

The
THINKING
Series

Leader's
Guide



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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in hosting the Thinking Series! We are excited to be a part of this extraordinary journey as you strengthen the church and reach out to those who are searching for answers. This Leader's Guide contains some of the insights we've gained along the way. It'll give you practical tips for logistics as well as for engaging those who attend the Series. If we've done our job right, this guide will help you become more effective as a host and a leader.

All the best on your journey!



Asking Life's Five Biggest Questions

How It Works:

With the Thinking Series, you will explore the top five questions our culture is asking today in such a way that shares the Gospel. This may seem like a daunting task, but the Series is designed in such a way that any lay leader can host it in a variety of settings. Here's one recommended format:

1. Welcome everyone and introduce the Thinking Series briefly.
(Approx. 2-3 minutes)
2. Play story video.
(Approx. 4 minutes)
3. Discuss intro video.
(Approx. 20 minutes)
4. (Optional) Play corresponding Think for a Minute video.
(Approx. 1-2 minutes)
5. Play teaching video.
(Approx. 10-15 minutes)
6. Discuss teaching and optional Q&A.
(Approx. 30 minutes).

DID YOU KNOW?

You can navigate to each session page using a subdomain name. You can find the resources specific to each session there.

Session 1
meaning.thinkingseries.com

Session 2
god.thinkingseries.com

Session 3
religions.thinkingseries.com

Session 4
evil.thinkingseries.com

Session 5
death.thinkingseries.com

Let's take a closer look at each step:

✓ **Welcome everyone and introduce the Thinking Series briefly.**

Here is a sample introduction:

“Let's get started. Welcome, everyone, to the Thinking Series. My name is [*insert name here*] and I [*introduce yourself briefly*]. The Thinking Series is a 5-session weekly get-together where we discuss the top five questions people are asking today. We will first watch a short video that raises the question, followed by a time of discussion. Then we'll watch another short video that addresses the question, and, after that, we'll close with a time of Q&A.”

Feel free to change the introduction according to what you are doing.

✓ **Play the story video.**

Make sure to have it queued before the session begins so you don't have to fumble through it while everyone is watching.

✓ **Discussion time**

Print the discussion cards and distribute them among the tables before the session begins. You can download the discussion cards from thinkingseries.com under “resources”.

Once the story video finishes playing, point people to the discussion cards and allow roughly 20

DID YOU NOTICE?

At the bottom of the discussion cards, recommended resources are listed in the order of reading difficulty.

minutes of discussion time. (If you have hired a musician, talk with him/her beforehand so they know to come back up after the story video finishes.) See **Discussion Tips** below for more information.

✓ ***(Optional) Play a corresponding Think for a Minute video.***

Think for a Minute videos are available on thinkingseries.com at the bottom of each session page. Alternatively, you can purchase the video files for \$1 per video for HD quality to play on a large screen. Visit our online store at apologeticscanada.com/store.

✓ ***Play the teaching video.***

Again, have the video queued before the session begins. The teaching videos are all about 10 minutes in length with the exception of the Session 5 video that is about 15 minutes long. Plan accordingly.

Alternatively, if you have access to a competent speaker, you may want to have them come up and teach. We encourage you to keep the teaching under 40 minutes, especially if you are at a coffee shop. See **Teaching Tips** below for more information.

✓ ***Teaching discussion time and / or Q&A***

You have two options to end the session: teaching discussion cards and/or Q&A. If you have someone who is competent in the areas of apologetics and philosophy, Q&A is a great option. Generally speaking, if you have a speaker, you want to have a time of Q&A. See **Q&A Tips** below for more information.

The other option is a teaching discussion time. The Teaching Discussion Guide is available for download at thinkingseries.com. When the discussion time is over, let people know that the session

is officially over but they can feel free to hangout and chat some more. Remember to extend an invitation to them to the next session.

General Tips

The nature of the Series being what it is, you can expect at least some non-Christians to be present. Hopefully, people have invited other thinkers to participate. Here are some helpful suggestions for you to help you engage them effectively:

✓ ***Pray.***

This is such an obvious thing, and yet we easily forget it in the busy-ness of putting the logistics together. There is spiritual warfare going on. Prepare yourself or as a team with prayer before, during, and after the sessions.

