

# Faith & Doubt



SESSION 4: Lifelong doubter, lifelong disciple

## Purpose of the Session

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. This session explores what it means to doubt God when we are beginning our relationship with Him, to what it looks like at age 45 or 75.

## Opening Statement

We have been learning about doubting our faith, asking questions about God or what it means to be a Christian. Often questions have been discouraged in churches or even in our youth groups so we hope that you have begun to find a safe place to bring your questions. For the final session we want to look to the future! Does my doubting need to be wrapped up once I become an adult? Do I need to get rid of any questions before I could even consider teaching someone else about the bible? Can we still be a disciple for the rest of our lives but also doubt God? Let's explore this together!

## Starter Question

Can a Christian really still have questions about God after 10 years of believing?

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you think life will be like for you 30 years from now?
2. How would you describe a life lived as a Christian?
3. Have you learnt anything about doubting from this series?
4. What do you think we can learn from Jesus sharing the Great Commission over the disciples and how they were experiencing faith?
5. What have you found encouraging about doubting?
6. How do you think leaders should manage their questions about God while leading others in faith?

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## I Doubt It Game

The purpose is to explore the role of community in our doubts, to help us explore together or as something which makes us doubt more! Get a list of Bible trivia questions, paper and pens. To announce the game, you want to make it dramatic and a lot of fun! Asking for the best Bible scholars ever to grace your parish boundaries. Ask for 2 or 3 brave volunteers who are willing to stand up in their Biblical knowledge. Get them to go to another room to revise, where they can't hear the rest of the group and are given a few minutes to get ready. Telling the rest of the group that you want them to try their best to make the others doubt their answers. Give them some time to come up with tactics and arguments to try and make the others doubt what they think. Bring the others in one at a time, asking them a question. You then want the group to make them try to doubt their answer. This keeps repeating until you've got everyone back in the room. Wait until the very end of explain to the volunteers what the group was doing. At the end ask the contestants did you doubt whether you had the right answer? Why or why not?

## Game of Life Life-sized

For an incredible game, especially for a small group, why not do a life-sized version of the Game of Life. You will want to use a large space and create the board to the size that young people can stand on a square and move around the board. This would be a great project for the more creative leaders! This could be done in a full evening for your group as a fun session. You'll need to create the board, including the spinner, cards, cars, pegs and money. It would be great to have the players have a cardboard box for their car that they can wear on them. Pegs and any other cards, stickers can be applied to the box as they walk around.

## Prayer

Father God, we thank you that we can have a safe place in community with other Christians to ask questions about who you are. As we grow up in our churches, help us understand where we can go with our questions and how we can continue to explore those together in community. We pray that you would continue to bless us through your presence for us to know your character. As we explore discipleship as a life long journey lead us, God, to a place where we love you more and more. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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## Chalenj Game

Why not play a few rounds of the board game, Chalenji?

The game runs by having challenges and young people are split into teams. The teams have to put forward a suggestion of how well they can do the challenge within a minute, eg Team 1 say they can do 20 press ups in 1 minute. The next team can either challenge them to do it or go bigger, eg. Team 2 say they can do 22 press ups in 1 minute. This goes on until a team challenges the last team. If Team 3 challenge Team 2, a failure would mean Team 3 get the points but if Team 2 did 22 press ups they get the points!

This game runs on calling out the team before, you could say 'I doubt it' when the team is challenging the team previous of their ability to meet the challenge. Even creating a large 'I doubt it' poster that the team runs to the middle to grab when they want to challenge the other team.

## Popular Questions & Adult Church Survey

Questions you might have discussed which are really common in young people

1. Does God exist?
2. Does God love me?
3. Am I living the life God wants?
4. Is Christianity true/the only way to God?

These are the questions which adults have too! Why not survey your church population and ask them if they have asked any of these questions during their teenage years? Secondly have they asked any of these questions in the last 5 years? You could also ask people what other questions they have asked about faith or God?

Once you've done this, you could invite everyone to an event to talk more about these questions or ask your Rector to do some sermons on the most popular question. Alternatively you could get the young people to put together a presentation about using the information and showcasing what they have learnt which could be given out during a church service to encourage the whole parish.

