Sometimes a play has a perfect name. Fiddler on the Roof is not only aware of this fact, it is proud of it. The musical explores the unstableness of life, the inevitability of the winds of change, and the struggle to make joy in the midst of everything. Standing on the two legs of the law and the prophets, Tevye bellows about tradition while trying to keep his balance as the ground under his feet convulses. A deeply human figure, our guide into the Jewish shtetl of Anatevka constantly looks to God in his confusion.

Though their ways are a bit different than ours, Christians can see many similarities to Tevye’s uncertainty and difficulty. Times are changing. Tough times threaten. God’s plans are sometimes unclear. But we have our faith and our family. We too may wish to be “cursed” with money, and never recover from it.

On the other hand, this play spends time giving us a Jewish sense of life. There are some differences that are helpful to explore. The charm of the musical is to embed us in the lives of these exiled people and feel their struggles as our own.
Let's Discuss

1. So much of the play is given over to consideration of marriage: the joys and the struggles. Marriage in the shtetl looks very different, or at least it looked very different, from modern marriage. What does this play have to say about the “old covenant” or marriage and the new approach that disrupts Tevye's home?

2. Practicing the Jewish law means there are “traditions for everything” (according to Tevye). There is much beauty in Jewish tradition. Did you spot any traditions that you wish we still practiced?

3. The looming threat of the pogroms and the Holocaust cast a shadow over this play. As you think about the plight of the Jewish people, what does Fiddler on the Roof add to that understanding?

4. Tevye often speaks to God about his plight and his wishes. How do you speak to God?

5. Though the men seem to control many aspects of business in the town, the women have their own voice and power in the life of the people. What does this play show about the role of men and women in a traditional culture?