✓ ***Assume that everyone is a non-Christian.***

As you host and/or teach, use inclusive language like “we / our / us.” Don’t use the “us vs. them” language and try to avoid labeling people (e.g. “non-Christians, unbelievers, etc.) unless it’s necessary. This may be appropriate as insider language (e.g. in this guide), but it will be generally unhelpful in public discourse. We want people thinking on these questions to feel welcome and accepted.

✓ ***People are cordial.***

Christians tend to assume that non-Christians are harsh by default. However, it has been our experience that rude people are the exception rather than the rule. Even if you do receive hostility from some people, they usually get over it if you treat them with

kindness and seek to build some trust. Don't rule people out because of the initial hostility.

✓ **Learn to ask good questions.**

During the course of the Thinking Series, you will be speaking with many different kinds of people. Because different people bring different assumptions and presuppositions to the table, it is critically important to learn to ask good questions. This helps bring out the hidden assumptions so that you can deal with the “question behind the question.” We highly recommend Greg Koukl's book, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.

✓ **Use common language.**

Drop the Christianese. Words like “fellowship,” “the Body (of Christ),” “blessing,” “feeling led,” or “called” don't mean anything to those outside of the Christian subculture. Substitute them with words they can understand.

Please know that we are not advising against using *any* Christian language at all. However, if you *are* going to use a word like “grace,” for example, be courteous to non-Christians in the audience and explain it to them:

TERMS TO AVOID

fellowship

salvation

sin

Gentile

divine appointment

blessing

charismatic (church)

(most people understand it as a type of personality)

spiritual warfare

putting out a fleece

and more...

“Receiving something good that you don’t deserve.” Remember that the goal of the Thinking Series is to communicate clearly.

✓ ***Prepare follow-up strategies for when the Series is over.***

It is vital to have some kind of follow-up after the Thinking Series. This can be as small as continuing to meet with the person one-on-one for further conversation. If the person is ready, you may invite the person to come to church with you and meet more like-minded people, or even plug into a small group.

Because we live in a microwave culture, we want results and we want them now. Be patient. People don’t give up their cherished beliefs overnight. For many, it is a long and agonizing process. Think in terms of months, years, or even decades.

REMEMBER

The Thinking Series is **not** the silver bullet of evangelism. In fact, there is no such thing. Instead, see this as a piece of the larger process in helping others discover the truth.

Discussion Tips

✓ ***Set ground rules for discussions.***

You may want to set some ground rules to ensure civility and safety. Here is a sample that one church leader has found useful:

1. Participate as much or as little as you would like.
2. You do not need to reveal your religious affiliation.
3. Respect one another's views. No attacking allowed.

✓ ***Let people talk.***

You will have a time of discussion after the story video finishes playing. This is a time when people are invited to share their various views on the topic. It is important to understand that this is a time of getting to know people and their views, not a time to challenge them. **Even if you disagree, just listen.** Keep your engagement to listening and asking clarifying questions. People (especially non-Christians) will appreciate that. It's important that people feel they have been heard.

✓ ***Let each person talk.***

Each person in the group should be able to express their views within the given timeframe. If you have table leaders, train them beforehand to encourage participation as well as to bring people back onto the topic.

If you do *not* have table leaders, start the discussion, wait a few minutes and interject with something along the lines of "Now, let's give someone else a chance to speak."

✓ ***“Tell me more.”***

Keep this phrase under your tongue at all times. If you feel that whoever just finished talking is holding something back out of courtesy, feel free to ask the person to tell you more. Not only will you have a chance to gain a better understanding of the person’s views, but they will also feel valued and validated because others are taking interest in what they have to say. It goes without saying that you need to use your judgment to find a good balance between giving everyone a chance to speak and having someone with more to contribute to the discussion speak more than others.

✓ ***Interact with groups after a group discussion.***

In a large group setting, it’s effect to interact with the groups after each discussion period. Pick a few groups and see what they came up with. If you can afford the time, you can go through each group.

