# Week Zero: Intro

**(Slide 2)** Let’s start with a quick poll, popcorn style. List as many religions (other than Christian denominations) as you can; I have a list here with twenty on it. Some are major religions and others are cults. We’ll study both in this class. Three minutes. Go.

1. Buddhism
2. Hinduism
3. Islam (also accept Sunni, Shi’ite, Wahhabi, etc.)
4. Taoism
5. Shintoism
6. Judaism
7. Baha’i
8. Mormonism
9. Watchtower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses)
10. Scientology
11. Confucianism
12. Hare Krishna
13. New Age Mysticism
14. Rastafarianism
15. Satanism
16. Wicca
17. Zoroastrianism
18. Falun Gong
19. Unification Church (Not the same as Unitarian Universalism)
20. Sikhism

Well done. We aren’t necessarily going to study all of these in depth but we will touch on the high points. Has anyone here had an experience or encounter with someone who is a member of one of the faiths groups we listed? It doesn’t have to be long or end with, ‘and then I shared my faith. He repented on the spot and became a Christian.’ *Be ready with a story to start them off in case no one volunteers.*

The goal of this class is to compare and contrast these religions with our own Christian beliefs, and to learn how to reach the adherents of them. The world gives us nice sounding messages on how to deal with religious differences. Seen these before? **(Slide 3)** It’s a nice thought, and it makes me feel all fuzzy inside. Or maybe that’s dinner. I’m not sure. The problem is there are irreconcilable differences between most of them. No matter what religion we are talking about, one of the key points is to remember that these people are human beings. They have feelings, and likely faith that is as strong, or stronger, than your own in what they believe. Talking down to them or disparaging their belief will not win you any friends, and it will not help you reach them. As we talk about this I will inevitably describe their beliefs in negative terms but don’t take that to mean you should be negative when witnessing to these people. They are lost souls in need to Jesus’ gift of grace, not simpletons in need of an education. The goal of this class is to compare and contrast these religions with our own Christian beliefs, but to do that we need to understand our own faith first. Sure, we all know what we believe, but why do we believe it? How do we know it is true? **(Slide 4)**

Before we begin, we need to define a few words that you’ll hear used a lot. Ask for definitions of Religion, Heresy, and Cult. Then read definitions from the session one handbook (Page 11). With that in mind, let’s lay out a foundation, with Christ as our cornerstone. Some of the things we will talk about are critical to salvation while others are not, but they are all important. What you believe about Jesus is central to salvation. What you believe about creation, for example, is not. What you believe about creation, however, will influence how you view the rest of the Bible. If you are willing to question what the Bible says about one subject, would you be more likely to question what the Bible says about other topics, too? You will hear me refer to this distinction as open handed vs. closed handed doctrines – Open handed doctrines are those I hold in an open hand and am willing to discuss or even debate. We can disagree on them and still both be saved. Closed handed doctrines are non-negotiable. If you disagree with a closed-handed doctrine - such as the truth of Christ’s sinless life, death, burial, and resurrection – then you cannot possibly be a Christian. If that is offensive to you, then too bad…! God is not interested in making sure you feel good. He is interested in making sure you have a saving faith in Him.

So what’s the point? Why are we doing this? Is any of this really important? Matthew 28:19-20 gives us the answer: It’s The Great Commission. We are to be Christ’s witnesses to all nations, and that includes nations where other religions are dominant. Some of them are outright hostile to Christianity, but the Bible does not make an exception for places like that.

There’s more, though. We are told to contend for the faith – make a case for the faith, not get in a fist fight for it. Jude 3 and 4 **(Slide 5)**. Still not enough? We need to be on guard for deceit… inside the church and outside it. Some of the groups we will study began as Christian churches. Matthew 24: 45-5, 11, 24. Also Acts 20:28-31a. Don’t get lazy. 2 Corinthians 11:3-4. There is one Bible. We do not need added works, new revelations, or updated scriptures as some falsely claim. Galatians 1:6-9.

You may have already encountered opposition at school or other places outside school. If so, that’s a good thing. If your faith wasn’t dangerous the devil would leave you alone. Challenges to your faith, if properly dealt with, will strengthen your faith. More to the point, each of you is about to embark, or will embark in the next few years, on a journey through the snake pit. By that I mean college, and in the most encouraging terms possible. If the recent movie ‘God’s Not Dead’ proved anything it ought to be that life as a Christian who is willing to defend the faith on a college campus full of secular students and staff is not only possible, but our mission. If you profess your faith, you will be assaulted with opposing views. It will happen. I promise. Thus, I want you to be ready for it. God is bigger than the Boogie Man **(Slide 6)**. He lives in your hearts. Contend for the faith as Jude encourages us. Be bold, understand what you believe and why you believe it, but also understand that it is God will win the battle, not you. John 15:18, 16:33 and James 1:2-4.

How should we respond to the threat of false religions attempting to worm their way into our lives and the lives of the people around us? First and foremost, have a mature grasp of what the Bible actually says **(Slide 7)**. Hebrews 5:14, Ephesians 4:14. Be vigilant for error you may encounter **(Slide 8)**. Heresies and cultic groups are dangerous, but they are also often subtle and sneaky. In some cases the purveyors of these religions intend to deceive (Jude 3-4). Other times they are simply misguided and doing what they believe is right. Either way, their message is destructive. The Bible does not mince words when it describes heretical teachers **(Slide 9)**: Acts 20:29-30. Be vigilant: 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22, 1 John 4:1, and Acts 17:10-11. Most importantly, speak the truth in love. Reach out to them, but practice a caring outreach **(Slide 10)**. 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

What will we be studying? We listed a bunch of religions and cult groups at the beginning and though I would love to study them all in depth Pam told me I can’t keep you every Wednesday until Thanksgiving. We’re going to limit ourselves to groups you are likely to encounter in your High School and College careers. These will be the challenges you face, and I want you to be ready to face them.

1. Week One: No apology needed: Apologetics and Doctrine. The key to strong faith and contending for it lies in understanding what you believe and why. **(Slide 11)**
2. Week Two: All along the Watchtower: Jehovah’s Witnesses. **(Slide 12)**
3. Week Three: Men on a Mission: Mormonism **(Slide 13)**
4. Week Four: Finding someone else’s center: Eastern Religions & The New Age **(Slide 14)**
5. Week Five: Howling at the (crescent) moon: Islam **(Slide 15)**
6. Week Six: Spiritual Soup: Secular Humanism, Universalism, Wicca, Scientology, and Christian Science **(Slide 16) – May not get through all of this one in one night.**
7. Week Seven: The week where you realize at 9pm on Tuesday night that you probably have a test or something the next day: Final exam. **(Slide 17)**

Homework for next week: Memorize your week one verse, 2 Timothy 2:24-25. I also have a quick knowledge check for each of you. On this quiz there is no right or wrong answer to each question, and unlike future quizzes it won’t be scored. Please bring it back next week. The goal is to get you thinking about the groups we will be studying, not to find out how much you already know. If you know the answer to one or more of the questions, great! If not, that’s okay too. Research it on your own – just make sure you indicate where you got the information. There is a lot of incorrect information on the Internet. As a general rule please avoid sites like Wikipedia, Yahoo Answers, and so on for research. Your best source is a site maintained by the religious group, or a church representing that religious group. The material you find on those sites will not be jaded by opinion. The quiz paper lists one major site for each group.