

Faith & Doubt



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Introduction

Leaders Guide

This is to support leaders who will be running the sessions with their young people in a local parish context. It is written to give basic ideas about facilitating difficult questions from young people as well as deeper ideas about how this connects into your wider parish community.

Session 1

This session is entitled Permission to Doubt. The aim of this session is to recap what was covered at Connor Takes The Castle, being reminded that our identity is secure in Christ and as followers we can doubt to explore and own our faith.

Session 2

This session is entitled Embracing curiosity. The aim of this session is about developing a safe place to ask questions about faith together. Curiosity of faith is something to be encouraged within our young people.

Session 3

This session is entitled Can I trust God with my questions? The aim of this session is to discuss if we can trust God with the biggest questions even if we don't find answers to questions.

Session 4

The final session is entitled Lifelong doubting, lifelong discipleship. The aim of this session is to explore that following God in discipleship means that as we learn more about Him, we can ask questions or doubt, but through this it leads us to understand more of the God we love.

Parent / Guardian Guide

As young people begin to process and open up about questions of faith, it is important that parents or those at home are also resourced. This will include articles and advice on how to respond or continue conversations with your young person.

Additional Information

This will include follow up resources and it will have a guide to running an event to explore questions that young people have brought forward.

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INTRODUCTION

This resource includes four sessions covering Faith and Doubt. The resource is structured with options within each session, for group leaders to choose what would work best for their group and adapt anything to suit the young people who will attend. There is a variety of games, activities, teaching points, discussion and responses. It is not expected for you to use all of the ideas included or to use them just as they are written, feel free to make them fit your context.

This resource has been created to link with the Diocesan Weekend in 2018, Connor Takes The Castle. The sessions were covering faith and doubt taught by Elise & James Turner. However, it can be used with groups or young people who did not attend the weekend.

Christina Baillie, Diocesan Youth Officer has developed this resource and any questions can be addressed by contacting her at christinabaillie@connordiocese.org.

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General information on responding to questions from young people:

How do you tend to respond when a young person asks a hard question about God? Is your response to open up space for more hard questions or to close down space? Often, we can worry about what questions our young people might ask and it can make us reluctant to providing an open space for them to process their own personal faith. Here are a few suggestions as to how to respond when young people ask questions and some practical options for facilitating questions in your own group.

1. Thank them!

A young person has trusted you to ask the question which has been in their mind. You might be the first person they have ever been able to share this question with. Often young people can have lots of questions in their minds but are reluctant to share them with leaders or adults especially in church. We want to assure them that asking questions is helpful and we are glad they have asked.

2. I don't know!

Honestly, you are allowed to say that you don't know the answer! Sometimes we can try and come up with an answer right there and it can fall short of what the young person is hoping to find out. Some questions that young people ask may not have an answer at all. We can offer suggestions like, "I don't know but we can find out together" or "I don't know but that is a really important question, I am sure a lot of adults think about that too".

3. God can handle questions!

We want to assure young people that by asking questions it doesn't mean you aren't a Christian or are going to be asked to leave the youth group. We want to assure them that lots of God's people in the Bible asked really difficult questions and lots of Christians we know ask questions too. God can handle our questions and by asking we show that we are wanting to understand more of who God is. As leaders we can be encouraged by this and see this as a positive step for young people engaging with God themselves.

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4. Take your time!

Even if it is a question you think you have a response to, take your time. You might want to ask the other young people if they have an answer to the question or if they have thought about something similar before you speak. Be careful not to jump right into teaching, prepare yourself to be ok in silence and in discussion. If you are coming to the end of your meeting time, arrange to follow up on the question at another time, this shows that it is important even if you can't answer right away. Allowing space to say, I have heard you, taking notes of questions or what has been discussed and agreeing together how you are going to follow up, can be incredibly valuable.

Programme affecting engagement

During these sessions you might want to change how you generally run your programme. Often you can frame the issue, question or session first to start your young people thinking. Then open up discussions! There will be discussion questions or starters in each session. Follow this up by engaging a biblical perspective and what God thinks about everything you've discussed. By doing this, it is hoped that your young people will give their opinions and offer real questions rather than just reflecting back what they think is expected.

