

THE THREE BIG QUESTIONS



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Johnny S., Crossroads student



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

Copyright © 2022 by Crossroads Prison Ministries. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.

Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version®, Nlrv® Copyright © 1995, 1996, 1998, 2014 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. www.zondervan.com. The "Nlrv" and "New International Reader's Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Some content and ideas within this course have been excerpted from Ray Pritchard's book *An Anchor for the Soul*. Copyright © 2001, 2011 by Moody Publishers. Used by permission of Moody. www.moodypublishers.com. Crossroads is deeply thankful to Dr. Pritchard for his generosity in granting Crossroads permission to use his materials for this course and to use his book *An Anchor for the Soul* as a source of inspiration for the course itself.

v.0325

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 4

Study Tools 5

Glossary of Terms 6

Chapter 1 7

Chapter 2 11

Chapter 3 13

INTRODUCTION

3 Big Questions explores the big questions that all people have about life: **Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?** We all look for answers to these questions. We search for them in many places.

The Bible offers answers to those questions. It also offers hope for a new and better life. And it tells us that the first step toward discovering that life is knowing God.

As a mentor, you are probably familiar with the Crossroads course *Who Are You? 3 Big questions* is the same course formatted into a single lesson booklet specifically for jail students. The average stay in jail is about three weeks. Combining the *Who Are You?* course in a single lesson enables more students in jail to complete the *Who Are You?* course in its entirety.

Crossroads uses learning objectives to guide course creation and to measure student learning. *3 Big Questions* was created so that students will:

1. Discover their need for God
2. Understand God's desire for a relationship with each of us, and
3. Recognize the importance of knowing Jesus as their Savior

As a mentor, you play a role in guiding your students toward these learning objectives. As you share what God has taught you, answer questions, and engage with the material alongside your students, you and your students will learn about each other while learning about God together.

We challenge you to share openly with your students. When possible, provide examples from your life. Find ways to connect with them through shared experiences, expectations, hopes, and dreams. Most of the questions are open-ended and have been written with the intention of encouraging students to share their personal thoughts, which will also help you to better understand where each student is on their faith journey.

We have included blank spaces labeled "My Notes" throughout the answer key. You can use these spaces to jot down notes relating to a specific question or theme that you want to remember when reviewing future lessons. These could include encouraging Bible verses that come to mind, your own answers to the questions, relevant stories from your life, or insights from students that you may want to share with other students.

You may notice that the questions in the lessons avoid using Christian vocabulary or direct Scripture quotations. The lessons are designed to allow students who are not familiar with the Bible or God to engage with the material and begin learning about spiritual and biblical topics without becoming intimidated or frustrated. We want to help students learn how God sees them: as men and women made in His image and worthy of His love. By the end of the course, we hope that students who are not Christians will be interested in learning more about God.

STUDY TOOLS

Throughout this course, students will be provided the tools listed below to assist them in their studies. These tools provide ways that you can interact with students.



CONVERSATION BOXES: We have included some spaces throughout the lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. Students can use these boxes to write questions and thoughts they have about the lesson or about life. You can also respond to a student in any space that the student has not filled.



ACTION STEPS: At the end of each lesson, we have included a challenge called an **action step**. It asks the student to apply what they have learned. If they feel that they need help or encouragement to complete it, they may simply write down what they plan to do. You can follow up with the student by asking if they have completed it.



Crossroads provides NIV Bibles, upon request, to students who need them to complete the lessons (if allowed by their facility).

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms and ideas that may be new to students. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. The list below includes all of the terms found in this course. In each lesson, we have included an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears.

Contentment — A feeling of being happy and satisfied. In the Bible, it is a supernatural peace that comes from knowing and obeying God.

Ecclesiastes — A book in the Bible. It was likely written by Solomon.

Faith — Trust in something or someone that cannot be seen.

