CONVERSATION GUIDE

10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask

(and Answer) about Christianity

A conversation guide with companion material for small groups and youth group meetings

To the book by Rebecca McLaughlin (Crossway)

About this guide

This conversation guide was developed by Esther Penner, with Daniel Oesterle and Andy Fronius.

Conversation guide by Pulse to the book "10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity" by Rebecca McLaughlin (Crossway). Free for your work with young people. What you may do with it: Terms of use

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter 1: How Can I Live My Best Life Now?	3
Chapter 2: Isn't Christianity against Diversity?	7
Chapter 3: Can Jesus Be True for You but Not for Me?	8
Chapter 4: Can't We Just Be Good without God?	9
Chapter 5: How Can You Believe the Bible Is True?	11
Chapter 6: Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?	12
Chapter 7: Why Can't We Just Agree That Love Is Love?	14
Chapter 8: Who Cares If You're a Boy or a Girl?	15
Chapter 9: Does God Care When We Hurt?	16
Chapter 10: How Can You Believe in Heaven and Hell?	18

Introduction

Help your teens take the training wheels off their bike of faith and ride through the rushing traffic of society's opinions without crashing. Use this conversation guide to the book "10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity" by Rebecca McLaughlin to walk alongside them on their faith journey.

> *"Rather than protecting my kids from divergent ideas, or urging them to affirm all beliefs equally, I want to equip them to have real conversations with real people who really think differently from them—and from me." — Rebecca McLaughlin*

This conversation guide is meant to give you ideas and inspiration to take your teens on a journey where they examine the Christian faith and learn to talk about their own faith with more confidence. With the guide to each chapter you have a selection of questions and elements you can use to start a conversation with your teens about the chapter's topic and let them draw their own conclusions. You don't have to cover every question, and not all of them even fit together. You may want to reword some questions or drop them completely. Adapt the guide in whatever way works best for you and your teens.

Rebecca McLaughlin writes that her hope is for this book to help young people start thinking for themselves.

Some groups like to read the book together with their teens at their weekly meeting. Others prefer to encourage their teens to read the chapter before each meeting, so there is more time for the discussion questions at the meeting. Feel free to adapt the guide to the way you do things here too.

Chapter 1: How Can I Live My Best Life Now?

Icebreaker questions

5 minutes

What things or people are you most excited about right now?

OR: What brings you the most joy right now?

What has been one of the happiest moments of your life so far?

Read the chapter

30 minutes

Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?

Read the chapter together.

Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*Moana*, *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Frozen*, *Aladdin*)

Small groups

25 minutes

How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?

How do you think your friends who don't follow Jesus would respond to this chapter?

The author gives seven pieces of evidence suggesting that Jesus was right when he said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

- #1 People who go to church are happier and healthier
- #2 Love is the most important thing
- #3 Helping others is good for us
- #4 Gratitude is good for us
- #5 Forgiving is good for you
- #6 Perseverance is great!
- #7 The love of money lets us down

Which of these pieces of evidence surprised you? Why?

Which of them convince you, and which don't? Why?

Read some of the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter and use them to go deeper into a topic of your choice.

- #1: Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:16; Matthew 16:24; Philippians 1:18; 2:18; 3:1; 4:4
- #2: 1 John 4:8; John 5:12; 1 John 3:16
- #3: Acts 20:35; Mark 12:31; Mark 10:44-45; Matthew 16:25
- #4: 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18; Romans 8:28
- #5: Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 11:4; Luke 23:34; Psalm 68:5; Romans 12:19
- #6: Matthew 7:14; 2 Peter 1:6; Hebrews 12:1-2; John 14:16
- #7: 1 Timothy 6:10; Matthew 19:16-26; 2 Thessalonians 3:12; Ephesians 4:28; Colossians 3:23; Matthew 20:16

- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 2: Isn't Christianity against Diversity?

Icebreaker questions

5 minutes

- Which countries have you traveled to? What did you like most about the country?
- Which country would you love to travel to someday, and why?
- If you had been born on another continent, which country would you have liked best, and why?

Read the chapter

30 minutes

- Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?
- Read the chapter together.
- Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*Harriet*)

Small groups

25 minutes

- How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?
- At the start of the chapter, the author describes meeting a twelve-year-old boy from Ghana. When she asked him why he thought fewer Christians live in America than in Ghana, he answered that Americans believe in diversity. Would you agree or disagree with him? Why?
- If one of your friends said to you, "Christianity is against diversity," what would you answer?
- Read some of the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter and use them to go deeper into a topic of your choice.