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## Teaching Points

1. Lifelong doubting, lifelong discipleship: aim of discipleship  
When we consider what it means to be a Christian we can come up with this idea that it means to be perfect. Sometimes we can get the wrong impression that discipleship just means learning more about God without any difficulty in putting that into practice in our lives or understanding what that means about who God is. Discipleship is the continual growth in our lives around faith. You don't have to have the answer to every question to be a disciple. A disciple isn't an answer person. A disciple doesn't have everything figured out. Faith, real faith, then looks more like exploring mystery. Real faith looks like trusting things we cannot see. Discipleship looks like allowing for paradoxes, where something might appear to be inconsistent or what is true doesn't fit with what we know. Discipleship looks like holding complex ideas that might feel beyond our understanding.

“As we learn more about God we struggle to comprehend. We contrast what we know about God to our human reality. This is discipleship.”  
(Fuller Youth Institute)

The effect of this exploration can lead to real joy, rather than confusion and abandoning faith. We see from this that we are more in awe and wonder of who God is. We understand that he is beyond our understanding, so we are humble and know our place before him. We want to see more of his goodness and glory rather than seeking certainty or pride in ourselves. We see this from Jesus leading his disciples. He asks them right at the beginning to ‘Come, Follow me’. They do, they abandon their every day work, their families and take off after Him. But following Jesus doesn't mean understanding everything he was doing or going to do. We see throughout the gospels speaking about Jesus' life that the disciples want to know more, they ask questions and sometimes get it wrong for what it means to be a follow of God.

So, questions can lead us to real joy in discipleship. We are all going to wrestle with big questions for the rest of our lives! If you haven't before this series, this might have helped you explore some questions for the first time, or you might be relieved to know that others have questions too, but unsure where we go from here. Does having questions about faith mean that I need to be in a different place to be able to lead others?

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2. Lifelong doubting, lifelong discipleship: Can I doubt and disciple others?

As we continue in our process of understanding how doubt might continue throughout our Christian lives in different ways, we want to know how to respond and what we can do in the midst of our doubt. For example, is it ok for a follower of God to teach someone else about Him even when they've got some doubts or are asking questions? Jesus' response to this is a resounding yes! When he is with the disciples in Matthew 28, he gives them the Great Commission to go and make disciples, to act in His name. But just before he does that we read in verse 17 that they worshipped him but some doubted.

The disciples had been through a lot with Jesus, they had seen him do miracles, teach from the scriptures like no one had before, yet at this point they stand and doubt him. We stand today with the whole Bible and able to examine who Jesus was. It doesn't mean that even though we have read and heard about who God is from the Bible that we are meant to be more certain, than the disciples who saw Jesus for themselves. Maybe you've thought that your questions or doubt mean that God can't use you to help others learn about him. Maybe you've felt that you need to get answers to enough of your big questions before you can teach others from the Bible. Maybe you think that your questions will make you less of a Christian than those followers you read about in the Bible.

Did the disciples doubting stop Jesus issuing the call to follow Him and disciple others? No! He asked all those present, including those who doubted, to take charge of bringing to good news to all the world. This is so incredible that this part of the Bible which we often use as an encouragement to do mission or share the gospel with others, is offered to those who have doubted! It means that anyone who has questions for God is not excluded from being used by him to share the gospel to others!

It leaves us without an excuse, the encouragement to pursue an understanding of God in the midst of our questions, but also to keep helping those around us become disciples too.

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2. Lifelong doubting, lifelong discipleship: Can I doubt and disciple others?

We can also see this in the lives of other Christians who have lived a life of service to God and are often used to encourage us to do the same. Mother Teresa is an example of this. She was a Catholic Nun who lived in India for most of her life. She served the poorest of the poor, through medical care, health care and spiritual teaching. After her death, her personal writings were published showing her journaling of doubt and questioning. "Where is my faith? Even deep down... there is nothing but emptiness... if there be God – please forgive me. When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul" (Mother Teresa). Yet she served others each day that they might know Jesus. She never abandoned the mission of Jesus.

