



Discovering
Jesus
through Asian eyes

leader's guide

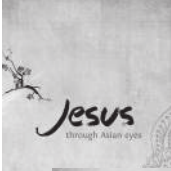
All you need to run eight friendly and open discussions about Jesus, life and faith in God



Discovering
Jesus
through Asian eyes

Leader's Guide

by Clive Thorne and Robin Thomson



also available:

- Discovering Jesus through Asian eyes *Discussion Guide*
- Jesus through Asian eyes *Booklet*



Discovering Jesus through Asian eyes Leader's Guide
© South Asian Forum of the Evangelical Alliance 2014

www.discovering-jesus.com

Project office:

Tel (UK): 020 7520 3831

Tel: (int): +44 207 520 3831

Clive Thorne and Robin Thomson assert their right to be identified as authors of this work. SAF is grateful for the input and advice given to this project by Dr Manisha Diedrich, Sivakumar Rajagopalan, Afsar Ahmed, Matthew Irvine and Wien Fung.

Published by The Good Book Company 2014

The Good Book Company

Tel (UK): 0333 123 0880

Tel (US): 866 244 2165

Email (UK): info@thegoodbook.co.uk

Email (US): info@thegoodbook.com

Websites:

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

North America: www.thegoodbook.com

Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz

The Evangelical Alliance

176 Copenhagen Street

London N1 0ST, UK

www.eauk.org

Unless indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Used by permission.

ISBN: 9781909919198

Design by André Parker/ninefootone

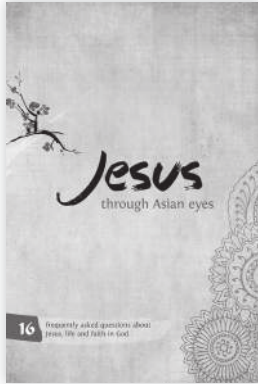
Printed in the Czech Republic



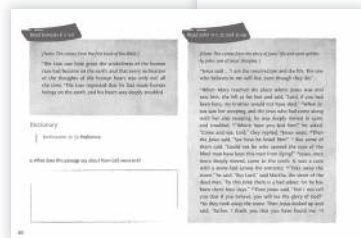
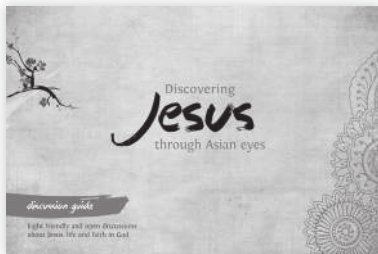
Contents

introduction	7
A. Using the <i>Jesus through Asian eyes</i> booklet	11
1. How to use the booklet to relate to Asian friends	13
2. 10 tips for continuing contact on a personal level	19
3. A brief introduction to the main Asian religions	21
4. Why these questions?	29
5. How to prepare your church or Christian group to reach Asians with the booklet and course	37
6. Organising a discussion	41
B. The <i>Discovering Jesus through Asian eyes</i> course	47
Discussion 1: What is Christianity?	53
Discussion 2: How can we relate to God?	61
Discussion 3: How do I know that God loves me?	69
Discussion 4: Is there life after death?	75
Discussion 5: Who is Jesus?	83
Discussion 6: Is Jesus the only way to reach God?	89
Discussion 7: Is the Bible reliable?	97
Discussion 8: What would need to change if I follow Jesus? ..	103
C. Going further	109
7. Leading an Asian person to Christ and follow-up	111
8. Resources	117

Jesus through Asian eyes *Booklet*



Discovering Jesus through Asian eyes *Discussion Guide*



Introduction

Note: The word "Asian" can vary in its precise meaning in different parts of the world. In the *Discovering Jesus through Asian eyes* course and *Jesus through Asian eyes* booklet, the word "Asian" describes anyone from the whole continent of Asia.

Many Christians are reluctant to talk about Jesus to their Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Muslim neighbours, friends or work colleagues, because they are unsure of how Asians would respond or what questions they might have about Jesus or about Christianity. Actually almost all Asians are religious, and are much more interested and indeed happy to discuss different beliefs about God than the average Western person.

