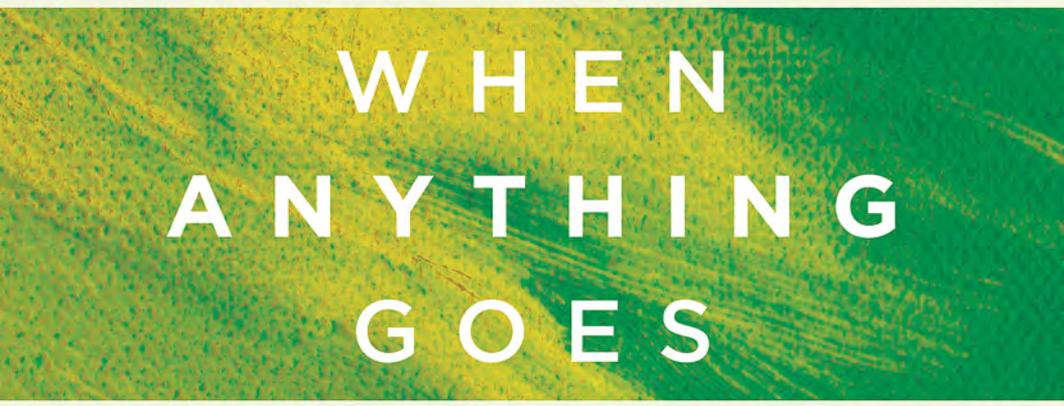
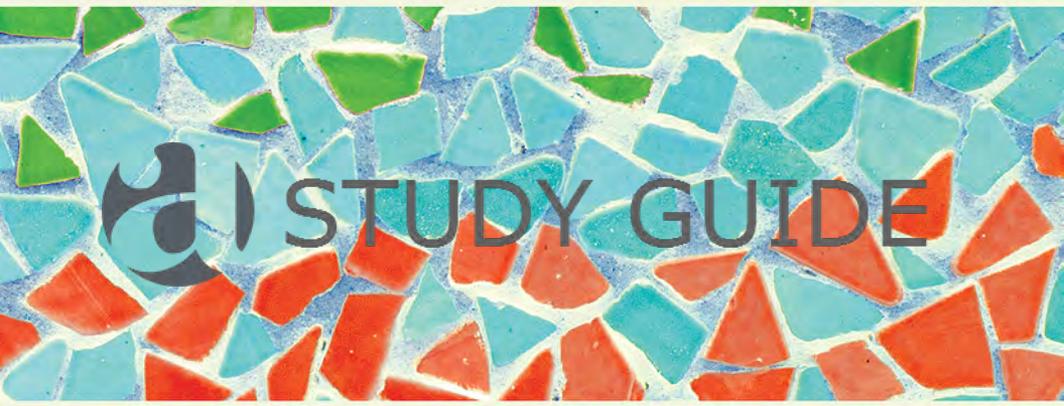


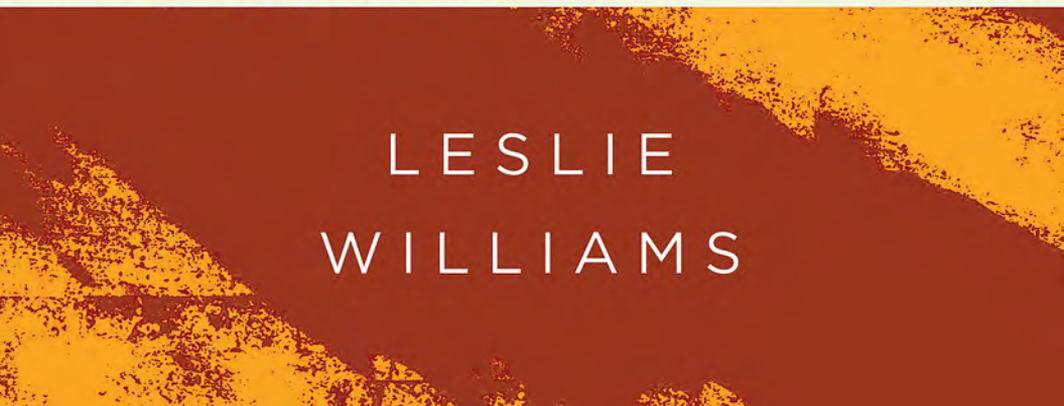
Being Christian *in a*
Post-Christian World