✓ ***Reiterate what was taught in the teaching video.***

Andy covers a lot of material in the teaching videos. An average person who is not very familiar with philosophy and apologetics is bound to miss or forget quickly what was taught. The MC or teacher should reiterate important teaching points after the video to refresh the audience’s memory, and take some time to hash out key ideas.

Teaching Tips

✓ ***Don't make it too long.***

The length of the teaching will largely depend on the setting. We encourage you to keep the teaching no longer than 30 minutes. Especially in a place like a coffee shop, people want to socialize. Between a longer time of teaching and a longer time of discussions, choose the latter. Remember: most people have just gotten off work. They are tired and want to discuss these topics in community.

✓ ***Don't be afraid to state what you believe is true.***

When it is appropriate, clearly state what it is that you believe. If you do, it will help the audience better understand where you are coming from. This will, in turn, help them engage during discussion times or Q&A. After all, you are there to exchange ideas and dialogue. You will find that people want to know what you think so do them the courtesy of letting them know what you think but do this with gentleness and respect.

✓ ***Actually answer the question.***

Related to the above point, you should actually answer the question raised in the video. People are not there just for a bunch of opinions. They want clear answers. Offer them answers and be ready to back them up.

✓ ***Save any personal testimony until the end.***

Sharing your personal testimony is a great way to build trust. Help people to know that you are sincerely looking for truth just like everyone else. As they see a genuine person behind the microphone, they will likely be more courteous when they engage you. From the feedback we've received, it's best to keep your personal testimony until the end, so that people don't get the impression that they are getting a "sales pitch" upfront and lose interest in the rest of what you have to say.

✓ ***Use simple language.***

After you are immersed in a certain discipline, certain technical terms or concepts may become second nature to you. You can use the terms if you wish, but make sure you explain it to the audience. (But don't do this too often or you will lose the audience.) Always assume that no one in the audience is familiar with your field of expertise.

✓ ***Angry Atheist!***

Although this is rare, you will sometimes come across people who seem to want nothing more than to mock and bully. Having these angry types in the audience can be frustrating for others who want to have a genuine, cordial dialogue. First, validate the

EVASIVE MANEUVER

If someone speaks out of turn or otherwise disrupt your talk, separate them and engage them privately later. Here is an example of how you might go about doing that:

"That's a good question (or point). I'd be happy to discuss it with you further, but I want to get through my notes and honour everyone's time, so why don't we talk privately after the session?"

question/objection as much as you can. If they don't feel heard, they will continue to be disruptive. Then, pull the time management card and encourage the person to come and speak with you privately after the session.

Q&A Tips

Q&A is an exciting time where the content of the Series meets real people in real time. If you are equipped to do Q&A after the teaching time, here are a number of things you may wish to keep in mind:

✓ ***Have realistic expectations.***

The time of Q&A is not about answering all incoming questions once and for all. If that could be done, we wouldn't need an organization like Apologetics Canada. Rather, this is a gateway to further discussion. There may be certain questions that are easy to respond to in a matter of seconds, but others will take weeks, months or even years of conversing. Think long-term.

✓ ***There is strength in numbers.***

It's a good idea to handle the questions with others, especially if you are not experienced in handling Q&As. While one person is talking, others can gather their thoughts and offer a more carefully nuanced response. It also gives people more options if they want to approach someone and talk after the session is finished. Be sure to introduce your panel.

✓ ***Redirect.***

People like to talk. I mean they *really* like to talk. It may be appropriate to let people go on a little longer during a discussion time, but Q&A is a time when you want to get through as many questions as possible from different people. If you find that one

particular person is hogging too much time with counters upon counters, invite the person to come and talk to you afterwards.

✓ ***Humility is a virtue.***

If you don't know the answer to a question or an objection, simply say, "That's a very good question. I've never thought of it that way. I'd like to look into this and continue our conversation next week. Would you like that?" Remember that some people are extraordinarily fine-tuned to smell BS. They'll smell it from a mile away. Be honest and say you haven't thought through that particular topic. People have a lot of patience for ignorance, but they have no patience for hypocrisy. We find that admitting ignorance is often a bridge to further conversation as it builds trust.

