oppressive. Under *karma*, there can be no appeal, no mercy, and no escape except through unceasing effort at self-perfection. Christians understand that the moral force governing the universe is a personal God who listens to those who pray, who has mercy on those who repent, and who with love personally controls for good the lives of those who follow Christ. In all things God works for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

Merit: Buddhists constantly struggle to earn merit by doing good deeds, hoping to collect enough to break free from the life of suffering. They also believe saints can transfer surplus merit to the undeserving. Jesus taught no one can ever collect enough merit on his own to earn everlasting freedom from suffering. Instead, Jesus Christ, who has unlimited merit (righteousness) by virtue of His sinless life, meritorious death, and resurrection, now offers His unlimited merit as a free gift to anyone who will become His disciple. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9, NIV).

Desire: Buddhists live a contradiction; they seek to overcome suffering by rooting out desire, but at the same time they cultivate desire for self-control, meritorious life, and nirvana. Christians are consistent; we seek to reject evil desires and cultivate good desires according to the standard of Christ. Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22, NIV).

Jesus and the Eightfold Path

Because Buddhists think a good life consists of following the Eightfold Path, the stages of the path can be used to introduce them to Christ as follows:

Right views: Jesus is the way the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12).

Right aspiration: Fights and quarrels come from selfish desires and wrong motives (Jas. 4:1-3), right desires and motives honor God (1Cor. 10:31).

Right speech: A day of judgment is coming when God will hold men accountable for every careless word they have spoken (Matt. 12:36).

Right conduct: The one who loves Jesus must obey Him (John 14:21), and those who live by God's wisdom will produce good acts/fruit (Jas. 3:17).

Right livelihood: God will care for those who put Him first (Matt 6:31, 33), and all work must be done for God's approval (2 Tim. 2:15).

Right effort: Like runners in a race, followers of Christ must throw off every hindrance in order to give Him their best efforts (Heb. 12:1-2).

Right mindfulness: The sinful mind cannot submit to God's law (Rom 8:7), and disciples of Christ must orient their minds as He did (Phil. 2:5).

Right contemplation: The secret of true success, inner peace, self-control, and lasting salvation is submission to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and setting your heart and mind on things above where He now sits in glory waiting to bring the present order of sin and suffering to an end (Col. 3:1-4).

When Witnessing to Buddhist

1. Avoid terms such as new birth, rebirth, regeneration, or born again, Use alternatives such as endless freedom from suffering, guilt, and sin, new power for living a holy life, promise of eternal good life without suffering, or gift of unlimited merit.
2. Emphasize the uniqueness of Christ.

- 3. Focus on the gospel message and do not get distracted by details of Buddhist doctrine.**
- 4. Understand Buddhist beliefs enough to discern weaknesses that can be used to make the gospel appealing (see Bridges for Evangelizing Buddhists and Jesus and the Eightfold Path).**
- 5. While using bridge concepts (see Bridges for Evangelizing Buddhists), be careful not to reduce Christian truth to a form of Buddhism. Buddhism has been good at accommodating other religions. Do not say Buddhism is good, but Christianity is easier.**
- 6. Share your own testimony, especially your freedom from guilt, assurance of heaven (no more pain), and personal relationship with Christ.**
- 7. Prepare with prayer. Do not witness in your own strength.**

LESSON PLAN

Attention Grabber (NONE)

Bible Exploration (20 – 25 minutes)

Preparation: Tell the class that they will be debating among themselves on the topic of Christianity and Buddhism. One group will be the Buddhist activists and the other will be strong believers of Christ. The objective of the debate is to persuade the opponent that their faith is better and makes more sense. You can either allow the children to choose their side or you decide for them. Among the group choose three who will represent the group in the debate.

The format of the debate:

The first and second speaker of each group will have three minutes each to defend their motion, then there will be a five minutes for audience to ask questions. After this, each group will have a three minutes period to further defend their position or question the opponent. Each group will take turn to speak in an orderly manner. After this three minute, the last speaker of each group will summarize their group's position.

The motion of the debate: Christianity and Buddhism are the same; both leads to the same destination. (The objective is to bring out the difference between the two faiths. Allow the children to explore for themselves and clear their questions.)

At the end of the debate, ask, **What do you learn about Buddhism today?** Allow the children to

respond and write down their answers on the whiteboard. **What is the difference between Christianity and Buddhism?** Let the children respond and write down the responses on the whiteboard.

Using the leader's guide to help you, go through the responses on the whiteboard with the children and clear any doubts or misconceptions with them.

Conclusion (5 – 8minutes)

Finally, give the children some simple handles to dialogue with their Buddhist friends. Ask them to talk to one Buddhist friend this week and find out more about what they believe. If opportunity arises, share the gospel with them.

Resource for children taking the Buddhist side: Ask them to go to the internet, <http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/buddhaintro.html>