Tackling anti-doubt culture

"The perception that 'good Christians don't doubt' can easily (and sometimes unintentionally) be fostered in youth ministry. This understanding can be intensified by the let downs that may follow retreat and camp highs and hype, haunting students who wake up the next week and don't 'feel God' as viscerally as before" (Fuller Youth Institute). By exploring questions together, it provides a space which reflects real life as a follow of Christ. To do this, you as leaders can share your experience of this which will be appreciated by the young people who know you care about them richly.

Creating Safe Places

As leaders, you might want to spend some time thinking through how you can provide a safe place for your young people to explore doubt and questions they have. This will be part of the resource for young people themselves to consider this and what would make them more able to share questions.

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Disagreeing Well

This might also be a time for your young people to express disagreement with one another as they explore questions. It is a great time to model to young people what disagreeing well can look like as they grow in their faith.

A helpful article with more information about encouraging questions that can both be useful within a youth ministry context but also for families can be found here:

<https://www.youthandchildrens.work/Past-Issues/2018/July-2018/Is-the-answer-Jesus>

Connecting to wider Parish engagement

As you run these sessions with your young people, there are huge opportunities for you to integrate their learning as part of the wider church community. I have included suggestions throughout the sessions about what you can do to facilitate participation from your parish for example: parish members speaking to young people or surveying your parish members about their questions. I would recommend speaking with your rector or clergy about any wider involvement across the parish for their support and suggestions to see how the ideas could be put into practice. You could share some information with your vestry or with parents of young people as well. There is a separate parents' resource which is written to be given out to parents on your behalf.

During the series you might want to help the church family connect to what the young people are learning by having a short minute long report during your Sunday morning service. It might be as your young people are returning at the end of a service or during the announcements if they have met at another point in the week. Session 4 will be particularly open to giving opportunities for parish members to be involved in sharing with the young people. This is a great occasion for you to encourage other adults to see their role in leading the young people through talking about their own experience.

Further parish projects which could be launched as a result of these sessions could be a question box facilitated by the young people which all parish members can write questions for. Alternatively you could run a parish wide Question evening and there is additional guidance on how to run such an event included in this resource.

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SESSION 1: Permission to Doubt

Purpose of Session:

To recap what was covered at Connor Takes The Castle, while giving context to young people who did not attend, being reminded that our identity is secure in Christ and as followers we can doubt to explore and own our faith.

Opening Statement

If you have questions about faith, you are not alone. Seven in every ten young people are struggling with doubts. Most of you will have had big questions about who God is, whether it is all real, what is our purpose. But only around 15% of young people will ever have a conversation with someone about those doubts. Conversations are welcome here. In the next few sessions we want to look at doubting, asking questions, why it can be difficult, what the Bible says about people who doubt and how we can have a safe place to share questions. If you haven't had questions about faith, PRAISE GOD! But you may come across something in a few years time, or perhaps when you leave home or turn 18 that leads you to ask questions about what you've always believed. We would love you to engage in this exploration just as much so that when you doubt, when you ask big foundational questions that it can help give you a building block for new, deeper faith.

Starter Question

Why do you think people don't share the questions that they have about faith?

What If Game

Get everyone sitting in a circle, each person needs a piece of paper and a pen. To start the game everyone writes a What If question on one side of their piece of paper. You can follow a theme like, "Silliest question you could ask God" or "Your Youth Group" or "Future thinking, 50 years from now". Get everyone to pass their question to a random person in the group. Each person then takes their new question and writes an answer to that question on the back of the piece of paper. Then they pass on their paper randomly across the group again. To finish up the game, start with one person working your way clockwise around the circle. The first person reads out their question and the person beside them reads out their answer. Then the second person reads out their question, followed by the third person's answer. This continues on until you've answered all the what if questions!

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Connor Takes The Castle Recap

There is a Kahoot quiz for young people to do together. There is a mix of questions that young people who haven't attended might know and some reflective questions. You can run this by searching on Kahoot for the 'Faith & Doubt Recap' Quiz. You will need to register with Kahoot to run this, but it is free and quick to do. The quiz is run online and uses a phone to give a group the chance to answer questions as you go.

Alternatively, you could get the young people to do a presentation about what they learnt or give the following questions for them to discuss in small groups with a mix of those who attended the weekend and those who did not.