W H E N
A N Y T H I N G
G O E S



STUDY GUIDE



LESLIE
WILLIAMS

STUDY GUIDE
When Anything Goes: Being Christian in a Post-Christian Culture
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Leslie Williams

Chapter One: In the first part of this chapter, the author talks about the origins of the universe from the latest scientific point of view. Read the first Biblical account of creation, Genesis 1:1-2:4.

1. In what order does God create the universe and the things of the earth? How does this compare to the order of creation in the current scientific theory?
2. According to the ancient Biblical world view (as presented in this first Biblical account), the earth as created by God looked like a flat disk, with mountains, valleys, rivers and flat land, with the sky contained within a curved firmament dome overhead (picture a snow globe). Above the firmament and below the flat disk of land, waters flowed, breaking in from above and beneath.
3. How does this world view compare to our world view, with the earth and other planets as solid spheres circling the sun? What are the similarities and differences? Using what we know about the depths of the ocean and the cycle of

- rain coming from above, discuss how the Biblical writers might have conceived of the sky as a “dome” and the earth as flat.
4. In this first account of creation, God creates human beings at the end of the week, both male and female at the same time, and both in His image. What does it mean that we are created in God’s image? Discuss the “goodness” of creation, as God pronounced each finished step, including the creation of people.
 5. Read Genesis 2:4-25, the second creation account. In what order does God create the universe and the things of the earth? What are the differences between this second creation story and the first one?
 6. Why does the Bible, as the inspired word of God, include two different stories of creation? How do we reconcile the two accounts? What is the difference between scientific truth and Biblical truth?
 7. With science and technology changing so quickly, why is the human race in general so quick to jump on the latest theories, inventions, and developments?
 8. In the second part of Chapter One, the author discusses the origin of individual lives. If God is the author of all life, how do you feel about artificial insemination, or in vitro fertilization, especially if the people created by these means turn out to love God? No matter how conception occurs, a woman’s womb is still required to bring a new human being to birth. Read Psalm 139:13-16. How does this verse apply to the latest scientific developments in conception?

9. Looking at your own birth story and family history, do you see God at work in your creation or do you see your existence as a series of coincidental combinations of DNA?
10. How do you explain the mighty Power or Force that created the universe and the earth, the One who is smarter and stronger than the best and brightest of humankind? Is this Force benevolent? Do you see this Force working in your life? Discuss.

Chapter Two: In this chapter, the author discusses the human need to search for meaning, addressing the age-old questions of “Why are we here?” and “What is our purpose on the earth?” in contemporary terms.

1. “Reality” is a catch-word for the Post-Modern world. Some say there is no objective reality outside of individual perceptions. If there is no objective reality, then there is no God other than each person’s own conception of the divine. Do you agree with this Post-Modern tenet, or do you think that the Post-Modernists are wrong? Why?
2. Our culture offers meaning through material possessions, sexual satisfaction, financial success, status, power, and beauty. How does the Bible offer a different perspective on the meaning of life? Discuss the following verses in terms of life’s purpose for Christians:
 3. Romans 8:35
 4. Luke 10:27

5. John 6:35
6. John 8:12
7. Mark 10:43
8. Matthew 5:16
9. 1 John 2:15
10. Look at your own life in terms of decades. What was the meaning of life in your childhood, your teen years, your early adulthood, and so forth? What is the meaning of life for you now? How would you explain to someone why you were created and placed on the earth in the first place?

Chapter Three: In this chapter, the author discusses the first part of the Trinity, God the Father/Creator, with the understanding that God is greater than anything we say about Him.