Forgiven — A word used to describe a person after God has removed the sin from their life (see “**sin**”). When God forgives us, He no longer blames us for our past and He cancels any debt we owed Him for sins we committed.

God-Shaped Hole — A concept talked about by theologians. It refers to a deep longing. It is a sense that you lack something meaningful in your life.

Gospel — The good news about Jesus Christ found in the Bible. The word can also be used to describe the first four books of the New Testament in the Bible, which are written about Jesus’ life and ministry.

Israel — The name of the kingdom that God established for His people. It was located approximately where the nation of Israel is located today in the Middle East region of Asia.

Prodigal — Someone who wastes a lot of money and time and does not value what they have.

Scripture — Another way to refer to the words in the Bible. All Scripture was given to us by God and written down by men.

Shame — A result of sin; closely related to guilt. It is an awareness that we will never live up to God’s expectations.

Sin — An action, thought or spoken word that goes against God’s divine plan. When we commit sins, we do things that are wrong and break God’s laws. Sins are the things that we do—or fail to do—that make us less than perfect. Sins keep us from growing closer to Jesus.

Solomon — A king of Israel. He was the most powerful king in the Bible. He had great riches. God gave him the gift of wisdom.

Theologian — Someone who studies who God is. They study the Bible, the nature of God and other elements of Christianity. Theologians often write books about God and faith.

CHAPTER 1: The Big Questions

1. What are some of the ways you've seen people look for meaning and purpose in the past?

Students will choose a variety of answers. Their responses will give you your first glance into their lives and backgrounds on a very basic level.

2. How do people look for meaning and purpose inside prison or jail?

You may read that people get involved in gangs, relationships, or drugs; become a shop guy (black-market salesman); seek to control others; take classes; spend all their time exercising; or read the Bible all day long. Some answers you read may be shocking. Do not shy away from what the student has written. We are trying to meet students where they are, not demand they clean up their lives or language before learning about Jesus or beginning to follow Him in earnest.

3. What are some things you think everyone might have in common?

Students' answers may include: we all need food and shelter; we experience pain and loss; we want to be loved; we want to belong; we have feelings, hopes, and desires; we want there to be more to life than our present circumstances. If the student mentions only tangible or superficial things, suggest to them that we all need love and we all long for a purpose and meaning for our lives.

4. How would you answer the three big questions? Take a few minutes to think about the questions below before you answer them.

Please share your own answers to the questions below in response to the student's answers. You can respond in the lesson or in your letter. The Scripture passages listed below offer examples of biblical answers to these questions that you can share with students when appropriate.

a. Who am I?

Genesis 1:26–27, Genesis 2:7, Genesis 2:15–17, 2 Corinthians 5:16–17, John 1:12, Ephesians 2:19–22, Psalm 8, Psalm 139

b. Why am I here?

Matthew 28:18–20, Ephesians 2:10, 1 John 4:10–11, Jeremiah 29:11

c. Where am I going?

John 3:16, Titus 3:4–7, Ephesians 1:3–14

5. Which of the big questions seems most important for you to answer right now? Why?

If you are comfortable, share your own answer to this question with your student.

6. What do you think Solomon meant when he said he “hated life”?

Solomon chased after material things and experiences, but he discovered that none of those things brought true meaning and purpose to his life.

7. Have you ever felt that way? What brought you to that point?

If the student answers yes, they may write about searching for meaning in relationships, money, drugs, etc. Some students may say that they are still struggling with a particular issue. If so, please indicate your sympathy for their situation and encourage them to believe that change is possible.

8. How would you describe yourself when it comes to knowing God? Are you skeptical? Are you a believer? Are you still trying to find the truth?

This question is designed to help you understand your student’s faith. They may be a Christian, or they may have just begun their search for God. They also might be Muslim, agnostic, Jehovah’s Witness, etc. No matter what their faith is, it is great that they are taking the course. Please keep in mind that it is not our job to convince the student to follow Christ—that is the Holy Spirit’s job.