1. What was the theme of the weekend? What four areas were the talks based around?
2. What did you learn about doubt or asking questions that you didn't know before?
3. What passages from the Bible did you learn about?
4. How do you think it could make a difference to your faith?

Never Have I Ever Game

This game is based on questions! Begin the game by having the players sit in a circle, with enough chairs for all but one player. The first player stands in the centre of the circle and says a simple statement beginning with, "Never have I ever..." This means they say something which they haven't done before. Now it is time to get up and change chairs. Anyone who has done whatever the first player says they have not done, must find a new seat, along with the person in the middle. If there is only one person who has done what the person in the middle has never done, they just swap! One person will be left without a seat. This individual takes the place in the middle of the circle also tells something they have never done. Play continues, with each person coming up with a new "Never have I ever..." phrase. Encourage the young people to think of things which a few people will have done to allow more people moving during the game! Also ensure that you set boundaries for what is appropriate to share questions about. You might want to search online for a few suggested questions to help if someone is having difficulty thinking of a question.

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Permission Slip Activity

This activity is just to begin and help the young people have the understanding that they have permission to ask questions or doubt aspects of faith.

Have you ever got a permission slip in school? Maybe to get you out of PE or excused from class to go to music class? A permission slip is a form used by adults to give those under 18 permission to do something which may be different. As leaders, we are going to write your permission slips to explore doubt together and share our questions. Leaders can get one too signed by another leader or the young people. You might want to ask the young people who else might need one and get them to write one for those people e.g. other young people who aren't present, their parents, your Rector. You can make your own or use the permission slip template included. You will have one personalised for each young person.

'Why God?' activity

Those two words have been a cry from believers throughout the ages as people grapple with who God is and the world in which we live. It can be often spoken in the midst of a crisis of faith or as we struggle to live out our discipleship.

So, when was the first time you asked the question, Why God?

Think about it and write down your experience. It might have been an unanswered prayer. It might have been something unfair happening in your life. It might have been something tragic happening in your community. It might have been something quite trivial.

You might want to share this as a group or allow young people to share this with someone they trust over the next week.

To close this activity, you could pray the following:

Heavenly Father, we can often ask you why. We have spent some time thinking about that today, those times where we wanted you to explain or give us an answer, when we have questioned what we believed about you. God, we thank you that you allow us to come to you. We thank you that you want to hear from us, our questions too. Lord help us to trust you with what you have revealed or explained to us. Help us to encourage one another as we explore our questions together. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Permission Slip



I permit _____ (name of young person) to explore their doubts and ask questions about faith. In _____ (group name) we will give permission to each other to have conversations about doubt or questions.

Signature of Leader:

Date:



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Permission by Example

This section is to show that adults have questions about God too! And that our doubts and questions are permitted in our discipleship journey rather than being a problem to be crushed. It might be helpful for all of your youth leaders to be involved in this, or some parish members too. Ask them the two questions below and share the responses with your group. You could do this via video, in person or having written responses.

1. What have you doubted about God or Christianity?
2. How have you kept pursuing God in the midst of questions or doubt?

Teaching Points

1. Permission to Doubt: Jesus said to ask

As we look at doubting and asking questions, you might be unsure as to what God thinks of it. Often, we can pick up from church or talking with Christians that we shouldn't ask big foundational questions or ask lots of questions about aspects of faith. So, we want to begin with the words of Jesus. We want to be assured by what Jesus spoke to his disciples so that you can take hope in his words, not ours. We read together in Matthew 7:7-8, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."

Let's spend some time looking at these verses and helping us see what that means for us as we consider doubting and asking questions. The passage is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where he is teaching people about who God is and a lot of practical instruction about how to actually live a life following God. Here we see Jesus encouraging us to ask. Most commonly this passage is used in relation to prayer and expressing to God directly our needs. In addition, we can look at this more basically and understand that Jesus is encouraging us to ask. He doesn't tell us 'to just believe'. It isn't ignoring how our brains work, our thoughts, our questions. Those are acceptable and welcome as part of following God. This is worth celebrating! We can thank God that our thoughts, our questions, our uncertainties are welcome. This is Jesus giving you permission to ask the questions about Him that you felt were silly or no one else would've thought about. This is Jesus giving you permission to ask questions about what it really means to live as a follower of Him. This is Jesus giving you permission to ask questions about understanding the truth in the Bible and what you see in the world. Your questions are welcomed by Him.