1. What is your favorite image or description of God the Father? Why does this portrayal speak to you? How is God bigger than your conception of Him?
2. Does a person's parental influence affect one's understanding of God? For people whose parents abused them, how is it more difficult to accept God's love? How is it easier? How is God different from our own parents?
3. Read Isaiah 44:8. We did not get to choose our own gifts or challenges. How do we relate to our Creator in light of what He has given us to work with in this life? How do we deal with our gifts and difficulties? How do we deal with wishing we had other qualities than the characteristics He gave us?

4. Read Isaiah 64:8. Do we resist, or embrace, the notion of God as potter and ourselves as the clay? Explain.
5. What does it mean to say that God's love is "unconditional"? Why is it hard to love each other unconditionally?
6. If God's love is always good, what are some of the ways that we mess up love and end up either hurting other people or getting hurt ourselves?
7. Read Revelation 1:8. If God is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and eternal, why does He not stop bad things before they happen? Why did He give us so much freedom to choose between good and evil?
8. James 1:17 speaks of God as a gift-giver. If you were to go through an average day, list all the gifts you would thank Him for. He is also described as the Father of Lights. What does this mean to you?
9. Romans 1:20 lists some of the attributes of God. What can you add to the list?
10. If God is unchanging, describe how and why our understanding of him changes over time. Process theologians claim that God is changing, mutable, and affected by the flow of time (although they say that His goodness and other qualities don't change). How do you feel about this notion?

Chapter Four: In this chapter, the author discusses the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, as God incarnate on earth.

1. What do you believe about the historical Jesus?

2. Read John 10:30 and Philippians 2:5-8. How do you explain the claim that Jesus is wholly God and wholly human at the same time?
3. Why do you think God sent Jesus to earth? Why isn't belief in God the Father/Creator sufficient?
4. Explain what Matthew 1:23 means by saying that Jesus is "God with us."
5. John 4:42, Peter 1:1, Luke 2:11, Acts 4:12, and 1 John 4:14 all speak of Jesus as Savior. If one of Jesus' main purposes in coming to earth was to save us, why was salvation so painful for him? Why did He have to die? He could have lived a long and happy life preaching to people. Why weren't his words enough?
6. Why did the authorities hate Jesus so much that they had Him killed?
7. Jesus' resurrection has been debated since the beginning, but orthodox Christianity holds His rising from the dead as a major part of the Christian faith. Why is this claim so important?
8. John 11:25 discusses what Jesus' resurrection means for each of us who believes in Christ. How do you interpret this passage?
9. Does it make a difference to believe in a God who has been in our shoes, who understands what we go through, who knows how hard it is to resist temptation, who has been hurt by life the way we have? Discuss.
10. What is the difference between Jesus as prophet and Jesus as Messiah? What kind of kingdom did He establish—a literal kingdom or an inner kingdom? Discuss the qualities of Jesus' kingdom.

Chapter Five: In this chapter the author explores the third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit's relation to us and to the other parts of the Trinity.

1. How do you explain the Trinity? How can God be three distinct persons and still be one God? If God is in relationship with the three parts of Himself, what does that say about our need for relationship with Him and with each other?
2. Read Genesis 1:2. If the Holy Spirit was present from the beginning, and made scattered appearances in the Old Testament, why do you think God waited for Pentecost to pour out the Holy Spirit for everyone?
3. The Holy Spirit, like the wind, cannot be seen; but its effects are visible, like the leaves moving, the grass swaying in the breeze. Read Galatians 5:22-23. Though we can't see the Holy Spirit, what are some effects, or fruits, that we can see in the lives of believers? Gives examples from your life or from what you've seen in others' lives.
4. Read Acts 2:1-21. Picture being at Pentecost, standing in a crowd of three thousand people, when the Holy Spirit descended. How do you think you would have responded?
5. The Greek word used in John 14:26 and other places can be translated in a variety of ways—Comforter, Advocate, Helper. What are the different aspects of the different translations, and what do they all have in common?
6. Romans 8:5-11 talks about the spirit versus the flesh in opposition. Discuss this passage in terms of what it means for us today..