Just as we are in good company, being followers who doubt today, we are also in good company with those we see in scripture. Those that doubted included Peter, Thomas, Mary Magdalene, and basically every other disciple. As they left their uncertainty there in the pages of scripture, it brings us comfort and safety as we read the Bible together and can be honest about our questions, our doubts. As we are honest about following Jesus, it actually can make us better at sharing and teaching others about who God is. When you share your questions with each other, it opens up exploration of doubt but also real authentic faith.

3. Lifelong doubting, lifelong discipleship: doing it together

So, as the Great Commission is given, we take the example that Jesus laid out to his disciples. We see that he gave this command around discipleship and evangelism to them as a group. As a group who worshipped. As a group who doubted. We want to take away that following God well, means doing it together.

"Without a period of questioning and exploring our belief, we continue to carry a faith that has been given to us by someone else rather than a faith we've wrestled with and internalized. Here's the unexpected gift tied to doubt within community: others hold faith for us when we struggle to believe...And by remaining faithful to God and to community through doubt, we often discover new depths of faith" (Fuller Youth Institute). How incredible to think about that, your faith could be a gift to others when they are doubting but also, we can then have a faith which is strong, and ours.

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3. Lifelong doubting, lifelong discipleship: doing it together  
“When [you] feel safe to share doubts and struggles with peers and adults, [you can] feel more supported by God” (Fuller Youth Institute). The amount that you feel that you are experiencing God, feeling that God cares about your life, feeling close to him and feeling valued by God can be totally increased through having positive Christian influences around you, and in particular people who are willing to talk about and hear your big questions about faith together. Even the wisest youth leader will not be able to perfectly answer all the questions that you have about God, but there is a joy in asking tough questions and exploring answers together in community. Why not make an agreement to keep searching after people who can explore questions with you?

## Leading By Example

Young people want leaders who are real about their own discipleship. Within this session it might be helpful to have some adult leaders share their questions and doubts they have had within the last 5 years. The purpose of this is not to give answers to questions but to explore how they have still been committed Christians while exploring questions about faith. Why not invite some parish members or local Christian leaders to be interviewed during your session? Some suggested questions to leaders:

1. What is the biggest question about God that you've struggled with over the last five years?
2. How have you felt about doubting or questioning God?
3. What has helped you process your questions?