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2. Permission to Doubt: Robust Faith

In this passage, we read two other actions. Does anyone know what they are? Seeking and knocking. We are encouraged here to not just ask a question but then to seek God and his truth in this. We are encouraged here to not just ask a question but to knock, approaching God with our questions to consistently come to him in prayer expressing our thoughts. In these two actions we see the process of developing robust faith. We are given permission to doubt or ask questions by Jesus and our response in the midst of questions is to be one of pursuing truth from God. Fuller Youth Institute speak about doubt saying, "Doubt can help form our faith in strong and perhaps more lasting ways". Doubt can sometimes be taught in churches as a sinful approach, or a troubling time that could lead us away from God. However, in our questions, there is an opportunity for us to discuss those questions and have a deeper and stronger faith as a result. When John Ortberg was asked why doubt and questioning are important to faith development, said "Doubt and questioning are critical to faith development because young people need to make the faith their own". We want you to make faith your own, as you go on in the rest of your life. So, we want to help you develop your faith through questions and doubt to have a robust faith. While you are turning up to youth group or church, people can make assumptions about where you are in your faith. You don't have to pretend to be a Christian just because you're always at church. In this few sessions, we would love you to be real about what you really think, not what you think other people want you to say, but what you really believe or are struggling to believe.

3. Permission to Doubt: Your Identity is Secure

A lie that can be portrayed by some Christians or churches is that doubting or asking questions can be a negative reflection on your ability to have faith, or be a statement over who you are as a believer. By doubting or asking questions, you are not deficient. You are not unfaithful. You are not unworthy. Your questions will not cause God to love you any less. As we read from Matthew 7, ask and it will be given. For each person who is a Christian, it is all a gift. When we ask God, we are given freely. This means that our identity is secure as our standing is in Christ, whether we have questions about our faith or not at that moment. The role of your church family is to hear your questions and hold them together.

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3. Permission to Doubt: Your Identity is Secure

Your church family may not have the answers to your questions but asking shouldn't make them change with you. They shouldn't push you away or question your faith, but gently be willing to sit in the midst of the questions. That is what you should expect from us as your leaders. Over the next sessions we are going to examine how we explore our questions about faith together and consider more about how God looks at us in the midst of our questions. But for now, we are assured that Jesus encourages us to ask, seek Him, knock and know that your identity is secure in Him.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you wish you had permission to do that is discouraged?
2. If you could ask God one question right now, what would it be?
3. How do you think the church deals with doubting?
4. What would you think about a Christian leader who says that they doubt their faith?
5. Have you ever encouraged a friend who has questioned their faith?
6. Do you think Christians need to have the right answer to all their questions to keep their faith?
7. If Christians are allowed to doubt, what should change about how we teach at church or in youth group?

Prayer

O God, we thank you that you allow our questions to come to you.
Let your merciful ears, O Lord,
be open to the prayers of your humble servants;
help us to ask and seek you to glorify you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

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SESSION 2: Embracing Curiosity

Purpose of Session

To develop a safe place to ask questions about faith together. Curiosity is something to be encouraged within our young people. We want to hear their questions and help them feel heard.

Opening Statement

Over the Connor Takes The Castle weekend, we explored a range of doubts we can have as a disciple of Christ. We recapped that last session, so we've got permission to doubt but where do we go from here? How do we be real about our questions? What can we as a youth group do, to help me explore what faith in God really looks like and for me to own that myself? We are going to look at what it means to ask questions in a safe place and how we can do that together.

Starter Question

Where do you feel most able to be your real self? What makes it safe to do so?

Icebreaker Question Intensive Game

Split your young people into groups of 2-3. The aim of the game is to have as many answered icebreaker questions in 3 minutes. You can time the groups and have a prize for the winning team. You might want to write your own questions or use an online resource like this: www.signupgenius.com/church/church-icebreaker-questions-for-small-groups.cfm You can use different amount of points for deeper questions to encourage them to go beyond surface level!