John 1:1-5; Genesis 1:26-27; John 14:9; Colossians 1:15

- God made all people in his image and likeness. What does that mean? What do these passages tell us about God and diversity?

Mark 12:29-31; John 4:4-26; Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:9-11; Acts 8:26-40; Colossians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Revelation 7:9

- What did Jesus and the apostles say about diversity?
- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 3: Can Jesus Be True for You but Not for Me?

Game: "True or Made Up?"

5 minutes

Play the game "True or Made Up?" with your teens: read out statements and let them guess which ones are true and which are made up. Or create your own game.

- Which statements were you 100% sure were true or false? Where did your certainty come from?

Read the chapter

30 minutes

- Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?
- Read the chapter together.
- Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*Titanic*)

Small groups

25 minutes

- How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?
- If someone said to you, "All religions are equally true," what would you answer?
- In the summary at the end of the chapter, the author writes that if Jesus is the only way to God and if he has given Christians the task of telling others about him, then it is disrespectful and unloving not to pass this message on to others. What are your thoughts on that?
- Read some of the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter and use them to go deeper into a topic of your choice.

1 Corinthians 15:17; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Mark 2:7; Mark 2:5, 10; John 11:25; John 14:6; John 14:9; Matthew 28:18-20 (Truth is a matter of life and death)

- Do you believe that Jesus is the only way to God and that he rose from the dead? What makes you think so?

1 Peter 3:15-16; Acts 9; 2 Corinthians 5:11-14; 1 Timothy 1:15 (Respecting and persuading people)

- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 4: Can't We Just Be Good without God?

Game: "Hunger Spoons"

5 minutes

Goal: The winner is the player who has the most M&M's in their bowl at the end.

Materials

- 1 table (the floor works too); 1 bag of M&M's; 1 bowl
- For each player: 1 chair (if you play at a table); 1 bowl; 1 long-handled spoon (one and a half times the length of an arm; lengthen it with a metal or wooden rod if needed)

Preparation

- Pour the M&M's into the bowl and put it in the middle (of the table), far enough from the players that they can't reach the bowl with their hands but can reach it with their long spoons.
- When you fill the bowl, make sure that if the M&M's were divided among the players, every player would get the same number (for example, 60 M&M's for 6 players, so each would get 10 if the M&M's were shared fairly). Important: Don't tell them that the number works out evenly.
- The players' empty bowls stand in front of them at their places. Seat the players far enough apart that they can still reach the other players' bowls with an outstretched arm and the long spoon.

How to play

- The players' task is to fill their bowl with M&M's. Their tool is the long spoon. They have to hold it at the end and may not let go of it, which means they may not hold the spoon farther down. They put their other, "free" hand behind their back. They may not stand up at any point and must stay seated on their chair or in their place. The game is over when there are no M&M's left in the bowl in the middle. The winner is whoever has the most M&M's in their bowl at the end. M&M's that fall on the way between the bowls go back into the bowl in the middle.
- If players ask, you can allow this: M&M's may be stolen from other players' bowls. Hitting other players' spoons is allowed too. Hitting other players is not allowed.

How the game goes

If the players cooperate and help each other instead of working against each other, they can all end up with the same number of M&M's in their bowls, and everyone wins. If the players work against each other, a spoon war breaks out, and they may form teams that work against each other. The leader doesn't step in and doesn't try to influence the strategy. The decision about how to play is up to the players.

Reflection

- How did you go about it? Why?
- When did you change your strategy? Why?
- Looking back, what would you have done differently?
- What other options would you have had?

Read the chapter

30 minutes

- Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?
- Read the chapter together.

Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*Wreck-It Ralph*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*)

Small groups

25 minutes

How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?

A friend says to you, "Every culture and religion can decide for itself what is good and what is evil." What would you answer?

Which of the arguments in the chapter might get your friend thinking?

Read some of the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter and use them to go deeper into a topic of your choice.

Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17; Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 10:25-37; John 4:1-42 (The value of every person)

What do you think the people felt or thought when they met Jesus?

How does Jesus show you that you are valuable?

Matthew 5:43-45; Luke 23:34; Romans 5:7-8; Romans 5:10; Romans 3:10-12 (Loving your enemies)

What do you find challenging about what these passages say?

What questions has this chapter raised for you?

Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 5: How Can You Believe the Bible Is True?

