

ARE YOU

THERE, GOD?

Three Bible Studies about

- The Existence of God
 - The Resurrection
 - God's Care for Us
-

TROPICAL STUDIES

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TOPICAL STUDIES

ARE YOU THERE, GOD, AT ALL?

OBJECTIVE: The point of this lesson is to explore the reasons we believe in God, the reasons we believe He exists. This would be a good outreach session, but it will also strengthen believers. It will soothe their unspoken doubts, give them evidence for their beliefs, and may provide them with more boldness to share their faith.

OPENING: This segment is almost all discussion, and is best done in the following way:

As a large group...

1. Read these two situations. (*Note: These letters are quoted from Campus Life magazine and are actual letters written by students.*) Ask the students how they would respond to/advise these students. Have them write their answers in the appropriate box on their handout.

- "I have a friend who is an atheist. She doesn't believe in God, she says, because there are so many different religions in the world and any of them might be true. What can I tell her?"
- "I've got doubts about God. What should I do?"

2. Corporately, brainstorm and discuss reasons NOT to believe in God. Perhaps list them as the students brainstorm, encouraging them to write down others' answers on their handout.

3. Discuss reasons TO believe in God, following the same procedure as before.

In small groups...

Creatively divide the group, instructing them to complete the "On Your Own" section. Each small group should have a leader who is prepared to engage the students in conversation and prepped with the T/F statements coming up.

1. Let the students answer this multiple choice question: *How sure are you that there is a God -- 100% 75% 50% 25% 10%?*

2. Answer and discuss the two true/false questions:

TRUE or FALSE: *If you could prove God existed, everyone would believe in Him.*

Have the students give and discuss their answers. Then read Romans 1:19-21.

TRUE or FALSE: *It is possible to go through life really wanting to know God, but not finding Him.* After discussing answers, read Jeremiah 29:13-14.

BODY: Come back together and teach the meaning and implications of the two passages your students read in their small groups, using the main points below mixed with your own illustrations and insight.

Romans 1:19-21 *Because you can know the invisible God exists through the visible things He has made, ignorance is never an excuse. The key to increasing our awareness of Him, however, is to be quick to admit He does exist when we see signs of His control, giving Him the credit and gratitude only He deserves. Remember -- light acknowledged increases light; light refused increases darkness.*

Jeremiah 29:13-14 *Finding God starts when we exhibit a desperate attitude and a humble spirit. Our search cannot be ritualistic or a matter of "going through the motions." It must contain the crucial element of a whole-hearted, singularly-focused mission: passion!*

Plus, present your **Top Ten Reasons to Believe in God**. The list is below, but you may want to put some meat on the bones. A solid source on this is the article *Is There A God?* by Marilyn Adamson. It is available on-line at www.leaderu.com/everystudent/isthere/is there2.html or a hard copy may be obtained from *Every Student's Choice* at (407) 826-2500. Additionally, you may want to look at these books: *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell; *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell; *Know Why You Believe* by Paul Little; *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. Other apologetic resources can be found at www.carm.org.

TOP TEN REASONS WHY I BELIEVE IN GOD:

10. I believe in lots of things that I can't see.
9. NOT believing is too risky.
8. Two Words: ANSWERED PRAYER.
7. The improbability of mere "chance" being the explanation for life's characteristics.
6. Humankind's inherent sense of right and wrong cannot be biologically explained.
5. The Bible.
4. Jesus Christ.
3. The complexity of our universe.
2. Universal belief in God.
1. I have personally experienced God. (Give your testimony here.)

CONCLUSION: Using your testimony, wrap up this lesson with a strong appeal to join the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ. John 3:16, though it's a familiar verse, contains the key word -- believe -- and would be a great place to finish. Give interested students a chance to respond to God's call in their life.

ARE YOU THERE GOD, AT ALL?

Here's What I'd Say ...

Here's What I'd Say ...

Reasons NOT to believe in God: _____

Reasons TO believe in God: _____

ON YOUR OWN ...

"How sure are you there is a God?" (circle one)

10% 25% 50% 75% 100%

" _____ " T F

" _____ " T F

Romans 1:19-21

"Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Jeremiah 29:13,14

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you.' declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.'"

ARE YOU THERE, GOD, OR ARE YOU DEAD?