Fort Building Activity

Divide your group into two teams. Give them a space in your halls or church, as well as blankets, lights, paper etc. Their task is to create the safest fort imaginable. Ask them to spend 5 minutes together as a group discussing and planning together. Then time for creation, encourage them to work together and be imaginative in how they use the resources. Polystyrene becomes a steel reinforced door or lights become security triggered lights. Once they've finished ask them to explain what they did and how they thought about it.

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Responses Activity

Get your young people to gather in the middle of the room. Have the two ends of the room labelled 'helpful' and 'unhelpful'. You have a list of situations or responses below, call each one out and get them to go to the label which they think best represents how they feel.

- You ask a question about God's goodness and a leader just stays silent
- Another young person asks your leader a question and they decide to meet up together to talk more about it
- You admit to your friend that you're struggling to believe in God since your Granny died, so they tell you to just have faith
- Your friend asks a big question about God and the response is a Bible verse
- You ask your big sister a question about God because she always brings you to church, she says she doesn't know the answer but will help you talk to some more mature Christians about it if you like
- You ask a question in youth group and they agree to talk about it again next time, but everyone forgets
- Following the last one, your leader approaches you after the session to apologise as they realise they forgot to have space for your question but give the whole next session over to discussing your question and other questions like it

Prayer

God, we have so many questions about who you are and what faith means. Thank you for your word in the Bible and the truth that you have given to us. Help us to grow in our understanding as we explore the questions that we have about you. As we share our questions as a group help us to allow one another to feel safe. Give us the grace when we don't have the best responses, to safely encourage each other's questions and praise you together. Lord in your mercy, hear us. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Question Party

Part of encouraging curiosity can look like celebrating questions as they come from the young people in your group. This might look like a reward for the group when they gather up ten great questions about Christian faith or having a party for the last 5 minutes of your session with question shaped snacks, songs that are questions and surprise gifts.

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Teaching Points:

1. Encouraging Curiosity: How we learn

We have seen from the passage of the Bible that we looked at in our last session that Jesus encourages us to ask. He encourages questions and asks a load of them himself when we see encounters with people he meets as he is teaching. We know that questions can help us learn and this is reinforced by what we read from the Bible. So, we can see that doubting or asking questions of faith can be an instrument of learning. Fuller Youth Institute says that young people can become more sure of their faith from, “studying, learning and pondering”. Isn’t that really helpful? We can develop in our faith and our discipleship through questions together. Your youth leaders want you to have a strong faith and so curiosity and questions are encouraged! Read Proverbs 2v1-8 together.

We see from this passage lots of encouragement to question, seek, call out, study, learn, search for wisdom and truth about God. This is how we are going to grow in our discipleship from childhood and for the rest of our lives. This passage is a father explaining to his son what he needs to do to grow in faith in God, as the father has learnt what it involves and is encouraging this curiosity in his child. This searching happens in a main way through our reading and studying of God’s word together.

The Bible is the truth that God has revealed to us, he has decided in his clear wisdom that this is all we need to know about who he is to be able to trust in Him throughout our lives. This is where we go, with other Christians to explore our questions together to see and understand more of God’s truth for us. Another way that we can learn and explore our questions is through our experiences. Experience of loneliness, anxiety and feeling overwhelmed can push us towards God. This can also be done through talking with other young people. In having faith that sticks, talking with others who have a different perspective can be really helpful.

We want to encourage you to discuss with others, disagree well and seeing from other perspectives which can strengthen the beliefs that you hold.

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2. Encouraging Curiosity: Nothing is off limits

As you grow in your faith throughout your life, you might have questions about every aspect of faith development and living as a disciple. However, as we process questions we realise that there are some aspects which the global church has laid out as central beliefs. This means that while we can question and doubt, we want to prevail in faith relating to these central beliefs. These are generally included through creeds. As the church, we want to explore questions that you have related to these central beliefs which will be so critical in developing and owning your own faith. In addition, there will be questions about controversial, hotly contested, currently reported issues but aren't central beliefs of Christians across the world.

We might think about questions which are relevant to what is happening in our lives or about aspects of faith which are key to being a Christian. We might think of questions which are related to what our friends are saying or about what we have grown up believing. All of these questions are valuable, important and worthy of discussing. Nothing is off limits in sharing questions with those who also love Jesus and care for you. Why not spend some time now looking through the Apostles Creed and come up with any questions you might have?