7. Paul refers to the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:19.
What is the importance of this description and in thinking of our bodies in this way?
8. How would you describe the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in light of the many authors, writing styles, and perspectives presented in the Bible?
9. How would you describe the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in terms of everyday life?
10. Read Romans 15:13. What is hope and what role does the Holy Spirit play in sustaining hope, joy, and peace?

Chapter Six: In this chapter the author discusses the early church, the history of the church, the church today, and why the church is an important part of the Christian faith.

1. How do you account for the rapid spread of the church in the early years and for the continued church growth world-wide in spite of schisms, apathy, destruction, cultural shifts, and attempts to eradicate Christianity?
2. What has your church experience been like? Have you been to services in a tradition different from your own? Discuss.
3. Do you think going to church is an important aspect of faith? Why or why not?
4. What are the strengths and weakness of the church as you've experienced it?
5. How is the body of Christ spreading the Gospel in your community? World-wide?
6. Do you feel that you have a niche in the church? Discuss.

7. What do you expect or need from going to church? What do you feel that you can contribute to the church?
8. Discuss the aspects of church-going common to all denominations. What is the importance of the building's design? The make up of the congregation? The style of music? The form of liturgy? The teaching? The minister? The governance?
9. Congregational emphasis varies greatly. Discuss the possibilities for outreach, for social ministries, for emphasis on spirituality, for evangelism, for worship experience in the context of the Christian community.
10. Why do you go/or not go to church?

Chapter Seven: In this chapter the author explores our attempts to control our lives and circumstances, the “control room” of our lives (the soul) where information is gathered and sorted, and the importance of placing Christ at the center.

1. What are the pros and cons of maintaining (or trying to maintain) complete control over our lives? Is it possible to control everything? To control everybody around us? To control ourselves?
2. The third and fourth steps in the Twelve Steps Program claim that a Power greater than we are can restore us to sanity, and that we need to give ourselves over to God as we understand Him. Why is it important for addicts to relinquish control?
3. Why is it important for non-addicts to relinquish control?

4. Think of an instance in your life when you relinquished control of your life to a Higher Power (God as you understand Him) and things fell into place—or didn't. Discuss.
5. We move from tiny creatures with no control over anything to adults that have a measure of control over some things, to elderly beings who may or may not have control over our minds, bodies, circumstances. Discuss the advantages and the pitfalls of moving from stage to stage in life.
6. How do we get “stuck” in control issues? Why are some people more controlling and others can “go with the flow” more easily? Why has control been so important to human beings throughout history?
7. How do we know whether we need to keep working on the solution to a problem and when we need to let go?
8. Discuss the metaphor of the “control room.” What are other metaphors or ways to describe the process of what goes on at the center of our being? How would you describe the place and the “soul processes” that go on in your own life?
9. Why do we sometimes have to bottom out before we can allow God to take control of our lives?
10. What does it say about God that He controls with love instead of power?

Chapter Eight: This chapter deals with sin—different kinds of sin, different ways to avoid dealing with it, and the importance of calling it what it is.

1. What is your definition of “sin”? How did you come by that definition?

2. Is sin a part of the human condition? Is it acquired from influences outside ourselves? Is it individual instances of doing the wrong thing? How can we be created good and sinful at the same time?
3. The Bible uses several different words for “sin,” differences explored in the chapter. Read the following Biblical references to see how the authors used these different terms for different circumstances. Discuss.
4. “Hamartia,” missing the mark.
5. “Parakoe,” disobedience.
6. “Hetteima,” fault.
7. “Parptoma,” intentional slip.
8. “Agroeema,” ignorance.
9. “Parabasis,” crossing a line on purpose.
10. What happens in a culture and in individuals when the concept and the nomenclature of sin is eradicated?

Chapter Nine: This chapter provides the Christian process of salvation from sin.

