



# CORE VS. PERIPHERY

## INTRODUCTION

Everyone has opinions. When it comes to things like sports and movies, differing opinions keep things interesting. But as topics get more serious, opinions can become divisive. Theological opinions can stir emotion. But differences in theology don't have to separate us. It's all about how we treat one another when we don't see eye to eye.

## USING THIS GUIDE

In this one-session group experience, you'll discover how you prioritize your beliefs. Then you'll discuss how that prioritization may influence the way you interact with people that don't hold the same beliefs.

1. **Print** a copy of this guide for each member of your group.
2. **Watch** the video together.
3. **Discuss** the video as a group, using this guide.

## WATCH THE VIDEO

Watch the Core vs. Periphery video located at [groupleaders.org/core-vs-periphery](http://groupleaders.org/core-vs-periphery)



**Don't turn the page until the assessment begins in the video.**

The next page contains a Beliefs Assessment.  
The video will guide you through the assessment.

# BELIEFS ASSESSMENT – PART 1

Rate each statement on a scale of “1” to “3” using these descriptions:

- 1 = It is impossible to be a Christian and disagree with this.
- 2 = It is troubling if a Christian disagrees with this.
- 3 = It is fine that Christians have differing opinions on this or I don't have a strong opinion.

You have **two minutes** to complete this exercise.

- There is one God who exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- The church must regularly observe baptism and communion.
- The Holy Spirit dwells within all believers.
- God predestined (or chose) only some to receive salvation.
- Baptism must be done by full-body immersion.
- All humans are separated from God by sin and are in need of God's grace.
- Jonah was literally swallowed by a big fish and lived inside it for three days.
- Salvation is found in no other name than Jesus.
- There is a literal heaven and a literal hell.
- Christians should take a stand on the moral direction of the country.
- The Bible is without errors.
- Jesus was literally resurrected from the dead.
- The Holy Spirit gives all spiritual gifts today that are described in the New Testament (including speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy).
- Revelation describes literal events that will happen at the end of time. Before Jesus returns, believers will ascend to heaven to avoid “the tribulation.”
- Satan is a fallen angel who opposes God's purposes in the world.
- The creation accounts in Genesis are literal.
- Jesus was fully God and fully human.
- Christians cannot lose their salvation.
- The church should prioritize the care of widows and orphans.
- With certainty, we can know God's will for our lives.



**Don't turn the page** and begin the next part of the assessment until prompted by the video to do so.

# BELIEFS ASSESSMENT – PART 2

Now that you've rated each statement, use the scale below to chart your results. Draw a bar to indicate the number of statements you rated "1" and so on. For example, if you rated ten statements as "1," your bar over the "1" should reach the 10 position on the scale on the left side of the graph. This graph is an easy conversation starting point.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you usually respond when someone disagrees with you? What emotions does it stir up?
2. During the video, Tim said, “If we have a lot of beliefs we consider core, it becomes easy for us to dismiss or disrespect anyone who doesn’t agree with us.” Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?
3. To what extent do you think the way Christians manage the tension between core and peripheral beliefs affects how non-believers view the church (and even Jesus)? Explain.
4. How do you think we should respond to other Christians who disagree with our core beliefs? How should we respond to non-Christians?
5. Which, if any, of your original answers on the assessment would you change? Why would you change them?
6. Is there a peripheral belief to which you devote too much emotional energy? What would it look like to extend grace to people who hold different beliefs?

## THIS WEEK THINK ABOUT ...

It’s important to distinguish core issues of the faith from peripheral ones. Here are some tips to help distinguish core versus peripheral:

- Core issues are beliefs that are essential to faith.
- Christians have considerable differences of opinion about peripheral beliefs.
- Core issues have endured over time; many peripherals have changed over time.
- Even if a belief is peripheral, that doesn’t mean it’s unimportant.
- Whether a topic is core to the faith or peripheral determines how much energy and emotion it warrants.

Now that you’ve had some time to think about and discuss the results of your assessment, do you think you have too many or too few core beliefs? How will that knowledge change the way you talk about your faith?

**NOTE:** To view the Statement of Faith at our church, visit [groupleaders.org/about](http://groupleaders.org/about). The statements there are not necessarily all core beliefs, but a combination of core and peripheral beliefs that help capture the perspective of our church leadership.

**So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

**GALATIANS 3:26–27**