3. Encouraging Curiosity: Feeling safe

As we ask questions together and explore faith, we want to ensure that you feel safe to do this. Fuller Youth Institute says, "Safety to express doubt seems to be connected with stronger faith". We would love your faith to grow and so we are going to work together to allow for safety as we ask questions together. As we have read through Proverbs 2, we see the verses about God giving wisdom but he also acts as a shield to those who walk in integrity. As you ask questions, are curious about faith and doubt what it means to be a Christian, be assured that with your hope of growing in wisdom, God will be your shield, he will guard your path. Part of this time together is for us to learn from you how we can make space that will help you ask questions.

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Pass The Parcel Game

Two great responses to questions that young people ask about faith are: 'Yes, you can ask that!' or 'I don't know but...'. To get them used to those phrases and even expecting them from youth leaders, play this game with lots of questions & they have the responses in pass the parcel! Wrap up a gift with several layers of wrapping paper. In between each layer, write one of the two responses. Randomly alternate them in between layers. To explain the game, young people start by thinking up a silly question. You might want to start them off with a question like, "What would be the best animal to resize to the size of a horse?" or "Is a hotdog a sandwich?"

Once you've got your group's first question you can start passing round the parcel, play some music which is fun. Once you stop the music, the person removes the layer of paper and reads out what is written. If the parcel says 'Yes, you can ask that!' then the person just thinks of the next question before starting to pass the parcel again. Alternatively, if the parcel says 'I don't know but...' the group have to come up with the end of the response, e.g. I don't know but we could ask a hot dog expert, or I don't know but what do you think. The group decides which person has the best ending to the response and they get to start passing round the parcel, as well as choosing the next question. This continues until you get to the centre but hopefully by then the responses will be going through your mind!

What does yellow taste like? Activity

Youth and Children's Work magazine have been getting questions from children and young people. They then put together a theological answer to the questions raised. You could use the questions and ask the young people if they have an answer to the questions raised? Get them to do this as homework and then discuss the given answer from the magazine in what they like from it too. You can find the information here: www.youthandchildrens.work/Apologetics/What-does-yellow-taste-like

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Discussion Questions

1. What is the most interesting question someone has asked you?
2. Do you ask all the questions that you have about life?
3. Considering the four ways to doubt, discuss the positive outcomes of this doubt and any possible difficulties together.

Four Ways to Doubt

Doubt as a primary reflex: the cautious reaction of 'I don't know about that'.

Doubt as an instrument of learning: using doubt skilfully in order to learn from it, asking good questions and seeking more understanding.

Permanent Doubt: the dangerous pessimism that we can use to overprotect ourselves in hurtful ways.

Humorous doubt: a realistic self-understanding of our need for grace, and a self-forgiving attitude toward our failures and shortcomings.

4. How could you feel safe to ask all the questions you've thought about faith? Dream together how we could create safe places for questions in our youth group, church family and your own home.

5. Put Proverbs 2:1-8 into your own words. Share this with each other and explain why you have chosen to phrase it differently to express what God is expressing here to you.

Statement of Doubt / Statement of Faith Activity

In your own words, express your statement of faith. This is what you believe about God, what you have faith in and how you would express it. Also write a statement of doubt. This is what you struggle to believe about God or are seriously questioning about Christianity.

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SESSION 3: Can I trust God with my questions?

Purpose of Session

To discuss if we can trust God with the biggest questions and even if we don't find clear answers to questions. It is to reinforce that God is big, strong and powerful enough to allow our questions. A way of processing our questions can be through lament or despair in the face of unsatisfactory answers. We can take our doubt, our lament, our uncertainty to Him.

Opening Statement

So far, we've learnt that it is ok to doubt, to ask questions about faith, to be unsure and want to find out more. We know that Jesus encourages us to ask and seek understanding as we learn more about God and the world in which we live. Our role as Christians is to be disciples who own our faith, test it for ourselves and part of this session is exploring what that means. We have talked about safe places to ask questions and encouraged each other to bring our questions forward. But what if we bring our questions to God himself? What will be his response? What are we expecting of Him? Always to come up with a perfect answer which makes us feel content or something less certain? We are going to explore in this session who God is and why that can give us comfort as we explore our questions about Him.