The *Jesus through Asian eyes* booklet and *Discovering Jesus through Asian eyes* course have been produced to give you basic and reliable resources that you can use with confidence with your Asian friends.

The booklet seeks to provide fairly brief and helpful answers to sixteen questions that Asian people from different backgrounds most frequently ask about Jesus and the Christian faith.

The course provides a biblical base from which to explore further the answers to these questions.

As you pray about starting a conversation about Jesus with an Asian friend, you can become familiar with the questions that you are most likely to be asked about Jesus and the Christian faith by first reading through the booklet yourself before giving it away. You do not have to be an expert on Asian people to use this material. This manual has been designed to equip ordinary Christians with ideas on how to use the booklet and engage in further discussion.

The four aims of the booklet are to:

1. Provide “bite-size” answers to the most common questions about Jesus and the Christian faith.
2. Clarify and deal with misconceptions about Christian belief.
3. Introduce people to the gospel message and inspire further discussion.
4. Lead on to the ***Discovering Jesus*** discussion course.

It can be used with friends, neighbours, colleagues, family members or other contacts in a variety of ways, for example:

1. To give away for them to read later.
2. As part of answering particular questions in one-to-one conversation or on the internet.
3. In a one-time discussion group.
4. To organise a ***Discovering Jesus*** discussion course.

It is very flexible. You can use sections from the booklet and from the material here as part of your conversation over a cup of coffee, or you could invite people to join you on a full structured course. You can use it with individuals or with groups, according to your situation.

It can also be used for training the whole church in how to reach Asian people with the gospel.

“It has often been hard to form discussion groups with people from traditional Asian culture as the idea does not necessarily fit with their cultural mindset, as you will read below, but I

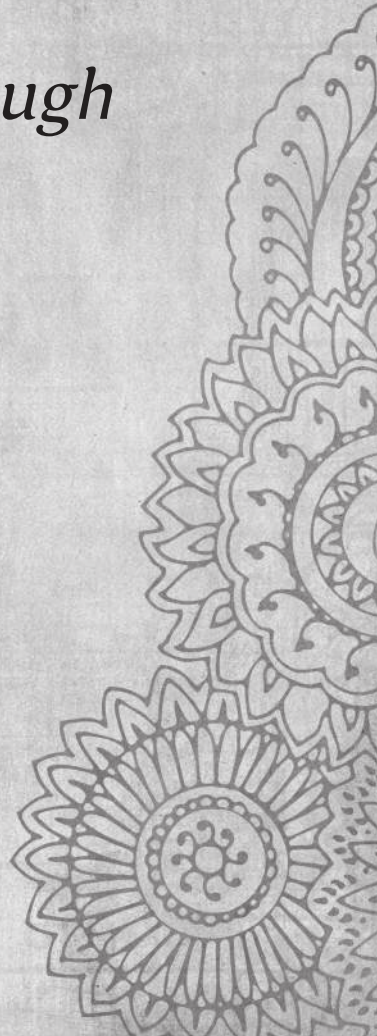
believe that the time has now come for this to work with a new generation. There is a whole new world of Asians whose culture would be open to joining a discussion group, and this booklet can form the launch-pad for their interest to enquire further about Jesus. Without Him, the world is lost... go for it!"

Clive Thorne Minister, Southampton Lighthouse International Church



A

Using the *Jesus through
Asian eyes* booklet



1. How to use the booklet to relate to Asian friends

Most Asian people (like most people throughout the history of the world) hold to their religious beliefs because that is what they have been brought up to do. Usually they have not reasoned out why they hold these beliefs; they simply follow the beliefs and customs of their community, although there will always be exceptions to this, especially among students and professionals. They are often, however, curious about what other religions believe.

Hindus and Sikhs believe that all religions are valid ways of reaching God, so they may be interested to find out more about the particular Christian way. Many from East Asia (eg: China or Japan), may similarly be interested. Muslims believe Christianity is the religion that preceded Islam in God's revelation to the world, and they are often keen to talk about similarities between the two faiths. Some Muslims will be eager to try to convert a Christian to Islam.