## Prayer

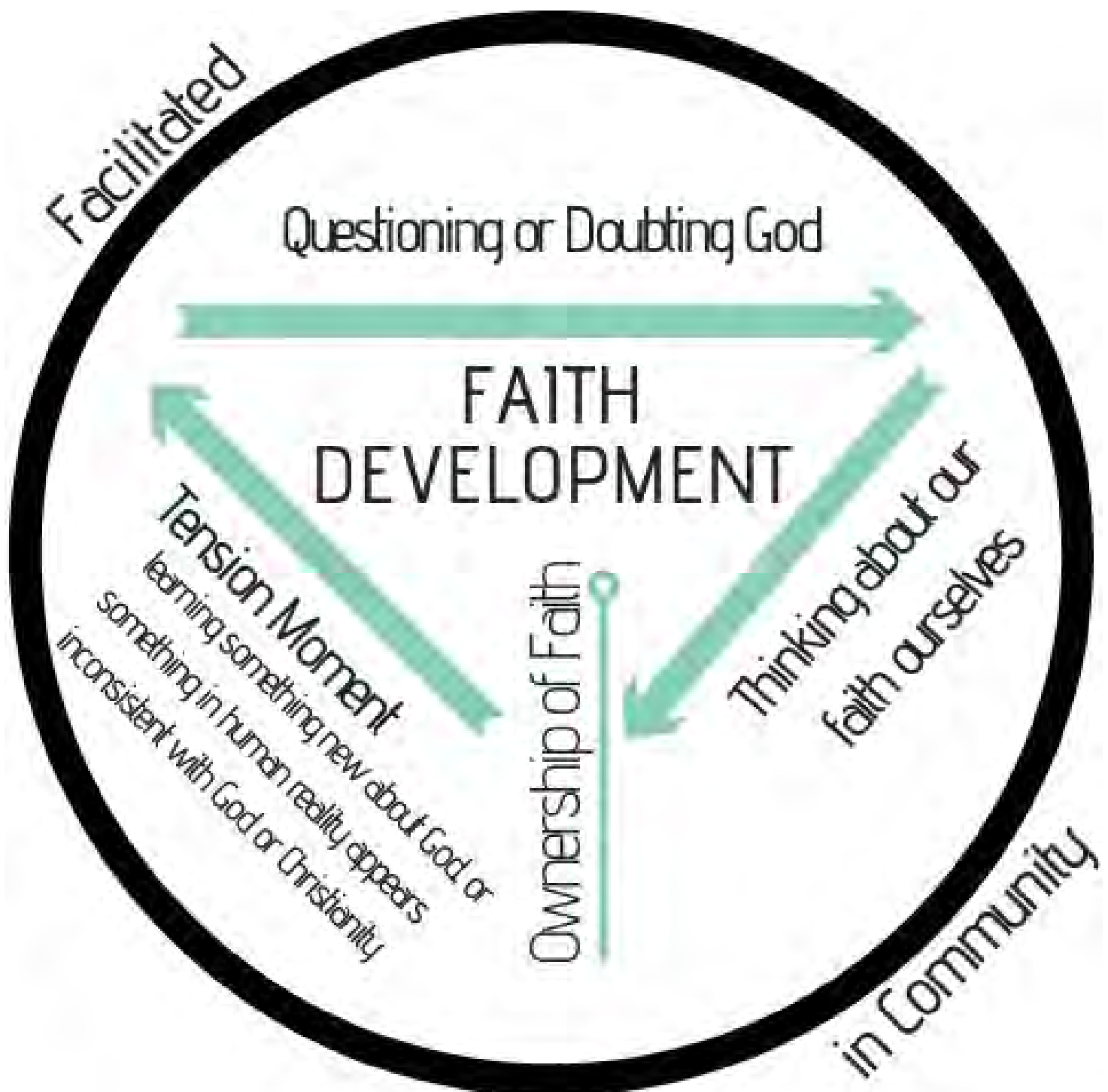
Heavenly Father, thank you for all that we have learnt about you and how you have created us to live. We praise you for how you have revealed yourself to us in your word, that is amazing and we are so glad that we can learn about you through that. Help us to understand and explore when we don't have a simple answer to the questions that are in us. Lord help us to continue to follow you. We believe, help our unbelief. As we grow up, help us to keep bringing our questions to you and other Christians. Help us to keep pursuing discipleship in each question and exploring more of your truth. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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## Model Discussion

I have created a model considering some of the themes which we have talked about. Examine this together and consider whether you agree with what is shown or if you can come up with a better way of showing what happens when we ask questions.





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## Commitment

As you finish this series, you could finish together making a commitment as a group for how you will continue to go on together.

You could make up one together as a group or allow them to make a personal commitment. Alternatively, you can use the suggested response together.

“We agree to give each other and ourselves permission to doubt. We agree to encourage curiosity and celebrate questions that we have about faith as we grow. We agree to pursue God with our questions and trust His character when we don’t get the answers we want. We agree to grow in discipleship together understanding that we may never be doubt free but we can commit ourselves to uphold one another in faith as a community. By God’s grace and mercy we ask for his power to keep these commitments.”

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## PARENTS / GUARDIAN GUIDE

We want to equip you as your young people are exploring big questions of faith and doubt in their parish youth group. We hope that this leads to your young person coming home and continuing to explore their questions with you. So, we have put together a few ideas and resources to encourage you and help you feel supported to continue the conversations as a family.

We would love to encourage you to embrace your role as a parent or guardian in developing your child's faith no matter what age they are.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

As leaders in the church, we want to encourage you to keep pursuing this for your young people. In the moments that you have with your children, to teach them, talk with them, share your questions with them as you help them be honest about theirs.

Some practical advice, which was also given to us as leaders regarding young people's questions, takes possible responses which you can use. As your young people share questions about faith with you, you can respond by thanking them for sharing the question. This allows them to be heard and know that asking questions is ok. You can say that you don't know what the answer to their question is, but that you could explore it together. This is a great way to show them that you respect their question enough to spend time considering it together.