Starter Question

When you ask a question about God, what do you think his expression/response is to you?

Video

The Bible Project have two great video's summarising the book Job which the teaching section looks at. The "Read Scripture: Job" video gives a great overview of the book from the Bible and how it is broken down by the chapters as well as the story. "The Book of Job" video is more following the story and slightly shorter. Both are available from YouTube.

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Question Game

Get two equally numbered teams of young people and leaders. Get each team to stand in a line opposite the other team. The purpose of the game is to continually ask questions! Team 1 starts and asks any member of Team 2 a question. For example, "Sarah, where did you go to school?" Then Sarah will ask a question to someone on Team 1, "Pete, how much time do you take to do your hair?" If you break any of the rules, you are out! Your team will vary in numbers as you try and reduce the other team down to 0, and keeps going until there is a winning team.

The rules are:

- You cannot repeat a question that has already been asked.
- You can only ask a question to a member of the opposite team and you must start with saying their name.
- You must ask a different person a question, than the person who asked you, unless the opposite team only has 1 player remaining!
- You cannot answer the question!!
- You cannot pause! As a leader, this one is up to you for how long they are allowed. Ideally you want the game to be continuous questions and no pauses but it depends on their age and familiarity with the game.
- No rude or offensive questions.

Card Game

Why not gather your young people and play a game of I Doubt It? It is also known as Cheat and can be played with a deck of cards. This could work well as young people are arriving or for the last 15 minutes of your session. Here is a description of how to play the game:

www.creativeyouthideas.com/resources/game-ideas/i-doubt-it/

Would I lie to you Game

This idea is based on the TV show so you can make your own or follow the suggested outline below:

www.creativeyouthideas.com/resources/creative-teaching-ideas/we-doubt-it-2/

The game is based on the premise of someone reading or creating a strange or ridiculous story/situation that happened to them. It might be true or it may not. Everyone else has to ask good questions to try and get to the truth. You could get your leaders to be the ones to tell the stories or situations, with your young people trying to guess if they are telling the truth or not.

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3 Up Game

Get all your young people sitting on chairs in a circle. For the duration of the game, no one can speak or make a noise. You can only communicate through actions. The aim of the game is to work together to have at least 3 people standing at any one time, but no person can be standing for more than 10 seconds in one go. Work together until you can do it successfully!

Song

Listen to My Lighthouse by Rend Collective Experiment. Give the young people the lyrics printed out and ask them to underline a line which they connect with. You could encourage them to write a response to this question: What truths does this song tell us about God and our place in the middle of doubts?

Song

Sing together Chris Tomlin's song, 'Our God' or the kid's song, 'Our God is a Great Big God'. Encourage the young people to think about what these songs tell us about the character of God and what that means when we consider his power and our questions.

Video

Josh and Ryan Shook have written a book as young people who have grown up in church, sons of a well-known pastor and how they have asked questions about their faith to make it their own. They are speaking on a Christian talk show about their book and talking in this clip about how they could trust God with their questions:

<https://vimeo.com/70414100>

Discussion Questions

1. Who do you trust to know the most personal things about you? Like your phone password? Or who you fancy?
2. Think of the worst thing that has happened to you, how did you feel towards God during that?
3. What do you think about the story of Job in the Bible? Do you have any questions about it?
4. What was God's response to Job? Do you feel like that would help if you were in his position?
5. Would you trust God by sharing your questions with Him?
6. Have you any experience of lamenting to God?

Faith & Doubt



Teaching Points

1. Can I trust God with my questions? He might not answer but he does respond

What is the hardest question about faith that you've ever heard or thought? Maybe it's something we've talked about over the past few weeks. Do you ever wonder if you can trust God with those big big questions? Do you question if God is big enough to handle it? God is big enough to receive questions! God is not afraid of your questions.

Alisa Harris, author, says "I was taught that faith was so simple and easily grasped that I could argue someone into it, which ended up shaking my faith when I found that belief wasn't simple, and argumentation and evidence could only take me so far."

We are going to look into the Bible and see a person who experienced that faith wasn't simple, that asking questions of God could be done and we can explore together how God responds.