9. Have you ever felt a longing for something that was missing from your life? If so, what did you do to try to fulfill that longing? Did it work?

Many students will acknowledge that they have felt that longing, but it is okay if they answer no. Some people may not be fully aware of the longing or pain that exists in their lives. If the student answers no, read the rest of their lesson to get a better sense of where they are on their spiritual journey. Then, if you are comfortable doing so, share reflections about your own life and ask questions that might lead them to think more deeply about the idea of their need for God.

10. What do you think of the idea of a God who cares deeply about you? Do you believe it?

If the student answers yes, encourage them to continue to rely on God's love for them. If they answer no, acknowledge their doubt and let them know that God loves them regardless (John 3:16–17, John 10:10–11, Ephesians 2:4–5).

11. How would you expect God to have reacted when Adam and Eve did the one thing He asked them not to do?

The student's answer will reflect their understanding of who God is and may also reveal how they feel about themselves.

12. Based on what you have read, how did God show His love to Adam and Eve despite what they did?

Students may write that God did not destroy them or that God went looking for them. Remind them that God also comes looking for us (Ezekiel 34:11–16, Matthew 18:12–14, Luke 19:10).

13. Read John 3:16–17 again. What do these verses say about God?

Students' answers may include: God loved the world; God gave His only Son; God sent His Son to save the world, not to judge it.

14. According to John 3:16–17, how does God feel about you?

Some students may say that God loves them. Others may not make this connection. Do your best to encourage them to continue studying to learn more about who God is and how much He loves them. Affirm their worth in God's eyes (Deuteronomy 7:9, Zephaniah 3:17, John 15:9–17, Romans 5:8, Romans 8:38–39, 1 John 4:7–11).

My Notes

CHAPTER 2: Who Am I?

1. List some of the talents, abilities, and character traits you consider to be your strengths.

The student answers may be insightful or misguided. Strengths can be used for unhealthy pursuits. Think about the student responses and provide affirmation or redirection towards how God can use their strengths to serve His purposes accordingly.

2. What would your best friends say they like most about you?

Our best friends often can see positive things about us that we can't see. We may have a negative self-image that prevents us from seeing ourselves as we really are. Encourage your student to see themselves the way God sees them. Provide Bible verses about God's view of us, "fearfully and wonderfully made," or for students that are believers in Jesus, how God sees us through the lens of Jesus' atoning work on the Cross.

3. How did the young man describe himself as he prepared to go back home?

The passage indicates that the son saw himself as a sinner, no longer worthy of being called a son, only worthy of working as his father's servant. Students may quote the story: "Father, I have sinned against heaven. And I have sinned against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:18–19).

4. How did the father describe the son when he came home? Write down the father's words at the end of the story:

Some students may include the entire last paragraph of the story, but the part we want them to focus on is the last four sentences: "This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found." The father was overjoyed to have his son home—he was entirely focused on his son's return, not where he had been or what he had done. Jesus tells us that this is God's reaction to us when we choose to follow Him.

5. Based on this story, how do you think God would describe you? Circle all that apply.

This answer will reflect the student's perception and understanding of God, and it may also reveal the way they view themselves on a deeper level. If a student circles "useless" or "lost," share an encouraging Scripture passage (for example: Romans 8:38–39, 1 John 4:9, Ephesians 2:10).

6. When Tairone first went to prison, how do you think he may have answered the question "Why am I here?"

Students will most likely list Tairone's crimes and reference his lifestyle. Be careful not to comment negatively on Tairone's past, as students may be able to identify with Tairone and his choices. If you have a similar past, this may be a great place for you to share your experiences and how God has impacted your life since that time.

7. How do you think Tairone would answer the question "Why am I here?" now? (Think about the second meaning of the question: "Why is it important that I exist?")