Icebreaker questions

5 minutes

- Which event in history that you didn't experience yourself, but heard about from others, would you have loved to be there for? Why?
- Is there a funny or important experience that your grandparents or parents had as small children and told you about? Would you like to share it with us? What makes the story believable to you?
- What claims have people made to you that weren't true, just to get your attention?

Read the chapter

40 minutes

- Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?
- Read the chapter together.
- Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*Aladdin*, *Frozen*, *The Princess Bride*)

Small groups

25 minutes

- How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?
- According to the author, why is it hard to believe that Jesus' first followers made up the stories about him?
- How believable do you find the alternative explanations? Why?
- Read the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter and choose your own focus for the passages you pick.

Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:11-18 (Jesus was seen alive)

- What do you notice in these passages? (For example: Peter is the one who lies about knowing Jesus, Mark 14:29-31; Mark 14:66-72. Then he is one of the first disciples to tell others that Jesus has risen. Would you have believed him?)

John 10:11; John 6:35; John 15:5; Matthew 7:13-14 (Metaphors)

- Which metaphors do you know that we use often?
- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 6: Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?

Icebreaker question

5 minutes

If time and money didn't matter, what would you love to invent?

Pop quiz[1]

Germany is known as a land of poets, thinkers and engineers. Here are some famous inventions from Germany.

Choose how hard to make your pop quiz, and let your teens guess the inventor, the invention or the year it was invented. You can also turn it into a team challenge.

Invention	Inventor	Year
Printing press	Johannes Gutenberg	1440
Beer Purity Law (Reinheitsgebot)	Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria	1516
Homeopathy	Samuel Hahnemann	1797
Telephone	Johann Philipp Reis	1859
Periodic table	Lothar Meyer	1864
Dynamo and electric streetcar	Werner von Siemens	1866
Motorcycle and automobile	Gottlieb Daimler and Carl Benz	1885
Glider	Otto Lilienthal	1894
X-rays	Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen	1895
Theory of relativity	Albert Einstein	1915
35 mm camera	Oskar Barnack	1925
Television	Manfred von Ardenne	1930
Nuclear fission and the atomic bomb	Otto Hahn	1938
Computer	Konrad Zuse	1941
Chip card	Jürgen Dethloff and Helmut Gröttrup	1969
MP3 format	Fraunhofer Institute	1988

[1] Source of the data: https://www.wiwo.de/erfolg/trends/erfindungen-aus-deutschland-17-beruehmte-deutsche-erfindungen/26701472.html (in German)

Read the chapter

40 minutes

Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?

Read the chapter together.

Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*Moana*)

Small groups

25 minutes

- How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?
- What would you say to a friend who tells you, "Science has disproved Christianity. I'd have to switch off my brain to become a Christian"?
- How do you think science and faith fit together? How does the Christian faith support science? How does science support the Christian faith?
- Which questions can science not answer, but the Christian faith can? (Who we are and why we exist)
- Read the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter.

Psalm 93:1; 1 Samuel 2:8

- Christians don't take these passages literally but see them as metaphors. What tells us that these are metaphors?
- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 7: Why Can't We Just Agree That Love Is Love?

Icebreaker questions

5 minutes

- What is the greatest proof of love anyone has ever given you (parents, siblings, friends)?
- If you could design your best friend yourself, what qualities would you give them?

Read the chapter

50 minutes

- Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?
- Read the chapter together.
- Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*Frozen*)

Small groups

25 minutes

- How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?
- What do you think about this statement (not a quote from the book): "If it makes them happy, what's wrong with two men getting married? They aren't doing anything wrong, and they can't help feeling the way they do. They should be allowed to find happiness too."
- Read the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter and choose your own focus for the passages you pick.

Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 63:16-17; Hosea 11:1-4; Matthew 6:9; Isaiah 49:15; Isaiah 54:5-8; Jeremiah 3:20; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1:2 (God as father, mother, husband)

Luke 5:34; Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7; Revelation 19:7; 21:1-5 (Jesus as the bridegroom)

- What do these verses mean for human relationships?

Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Romans 1:18-31; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; 1 Timothy 1:15-16; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Corinthians 7:7, 32-35; Matthew 5:27-28 (Sexuality and love)

- How would you define marriage based on these passages?

John 15:13; Luke 5:31; 1 John 3:16; Romans 8:35-39 (Jesus' love and sacrifice)

- What picture do these passages give us of true friendship?