Read Job 1:8-2:10. To this point, we see Job as a righteous man who has not sinned against God and this interesting interaction between Satan and God testing why Job is faithful to God. Job then spends the majority of the book trying to understand what has happened to him, his friends are speaking back to his arguments expecting that Job must have done something wrong to deserve what has happened to him. His friends don't ask questions, only make assumptions about Job and about God. Whereas Job is living in the midst of incredible difficulty and trying to understand who God is as a result.

In Chapter 31 we find Job's final words to his friends searching for answers. We see Job say "Oh, that I had one to hear me!" (verse 35). He has felt like God hasn't heard him. He has felt like his friends haven't heard him. Job felt like he wasn't known or heard by anyone. Sometimes in our faith journey we can feel like no one hears us, no one understands us, no one is willing to answer us. So here in the midst of the Bible we see and acknowledge Job, calling out to God, being spoken over by his friends and we are thankful. Because what we see next is God's response. He may not answer Job's questions in the way we expect. The book of Job doesn't explain to us why suffering happens, but God speaks to Job as Job has called out to God.

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2. Can I trust God with my questions? We trust God's character
When we consider Job and what has happened to him, it is really interesting to read how God responds to Him. Chapters 38-41 is God's response, you might want to read through some of this together. But what we see here is very little about Job's situation and a whole lot about who God is, and this is what helps us be sure and certain that we can trust God with our questions. This is about God's character. God is beyond our understanding. His perspective on the world is so much greater than ours. It will always be beyond what we can comprehend. Alister McGrath, a professor of Science and Religion at Oxford University, says, "Doubt arises partly because we feel frustrated at not being able to understand everything" (The Sunnier Side of Doubt, 40). This is God's response to Job in the midst of his suffering. God says to Job: Trust me because I know how light exists. Trust me because I see the storehouses of snow. Trust me because I bring rain where no person is. Trust me because I have created people to have wisdom within them. Trust me because I can do all things.

We can trust God with each of our questions because he is powerful, he is above all, he is in charge of everything, he knows all. So even when we don't, he does. It is the character of God which helps us trust and bring our questions to him in prayer. He will respond to our doubt with a declaration of who He is and why we can keep putting our trust in Him.

3. Can I trust God with my questions? He encourages our lament
So, if we know God is big enough, powerful enough, strong enough for us to question Him and what faith means, how do we share our questions with Him? Part of trusting God with our questions is learning how to communicate them to him. We can use what is in the Bible to help us with this process. How can we communicate our questions to God? Through prayer? Song? Tears?

"While scripture doesn't always give us answers to all our questions, the Bible does have a surprising place where doubts and struggles are freely expressed: the book of Psalms. While we tend to think of the psalms as a book of praises, the writers of the Hebrew songs and prayers that became their worship book were not afraid to ask God to show up in the midst of ugly situations. Out of the 150 psalms, over one-third are considered laments.

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3. Can I trust God with my questions?

A lament can be defined simply as a cry out to God. It's both an act of grief and of asking for help. In fact, lament is usually something we do in the dark places—often the darkest points of our life journeys. For example, Psalm 88 ends with the phrase, “darkness is my closest friend” (v. 18). One of the most frequently-asked questions in scripture is “How long, oh Lord?”

“It's an important question because it calls God to do something to end our pain or the pain of others. Laments like this don't answer all of our questions, but lamenting can be a helpful part of strengthening our faith by reminding us that answers aren't everything. As the psalmists proclaim over and over, the unfailing love of God isn't wiped out by anything: not our crises, not our doubts, and not even our sins.” (This section is from an article by Fuller Youth Institute, its available here: <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/i-doubt-it>).

We want you to be aware that lamenting is a really acceptable way of communicating with God. We are open to hard questions in lament and writing our own laments together or using the examples in the Bible to lead us.

Lament Activity

Why not write your own song of Lament? You might want to read through some Psalms of Lament on your own or together to help.

Examples of Psalms are Psalm 5, 42 & 60.

Once everyone is finished, you could allow them to silently pray through what they have written. To close the activity, you could have a corporate response for the end as you respond together.

You could say:

“Lord, here is my lament.

I know your love is unfailing towards me.

Hear me. Thank you. Amen”

Prayer

Using Job's response to God's character in Job 42:1-6, write a prayer together to express your awareness that you can bring your questions to God and how his character gives you comfort.