Students may answer factually and talk about Tairone's participation in his church's van ministry. If they do, point them back to his larger purpose of reaching youth with the Gospel and sharing his story in order to change their futures, so that they do not make the same mistakes he made.

My Notes

CHAPTER 3: Where Am I Going?

1. What are some of the things you want right now in your life?

Students may list physical desires like better food, or they may say that they want to get out of prison or to fix broken relationships with friends or family members. If they mention family, encourage them to write a letter to a family member, even if they are not able to send it. Advise them to write things that they love or miss about their family member.

2. What things in your life do you want to change?

Students may say they wish they could change their past, their current situation, or broken relationships. Other students might say they are in a good place right now and do not need to change. In either case, respond by sharing something you are working to change in your life. Consider sharing Philippians 3:13–14.

3. What have you tried to do to change your life in the past? Did it work? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Like most of us, a majority of students will acknowledge that their attempts to change have not always been successful. When you encounter that type of response, encourage them not to berate themselves but to learn from the past. Let them know that even Paul struggled to change (see Romans 7:15), but that if we are following God, He will transform us through the power of the Holy Spirit into His image and change our lives completely. Related Scriptures: Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 1:6, Colossians 1:9–10.

4. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that He wants those who follow Him to have life in the fullest possible way?

When we follow Jesus, we begin to see the world and the people in it differently. We find purpose for our lives. We understand that everything that happens is part of God's larger plan—even difficult things. We desire to help people. We find peace about death. Our fear is minimized as we realize that God is in control. Our joy expands as we begin to produce the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. All these things help us live life to the fullest. Related Scriptures: Psalm 37:4, Jeremiah 29:10–14, Proverbs 3:5–6, Matthew 6:25–34, Mark 8:34–35, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:28, Philippians 3:7–14, 1 John 4:7–18.

5. What do you think the woman thought was going to happen to her when the crowd grabbed her?

The factual answer is that she was facing death by stoning, but students may also reflect on possible events leading up to that situation—being judged, being shamed, etc.

6. How would you have felt if you were the woman standing in front of Jesus? Circle the words below that describe how you would have felt. Feel free to add your own words.

Some students may identify with the woman in the story and her situation, so any additional words they write may be very personal. If they share something personal, point them to God's grace that Jesus shows in the story.

7. How did the crowd react to that question? Why do you think they reacted that way?

The people in the crowd walked away because they knew they were not perfect. None of them could claim they had not sinned, just like none of us can. It is important for students to realize that they are not alone in their guilt. The whole crowd walked away; all of us would have as well. Romans 3:23 is a good passage to share in response to this question.

8. What would your answer be if Jesus asked you if you had never sinned? Could you have thrown a stone at the woman?

The question is intended for the student's personal reflection. Let them know how you would answer the question as well.

9. How would you feel if someone told you that you were completely forgiven for something serious that you did in your past?

Students may respond with considerable emotion. Students who are Christians often have a deep understanding of their need to be forgiven (Luke 7:47). They also comprehend more completely the freedom that forgiveness provides. Be careful not to comment on a student's crime, even if they mention it in passing.

10. If you were completely forgiven, would you think about yourself differently? Would you act differently? How would your life start to change?

Encourage students to pursue the life they have described and to take steps toward that future. Remind them that the place they live does not determine their purpose if God is in control of their lives. God used Paul to write many of the Epistles from prison. God chose Timothy from a tiny village in the middle of

nowhere. John wrote the books of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John during his exile on Patmos. These individuals had a huge impact on all Christians.

11. Have you accepted God's forgiveness and God's promise of a new life? If you have, how has it changed your life?

Answers will range from "God has completely changed my life" to "I'm not interested." Others may say they are Christians but that they are not seeing a lot of change in their lives. If their life has changed, celebrate that with them. If they are still seeking or struggling, try to answer any questions they have written, share how knowing God has impacted your life, and encourage them to keep reading and studying.

My Notes



CROSSROADS

PRISON MINISTRIES

cpministries.org