✓ ***People are both rational and emotional.***

Sometimes people's questions come loaded with emotional baggage. Questions like "My mother was a good woman but she died a non-Christian. Where is she now?" can be hard to address. Be sure to acknowledge the person for sharing something very personal before you go on to respond. Just remember that emotional challenges are seldom, if ever, resolved through rational argumentation. Identify the point of tension and address it accordingly.

At other times the questioner is simply angry because of some bad experiences with Christians either currently or in the past. Engaging them intellectually is very important, but, if at all possible, have someone spend time with this person and build trust in the context of genuine friendship. When trust is

established, the person will then be more open to hearing counter-perspectives.

Rational argumentation can be very effective, but it is not everything. People are more complex than that.

✓ ***Know what questions belong to which session.***

You will often see people getting ahead of you and asking questions that really belong in a future session. For example, in talking about religious pluralism in Session 3, people may begin to ask questions that have to do with how different religions address the problem of evil and suffering. When this happens, acknowledge the question and then redirect, telling them that this issue will be address in the next session. This is a great incentive to come back to the next session when we will discuss the subject of evil. Remember: the Thinking Series builds on itself so you will find that this happens a lot and it should.

✓ ***Show interest in the questions and the questioner.***

Questioners will inevitably tie themselves to their questions to an extent. So, if you are dismissive about the questions in any way, the questioners will feel as though you are dismissing *them*. Show interest in the questions and the questioners by asking clarifying questions if appropriate.

✓ ***Some people's minds are made up.***

From time to time, you may come across people who are just not interested and their minds are already made up. Any of the following can be a good indicator that their mind is made up:

1. They use the “shotgun” approach. They fire out more issues than you can reasonably be expected to handle all at once.
2. They “hop around” from one issue to the next without acknowledging what you are saying.
3. They cite facts and statistics without citing their references. Don’t let them off the hook but ask them, “Where did you get that?”

When you sense that the people you are talking to may be dead set in their skepticism, a good question to ask is, “Can you even be convinced? What would it take to convince you that Christianity is true?” Chances are, they will offer a standard of proof that is unreasonably high. See if that can be applied to any of their own beliefs.

Beyond that, and perhaps learning from their objections, there is not much you can do with skeptics that come with an agenda. Their mind is already made up.

✓ **Microphones**

If the room and the gathering are large enough, and if you have the resources, you may wish to use wireless microphones so everyone can hear the questions during the Q&A. If you decide to do this, make sure to **instruct people to wait** until a microphone gets to them before they start asking their questions. Otherwise, they will simply jump in and fire off the questions right away. If the questioner does not have a microphone make sure that *you* repeat the question before answering it so that the audience knows what was asked. This practice also helps make sure you correctly understood the question.

✓ ***Plan on staying longer after the session.***

Some people would rather ask you questions in a semi-private conversation than engage you in front of others. Or sometimes people would like to have dialogued further with you during Q&A but didn't have enough time. Whatever the case, you will often have people approach you once the session is over. Always plan on staying longer. You'll be surprised at the kinds of conversations you get to have.

Logistics

The Thinking Series can be hosted in a variety of different settings and in several different ways. Nonetheless, there are a number of things to keep in mind:

✓ **Room setup**

The room should be setup in such a way that is conducive to discussions. It helps if people are in small groups facing each other (around tables). You don't want the groups to be too small but you don't want them to be too large either. The exact number depends on the dynamics of the particular gathering you have, but 5 is a good place to start.

✓ **Have snacks ready.**

Relationship-building is key in The Thinking Series. People come not only to engage intellectually but also to meet others and get to know them as people. Food is an excellent catalyst for socialization. If you are not in a place where you can make food, at least have some coffee and tea ready.

✓ **Technical requirements**

To host the Thinking Series, you will need a screen of some sort to show the video material. If you are showing the digital download version of the Thinking Series on a large screen TV or a projector, we recommend that you use the HD version. The DVD can handle most large screens.

As for sound, the volume should be loud enough so that everyone in the room can comfortably hear what is being said. When you

test the volume, gauge it from the back of the room to make sure people who are farthest away from the source of sound can hear clearly what is being said or played.