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This quote below is to encourage you to keep engaging, keep sharing even when you think your young person may not want you to;

“Most adolescents in fact still very badly want the loving input and engagement of their parents—more, in fact, than most parents ever realize. They simply want that input and engagement on renegotiated grounds that take seriously their growing maturity and desired independence. All too often, however, parents misinterpret their teenager’s signals about renegotiated relationships as simple demands to be left alone and, for whatever reasons, they readily comply. So just at a time when teenagers most need engaged parents to help them work out a whole series of big questions about what they believe, think, value, feel, are committed to, and want to be and become, in many cases, their parents are withdrawing from them.”

(Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults, by Dr. Christian Smith, page 284).

We would recommend reading this article. It is an article written for youth leaders but with lots of helpful direction to fostering and responding to questions from young people in the home:

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

The article below talks to parents about sharing your faith with your young people:

<https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/showing-your-own>

From your Parish Youth Leaders:

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Opportunities for Facilitating Questions:

#### 1. Mentoring

If there are one or two young people with lots of questions you might want to pair them up with a youth leader or an adult from the parish. They can meet up and discuss questions and read through the Bible together.

#### 2. Question Box

As part of your regular youth meetings you can include a question box so young people can anonymously place a question into the box at any time and leaders can discuss it with the group. The aim would be to allow young people to understand how valid their questions are and being more confident to ask them within discussions. You could open this up to the parish too to encourage questions from adult members.

#### 3. Polls!

You could use a poll to ask the young people what they think the answer to a select group of questions are. You could do this around a room using separate stations or using an online tool like <https://www.polleverywhere.com>.

### Online Resources for young people to explore:

Be Thinking: <https://www.bethinking.org/>

This website has a huge amount of information on big questions around faith, helpfully comparing beliefs in Christianity to other faiths as well as the big beliefs about who God is.

Fevr: <https://fevr.net/>

This website has a huge range of blog posts and videos from a Christian perspective. Why not encourage your young people to go here and search about doubt.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Book Resources:

The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family by Kara Powell

This book comes under the Fuller Youth Institute and their research around helping young people have faith that will last. This book is written for parents or guardians hoping to instill a faith that lasts for their young people, with lots of practical tips and based on research.

Can I Ask That? Resources by Fuller Youth Institute

These are youth group resources based on the Sticky Faith research. There are two books following this research which are excellent. I would recommend them to mature young people generally 14 years old and up. It goes through big questions about God and faith allowing exploration without simplified answers.

The Reason for God by Tim Keller

For those young people who are looking to consider the main aspects of faith, critically reasoned and expertly discussed Keller leads readers through what faith can look like.

Firsthand by Ryan and Josh Shook.

A book for young people who have grown up in church wanting to explore what it means to have their own faith, developing it themselves. Written by children of a pastor and ready to explore what their faith means to them.

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## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

### Big Question Night Resource

As mentioned one of the follow-on events which could be run from these sessions could involve the wider church family or just be focused around supporting young people and young adults with their questions.

Arrange a time which would suit your young people and adults to attend.

Gather together questions in advance, either through slips of paper which can be left in a box. Alternatively, you might want to allow people to submit questions to a designated email address or phone number. You will want to decide whether people can submit questions anonymously or if you will encourage people to leave their information. By asking for a name along with a question means that the question can be followed up but ideally just reading out the question only in a public event.

I would recommend you begin by praying and introducing the event as an opportunity to explore our faith and big questions together. With this type of event, I would recommend explaining that it isn't about coming to get a perfect, right answer. We want to encourage discussion of questions as a church family and explore the issues together. This will take pressure off your panel and give people the right expectation.

Discuss how you want to facilitate questions and their discussion. It might be that you have a panel at the front of your clergy and mature Christians who can share their perspectives.

You could also run the event by allowing for small group discussion with mature adult facilitators at each table. This could allow for more specific questions to be discussed or for more participation from those attending.

You can conclude by praying together and offering the opportunity to decide if questions or discussions need to be followed up in another context.