1. What did Jesus’ death and resurrection accomplish in terms of rectifying what Adam and Eve started in the Garden of Eden?
2. How does the church provide the means of forgiveness? What part does the Eucharist play? What part does confession play?

3. Why is forgiveness so important for spiritual health? Discuss the steps in the process of forgiveness: first the need to recognize the sin, then to feel sorry for committing it, then to confess it, and finally to receive forgiveness.
4. Read Matthew 6:14-15. Why is it important to forgive others for sins against us?
5. John 3:16 is a familiar verse, but verses 17 and 18 explain more fully God's purpose in sending Jesus, and how belief in Christ saves. Read and discuss.
6. In Romans 10:8-10, Paul explains the relationship of the heart and the mouth in the process of salvation. Why does he include both?
7. In Acts 2:37-39, Peter explains to the crowd at Pentecost how the Jews had killed their own Messiah, and he responds to their anguished question, "What should we do?" Discuss this passage.
8. How would you explain salvation to someone who had never heard of Jesus Christ?
9. Read Romans 5:8. Why do we sometimes think we have to be perfect before God will love us?
10. Explore the gratitude and relief felt after sins have been forgiven.

Chapter Ten: In this chapter the author talks about the importance of communicating with God and the different ways it is possible to have meaningful dialogue with the Lord of the Universe.

1. How were you taught to pray (or not) as a child?
2. How does your church pray? What sort of prayer are you most comfortable with?

3. Read Mark 11:24. How do you reconcile this promise that Jesus makes with the fact that some prayers are answered “no,” that we don’t always get what we pray for?
4. In Matthew 6:7, Jesus makes it clear that God does not “grade” our prayers by the number of words we use. Explore the issue of covering the subject in prayer or going on and on, beating a dead horse.
5. How does a prayer style reflect each person’s personality? Do we talk to God the same way we talk to our closest friends?
6. Romans 8:26 speaks to those times in life when we are too burdened, too miserable to pray. What does Paul mean that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us?
7. Read James 5:13-16 and discuss how to pray with each other under specific circumstances.
8. First Timothy 2:1-4 instructs us to pray not only for people close to home but for the world. What kind of effect do these prayers have?
9. In 2 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul says to pray without ceasing. How do you interpret this verse in light of daily activities, pressures, busyness?
10. Go line by line through the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, exploring what the words mean to you.

Chapter Eleven: In this chapter the author explores death and the theologies of heaven according to different religions and what Jesus promised about life after death.

1. What is your idea of heaven like? Describe the physical aspect as well as the spiritual characteristics.
2. The book of Revelation is filled with descriptions of heaven, but one of the primary characteristics is the absence of any kind of suffering. Discuss Revelation 21:4 in terms of what it means to you.
3. Does heaven coincide in time with the present? Is it in *kairos*, God's time, or *chronos*, our linear time? Read Luke 23:43 and explore what Jesus meant when he told the repentant thief that he would be with Him in Paradise "today."
4. Genesis 1:1 tells us that God created the heavens at the same time that He created the earth. What does that say about God's plan for humanity, from the beginning?
5. If we believe that God created us as unique and special in our mother's womb, then has he made a special place for us in the life after this one? How do you interpret John 14:2?
6. Throughout the millennia, the fear of Hell has driven many people to accept Jesus out of desperation that they will fall into the pit after they die. How does John 10:28 give us reassurance about the afterlife?
7. Hebrews 11:16 talks about heaven as being a different country or city and many have written on the New Jerusalem. Discuss what this new city or country would be like, contrasting it with your own city or country.
8. Near-death experiences have given us glimpses of heaven, but as 1 Corinthians 2:9 explains, nobody has gone to heaven for longer than a few minutes and

returned to tell us about it, in spite of popular movies. Why do you think God does not give us a perfect vision in advance?

9. Second Peter 3:13 talks about a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness reigns. For righteous people living on the earth, why are we unable to bring about a kingdom of righteousness before we die?
10. As we grow older and closer to our inevitable death, what can we do to prepare ourselves for this final transition?