

World Religions

Better understanding our neighbors and their beliefs

Week Six: Hinduism & Christianity

Series overview: As we get to know our neighbors, many of us are met with a rich collection of people from cultures worldwide. With so many religions and backgrounds represented in our community, you may find yourself wondering more about the people who surround you. What do they believe? How do I relate to people coming from experiences far different from mine? And most of all, how do I interact with my neighbors in a way that shows love and respect?

This week's message: Hinduism developed over 3,500 years, starting around 1500 BC. With no founder, no prophet, no structure, and no creed, Hinduism has been described more as a culture; one that is rarely understood. Hindu scriptures include the Vedas – texts comprised of rituals, songs, and stories – and the Upanishads – containing the more philosophical ideas that form Hinduism today. The Vedas, originally passed on largely by oral tradition, encompass various ideologies, including polytheism, henotheism, monotheism, agnosticism, and monism.

Hindu Beliefs

- Brahman: transcendent absolute reality; whether you call it a spirit, being, or idea, Brahman is the impersonal god of which all other gods are manifestations
- The Brahman/Atman Unity: the universal self, the absolute knower, the part of you that has nothing to do with your flesh; you are disconnected from deity, but you actually are deity, you just don't know it or experience it
- The Problem of Maya: The illusion that our every day experience is real
- The Liberation of Moksha: Release from the human condition that prevents The Brahman/Atman Unity; comes from accepting that nothing we experience is real
- The Law of Karma: the ongoing influence of past actions on the future
- The Cycle of Samsara: the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth that accounts for our physical existence; this reincarnation is a negative consequence of karmic debt, as the goal is to eventually break the cycle to reach enlightenment and be absorbed into god

Hindus may choose one of the following yogas, or disciplines, to reach enlightenment – knowledge (meditation and emptying your mind), action (practice and ritual), or devotion (adoration of and service to whichever god you choose).

Small Group Discussion:

➤ Connect

- How have you experienced Westernized forms of Hinduism? How does it compare to the original Eastern religious expression? (i.e. karma, yoga, monism, reincarnation, etc.)

➤ Grow

- Do you see similarities between the disciplines of Christianity and the yogas of Hinduism (knowledge, action, and devotion)? How do they differ in motivation and practice?
- Read Exodus 34:6. How would you explain the differences between our God and Brahman to a Hindu? What other Scripture would you use?
- Read Ephesians 2:8-10 & Matthew 11:28-30. When it comes to the exhausting cycle of Samsara, how would you explain the hope and peace we as Christians have in Jesus to a Hindu?
- Read Revelation 21:3-4. Hinduism teaches to deny that the world, along with the pain & suffering within it, are real. How would these verses serve as a comfort to Hindus?
- Sometimes when catastrophe strikes a Hindu family, the Hindu community sees it as earned/bad karma, and refuses to step in. How could we, as believers, use this as an opportunity to share God's love and truth? If asked by a Hindu why you're stepping in to help, what Biblical response would you give that could lead into spiritual conversation?

➤ Reach

- One City. Hindus are a very open people with lots of stories. Think of questions to ask the Hindus you know about what they believe. Then, take the next step of asking them this week, and listen without trying to argue.
- One Nation. Pray for our country – that we will stop adopting the misunderstood pieces of various religions that sound good to us; that God's Spirit will bring revival.
- One World. Pray for Hindus around the world who are hearing about the hope of Jesus Christ – that they recognize it as truth and accept it fully.

Prayer Focus

Pray Psalm 86:5-13 over yourself, your small group, the Church, and the nations. In thankfulness, recognize who God is, and ask that that continues to change your heart as well as hearts around the world.

Scripture Memory

"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. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Ephesians 2:8-10