Romans 12:5; Matthew 12:50; Colossians 2:2; Philippians 2:25; Philemon 12; 1 Thessalonians 2:7 (Friendship, more than love)

- The author writes that the deepest intimacy of friendship is a special gift for people of the same sex. To what extent do these passages support her statement, or not?
- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 8: Who Cares If You're a Boy or a Girl?

Icebreaker questions

5 minutes

- Game: "Who Am I?" (see the book)
- Have you ever asked yourself, "Who am I?" What made you ask? Would you like to tell us more about it?

Read the chapter

50 minutes

- Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?
- Read the chapter together.
- Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*)

Small groups

25 minutes

- How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?
- Read the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter and choose your own focus for the passages you pick.

Colossians 1:15; Mark 4:35-41; Matthew 26:53; John 11:25; Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 8:3; Luke 4:40; John 2:13-17; Matthew 11:28-30; John 11:35; Luke 22:49-51; Mark 10:45; John 13; John 21:9; Philippians 2:1-11 (The perfect man)

- What picture of a man do these passages give us?

Luke 10:38-42; John 4:1-42; Luke 7:36-50; Romans 16:1-16; Acts 16:14; Luke 8:2-3; Luke 24:10-11; Philippians 4:2-3 (Women among the first Christians)

- What picture of a woman do these passages give us?

Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:18; Psalm 54:4; Matthew 16:24-25; Matthew 19:4; Galatians 3:28 (Man and woman, woman as helper)

- What perspective do these passages give us on the chapter's topic?
- How would you define being a man and being a woman?
- How do you think knowing who we are in Jesus affects the way we see ourselves?
- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 9: Does God Care When We Hurt?

Game: "Would You Rather"[2]

5 minutes

Would you rather ...

- ... always be tired, no matter how much you sleep, or always be hungry, no matter how much you eat?
- ... always be stressed or always be bored?
- ... lose your sense of smell or lose your sense of taste?
- ... never be able to speak again or never be able to read again?
- ... have hiccups forever or have a runny nose forever?
- ... be alone forever or always be surrounded by annoying people?
- ... never be allowed to leave your town again or have to move every month?
- ... live without legs or without arms?
- ... be blind or be deaf?

Icebreaker questions

5 minutes

What would be the worst thing that could happen to you?

What do you think would have to happen for a life without suffering to be possible?

[2] Questions taken from: https://thepulse.org/en/100-would-you-rather-questions/

Read the chapter

50 minutes

Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?

Read the chapter together.

Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*Harry Potter*)

Small groups

25 minutes

How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?

Read some of the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter.

Romans 8:28; Luke 10:38-42; Revelation 21:4; Isaiah 53:3; John 10:28-29; Romans 8:18

John 11:1-44

The story of Lazarus being raised from the dead in John 11 runs like a common thread through this chapter. Together with the other verses, how does this story help us understand the role God plays when it comes to suffering?

Watch one of these video clips:

- Nick Vujicic: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQkDIeQ4Afg
- Philipp Mickenbecker (in German): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ht5hc3uSBIM

- What do the experiences of Nick Vujicic or Philipp Mickenbecker show us about how God works in or through suffering?
- What would you say to a friend who is going through something painful and asks you why God allows it?
- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?

Chapter 10: How Can You Believe in Heaven and Hell?

Icebreaker questions

5 minutes

- What ideas would you say most people have about heaven or hell?
- Why do you think McLaughlin calls this the hardest and most important chapter in the book?

Read the chapter

50 minutes

- Before we read the chapter: How would you answer the chapter's question?
- Read the chapter together.
- Tip: You can take breaks from reading to watch the movie scenes mentioned in the chapter. If you do, plan more time for reading. (*The Good Place*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, *Frozen*, *Titanic*)

Small groups

25 minutes

- How does the author answer the chapter's question? How does she arrive at this answer? What do you find surprising, helpful or challenging about her approach?
- In this chapter, one section asks whether life without Jesus is really so bad. How would you answer that question after reading the chapter?
- Read some of the Bible passages mentioned in the chapter:

Matthew 22:30; Revelation 3:20; John 8:12; John 6:35; John 14:6; John 11:25-26; Matthew 5:21-48; Isaiah 6:1-5; Romans 6:6; Romans 5:7-8; Luke 15:11-32; Matthew 25:1-13; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 23:42-43; 1 Corinthians 1:27

- What do these passages add to the picture of heaven and hell that McLaughlin paints for us?
- What questions has this chapter raised for you?
- Which statements in this chapter would you like to explore further?