



## Roadside Religion

### Session 1

#### Introduction: In Search of the Sacred

### Session Overview

This opening session explains the idea of roadside religion. Included are numerous examples of everyday artifacts of faith as well as a discussion of why roadside religion is worth studying in the first place.

### Session Outline

#### 1. Where do we encounter religion in America today?

- If we are looking for “the sacred” where might we turn?
- Usual suspects: churches, synagogues, small groups, Sunday School classes, community service projects, seminaries
  - But expressions of faith routinely take us beyond official sites of religion
- Religion, especially Christianity, is often expressed and transmitted through “everyday artifacts of faith”
  - Typically unsanctioned by churches and often reflect a blend of Christian belief with popular culture and media
- Taken together, we’ll refer to these everyday artifacts of faith as **roadside religion**

#### 2. Where do we find Roadside Religion? [see the Prezi slides]

- **church signs**
  - Some expand on [biblical commandments](#), while others respond to more [practical issues](#); some are in need of [editing](#)
- **PDB’s (Public Displays of Bible)**
  - Bumper stickers and other forms of “car art”
  - And a curiously named tree service company
- **Bible Theme Parks**
  - From the [Creation Museum](#) to the [Holy Land Experience](#)
- **Around the home**
  - [Magnets](#), wall art, and an endless array of [Christian kitsch](#)
- **Tattoos**
  - If you’re going with Hebrew, watch your spelling...typos are hard to fix!



### 3. Is Roadside Religion worth studying?

- For most, the answer is NO – too silly, superfluous, or sacrilegious
- Three reasons why the answer should be YES:
  - Roadside religion constitutes the public face of Christianity for many outside the church – we need to better understand how Christianity is being perceived
  - Roadside religion is not inherently less authentic or legitimate than more official expressions of faith – an external expression of internal belief
  - Roadside religion is designed to mark certain places as “sacred” – set apart from ordinary space
- Two central questions will guide our study
  - What motivations, ideas, and beliefs lie behind these everyday artifacts of faith?
  - What do they get right and/or how do they potentially misconstrue important aspects of the Bible and theology?

### Discussion Questions

- ❖ What was your initial reaction to some of the examples of Roadside Religion introduced in this session? Positive? Suspicious? Curious? Something else?
- ❖ What are some everyday articles of faith you have encountered recently? Where did you find them and what form did they take?
- ❖ Can you think of ways in which you express or experience your own faith outside of church and other official religious institutions? What form does it take? Is it – or why is it – meaningful to you?
- ❖ Read [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#). In what ways does this text ask us to privately “internalize” God’s Word? In what ways does it ask us to publically “externalize” God’s Word? Which is more comfortable for you to do? Why?
- ❖ On the basis of Deuteronomy 6:9, many Jewish families place what is known as a mezuzah (a small box containing the texts of Deut 6:4-9 and 11:13-21) on the doorpost of their homes. What do you think is the purpose of doing this? Is this – or how is this – any different than putting a “Jesus loves you” bumper sticker on your car?
- ❖ Of the topics named in the course overview, which is of most interest to you? Why?