“In over 30 years of trying to reach Asian people with the gospel, including Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, I have hardly ever come across someone who was reluctant to talk about faith. Some Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs came to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the first time that I met them, as they had

been prepared by the Holy Spirit and were seeking a real relationship with God; others took longer. One Muslim man met me every week for two years, talking about faith and trying to convert me to Islam, after which the Lord saved him! A dear Sikh friend made his first step of faith in the Lord after we had met most weeks for over 20 years ... Reaching Asian people with the gospel can be a long-term project.”

Clive Thorne

Forming friendships

Forming a friendship is vital in starting to share with anyone about the gospel. Whatever the background, talking to an Asian person about Jesus is normally “as easy as falling off a log”. Their culture is largely based around relationships and they are usually friendly, polite and respectful of the beliefs of others. They are also often curious to know exactly what Christians believe. The best way to use this booklet is to offer it once a friendship has been formed and an initial conversation has sparked further questions. This could lead to people joining the discussion course.

At the same time, it is important to realise that most Asian people may also have misconceptions about Christians, including the almost universal assumptions that Christianity and Western culture are really the same thing, and that we are all born into our particular religions. So we need to take time to build relationships and bridges through which we can begin to communicate beyond the stereotypes (which, of course, work both ways).

Friendships can be formed at work, school or college, or with neighbours, shopkeepers, hairdressers, etc. Food and hospitality are always good ways to begin. Be aware that Muslims do not eat pork or non-*halal* meat, and do not drink alcohol; and it is better to serve vegetarian food to Hindus and Sikhs. Accept any offer of hospitality as this will be a sign of your friendship (it will help if you like or develop a taste for Asian food!). As your relationship grows, you are very likely to receive such invitations, and this is an important part of most Asian cultures and friendships.

Similarly, learning about the appropriate history, culture and customs of your Asian friend will go a long way to building a bridge of understanding between you. A few words of the right Asian language (beware—there are many), used appropriately, will help to bring a smile and break down barriers. You do not have to be fluent but attempting a few phrases will show interest in their background.

Invitations to church social events, such as appropriate barbecues, are often accepted, especially on special occasions such as Christmas or Easter, as Asian culture especially respects “holy days”. Avoid inviting conservatively clothed Asian people to summer picnics where others may be wearing very little, or Muslims to Christmas carol services with sausage rolls and mulled wine!

In Asian culture, it is acceptable for even mild acquaintances to celebrate or show their respects at major life events, such as moving to a new house, marriages, the birth of a child (a baby boy is especially celebrated) or funerals. Asian families will often invite neighbours or workmates to such occasions. By getting involved, you will strengthen whatever relationship you have with that person, and you can get to know their extended family, where you may find new friendships.

“Over the years, meeting and befriending members of extended families and their friends has been the major way of making new contacts who have eventually come to faith in Jesus. We have sometimes had over a hundred such contacts at our annual barbecue or Christmas party.”

Clive Thorne

The church may have activities which attract Asian people, such as:

- ◆ mother and toddler groups
- ◆ youth groups
- ◆ English classes or other specialist classes, such as baking
- ◆ football or cricket teams, or other sports activities
- ◆ help for asylum seekers
- ◆ musical events
- ◆ lunch clubs for the elderly
- ◆ charity/thrift shops or stalls
- ◆ booktables

All of these and others represent opportunities to form friendships through social events, such as organising a Christmas party for the youth group or for those learning English.

Be a genuine friend rather than just showing interest in someone with a view to conversion. Invite people into your home wherever possible, and do not be afraid to offer to pray for them, as most Asian people would appreciate this. There needs to be trust and integrity in the relationship, and reliance on the Lord to fill you with His supernatural love.

We cannot stress this enough. Our purpose in this booklet and discussion course is to help those of us who are followers of Jesus to point Asian friends to the love of Jesus. We do that because we have experienced His love and forgiveness, and want them to do so as well. Each person has to make up their own mind about what to do after they have encountered Jesus through this material. We will continue to be their friends and to love them and serve them, whatever they choose to do.