Make sure you test all the equipment and queue the video material well before the session begins. This is a process that takes little time that could potentially save a lot of embarrassment.

✓ **Table leaders**

If you have volunteers with some basic people skills, you can place one or two at each table to facilitate the conversation. **The table leader's primary job is *not* to answer questions.** Rather, the table leader's job is to make sure everyone gets an opportunity to contribute to the discussion and moderate the table dynamics if someone begins to chase down rabbit trails or hog the discussion time.

TACTICS

Here is an example of how you can encourage participation and bring the derailed discussion back onto the topic:

"That's an interesting point you brought up, John. Perhaps we can talk more about it after the meeting. For now, let's backtrack and continue to talk about the original issue. What about you, Jane? You've been rather quiet. Do you have anything you would like to add to the topic?"

✓ **Finding musicians**

Live music is great to have before and during the sessions. If you choose to have musicians, have them play a set of roughly 20 minutes leading up to the start of the session, and have them back for another 20 minutes or so for the discussion time after the story

video. It is generally a good practice to announce the discussion time and invite the musician back up so people understand the transition.

We have found Craigslist to be a good place to find local musicians. Contact one and ask for a demo. Don't be afraid to bring on a musician who is *not* a Christian. In fact, we encourage you to stay away from music that is overtly "Christian." Try to create familiarity with songs people would recognize. We want it to be a place that is accessible for everyone.

Alternatively, you can have a DJ.

✓ **Promotions**

There are a number of ways in which you can advertise and promote your upcoming Thinking Series. You can:

1. use Facebook, Twitter, or other social media sites (For example, create a Facebook group, run an ad in your local area, etc.), partner with churches,
2. have friends invite other friends via word of mouth, and/or
3. use Craigslist.

HERE'S AN IDEA!

Make use of the Thinking Series trailer on social media sites or at your church. You can go to **thinkingseries.com** and click the link just below the embedded trailer video to download it. Also, each session has its own trailer. You can use those on social media to create interest in that week's discussion.

Hosting in a Coffee Shop

A coffee shop can be a great place to host the Thinking Series. It is a neutral setting where people naturally come to think and talk. Often, we see the general public come in just to get coffee, but then decide to stay for the session because their interest/curiosity is piqued. If you choose to host the Series at a coffee shop, here are a number of things you want to keep in mind:

✓ ***Pick a coffee shop that has good traffic.***

The real estate agent's motto is appropriate here: location, location, location. Some coffee shops have higher traffic than others. If at all possible, select a shop that is centrally located for maximum exposure. That could be a difference between ten attendees and sixty attendees.

✓ ***Choose independent, family-owned shops rather than big corporations.***

While places like Starbucks have bigger draw, they also have restrictions on hosting certain functions. Independent and family-owned coffee shops also give you a chance to speak directly to the owner.

✓ ***Connect with a local coffee shop owner and frequent that place.***

If the shop owner or manager has no relationship with you, it will be that much more difficult to host the Thinking Series. Frequent the shop and get to know the owner or manager. Be consistent with who you are connecting with.

✓ ***Be courteous and generous to the baristas.***

Don't underestimate the baristas! Serving coffee is not all they do. Often, the owner will talk to the baristas to gauge whether the Thinking Series is worth having again, and they can either talk it up or talk it down. If you are going to have an ongoing relationship with the shop, be courteous to the baristas and tip them generously. 😊

✓ ***Benefit the shop.***

A coffee shop is a place of business. At the end of the day, money has to come into the till. Promote the Thinking Series well in advance so people are aware of it. If you have volunteers, encourage them to buy coffee and other goods from the shop. Another way to benefit the coffee shop is to negotiate a cover charge that includes a drink and some food. Alternatively, you can negotiate a rent of some sort with the owner.

✓ ***Greet customers.***

When the Thinking Series begins, have a few volunteers (1-2) to greet the customers and invite them in as they walk in. This lets them know that the Thinking Series is not a private function and the coffee shop is still open to them (assuming that you are keeping it open to the public).