For further suggestions and resources, see pages 39-40 (in the section *How to prepare your church to reach Asians with the booklet and course*).

Giving the booklet away

The *Jesus through Asian eyes* booklet is more than an “easy give-away” tract but less than a book, and has been designed to fill the gap for those who have just started to develop an interest in Christianity but are not ready to take on anything more substantial.

If you are offering a discussion course, it would be good to have contact details and information about the times and location of the course on the booklet when giving it away.

We should always be open to the Holy Spirit leading us in giving the booklet to friends, neighbours, relatives, work colleagues, etc. Evangelism is a work of God and so we need constantly to pray for the Lord to give us opportunities with people whose hearts are open to the gospel. In the midst of the crowd, Jesus could single out Zacchaeus in order to go and stay at his house, because Jesus knew that Zacchaeus would repent and

believe in Him. Jesus remains the same today, and it is good to ask Him for discernment when giving the booklet away.

Some may have a casual conversation on a train or plane, and sense that it would be right to offer a booklet. But it would sometimes be a waste to ask someone we've just met in a shop or on the street if they would take one, as they might agree to take it out of politeness but then not read it. Asians from all kinds of background may simply believe that "God is One"; they will assume that whatever Christians believe must be fundamentally compatible with their own beliefs, and so dismiss the need to ask any questions. Some Muslims may assert the superiority of Islam and refuse to take it. It is always best to get to know the person on a friendly basis before offering the booklet. If their interest persists, you could suggest going through the discussion course.

When befriending someone from an Asian background, it is usually best to approach a person of the same sex, as traditional Asian cultures, especially Muslim ones, usually have strict rules separating men and women. This of course may be different when dealing with people who have adapted to Western ways, particularly young people born or brought up in the West.

It is worth mentioning that it is usually not a good idea to talk to Muslims in a group, as even if they are interested in what you have to say, they will often be frightened to show it in front of other Muslims. The same may apply to a lesser extent with members of other faiths, where interest in Christianity may be seen as disloyalty to their own faith.

Try to discern if your friend would be more comfortable discussing Christian faith individually or if they would be happy to join a group. Emphasise that the group will be very informal, with opportunities to express opinions, discuss and ask further questions. Assure them that the aim is to explore what the Bible says about these questions together—it won't be a religious lecture!

The group could be one that has already started, with members of your church. For further suggestions about how to start a group, see pages 37-39 (in the section *How to prepare your church to reach Asians with the booklet and course*).

2. Ten tips for continuing contact on a personal level



Once someone has shown interest, how should we continue?

1. Pray constantly and rely on the Holy Spirit to lead you in the discussion.
2. Be a genuine friend and try to demonstrate God's love: heated debate and argument are to be avoided.
3. Never attack the other person's religion as this will only alienate them. Once a friendship has been established and interest shown, areas of difference between their faith and following Jesus will become evident, but deal with them with gentleness and respect.
4. Be hospitable and accept hospitality, but remember that Muslims do not eat pork or non-*halal* meat and do not drink alcohol; and it is safer to serve vegetarian food to most people of other faiths.
5. Use the Bible respectfully: they will consider it disrespectful to a holy book to put it on the floor or on a table where there is food, or to write in it. Invite them to read the Bible for themselves, perhaps by offering them a Gospel to read. The style and content of Matthew or Luke are more helpful for Muslims, and John for Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists.
6. Do offer to pray for them as they will usually appreciate this. The Quran says that Jesus healed the sick and so Muslims will

often accept prayer for healing in Jesus' name. Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists will respect Jesus as a holy religious teacher and/or an incarnation of God, and so will usually welcome prayer in His name.

7. Learn as much as you can about their background and community as part of building a bridge of friendship.
8. Share your personal story and later, if possible, introduce them to someone from their faith who came to follow Jesus; but please note that this may cause offence if done too quickly.
9. If interest is growing, offer to introduce them to a group of like-minded people from the same background who are following Jesus.
10. Be prepared to be their new family if they are rejected by their own.