OBJECTIVE: This lesson is about the resurrection and the evidences for it. Because many Christians often harbor hidden doubts that can cripple their spiritual lives, a positive presentation of these truths can free them from the shackles of their doubts, deepening their relationship with Jesus and helping them become more confident to share Him with others.

OPENING: Collect some tabloids with way out /ridiculous cover stories and discuss the actual evidence in the articles for the validity of the event. Have them write their "craziest and most ridiculous" story on their handout, and have some share what they wrote. As the humorous interaction comes to a close, transition by saying something like, "Does the resurrection of Jesus seem like just another unlikely event or superstition or legend? Do you think some people look at it that way?" As you begin to draw their attention towards the topic, you may want to pique interest with these amazing points about the resurrection:

- With all the talk these days about afterlife, near-death experiences, and paranormal phenomenon, and with the glut of entertainment about the supernatural, the resurrection may not seem unique, but it is! Imagine a man being dead for 3 days and then getting up and coming back to life in his physical body totally on his own. That is what Jesus did!
- Paul says in I Corinthians 15 that the resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith.
- The resurrection was such a big deal that it changed the day of worship (from Saturday to Sunday) and it started one of our biggest holidays — Easter.

BODY: Give and explain the Top Ten Evidences For the Resurrection. You may want to make a transparency of this list to aid you as you talk through it, encouraging the students to follow along on their printed handout. Additional information to explain the evidence can be found in Evidence That Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell, or in an article by McDowell at www.leaderu.com.

Broken Roman Seal
Empty Tomb
Large Stone Moved
Roman Guards Go AWOL
Graveclothes
Jesus' Appearances Were Confirmed
Hostile Witnesses
The Correct Tomb Was Visited
Jesus Really Did Die
The Body Was Not Stolen
The Disciples' Lives

Once you've talked through the evidences with them corporately, engage the students in the following exercises:

1. Split into groups and have the students discuss which evidences they found most helpful or convincing. Which were the hardest to understand? (They can jot notes on their handout.)
2. Take turns reading verses in the resurrection account in Luke 24 (on handout). Ask: *How do you think the disciples felt when they realized that Jesus was alive?* Brainstorm the various emotions they may have felt (on handout).
3. What difference can it make to YOU that Jesus is alive? Let the students brainstorm possible answers, then read and discuss the implications of these verses (on handout):
 - *Hebrews 7:25* He lives and intercedes for us.
 - *I Cor. 15:18* Since Christ was raised from the dead, there is hope for our loved ones who have passed away.
 - *I Cor. 15:20-22* Christ's resurrection guarantees our resurrection.
 - *I Cor. 15: 42-44* Christ's resurrection assures us that we will receive a spiritual body.

NOTE: There are other implications about the resurrection in Scripture as well. Feel free to find a few of your own, starting with Hebrews 2:14-18.

CLOSING: Wrap up with a time of REFLECTION and RESPONSE (on handout), asking each student to write one or two concepts they learned in this study, followed by a prayer indicating how they wish to respond to God in light of what they have learned. In essence, encourage them to *nail down an area of their life they need the living Christ to help them with*. Perhaps have them write this area on a small piece of paper and trade with a friend, mutually agreeing to pray for one another all week. Or have them all turn it into you, assuring them you'll be praying for them daily. In return, jot a note to each student on the back of his/her request and mail it to them during the week as a visible reminder of your prayer promise and unconditional love.

ARE YOU THERE GOD, OR ARE YOU DEAD?

"The craziest and most ridiculous story I've ever read about goes like this ..."

Read Luke 24:1-12

"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Top 10 Evidences For The Resurrection:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

IN YOUR GROUP

Most convincing evidences ...

Emotions the disciples must have felt ...

Read and brainstorm implications from the following verses...

BRAINSTORM

Hebrews 7:25 _____

I Cor. 15:18 _____

I Cor. 15:20-22 _____

I Cor. 15:42-44 _____

Hebrews 2:14-18 _____

REFLECTION

"1 or 2 concepts I have learned are ..."

RESPONSE

"The Holy Spirit is leading me to respond by ..."

YLC Leader's Guide

By Richard Jones & Todd Stiles

ARE YOU THERE, GOD, OR DON'T YOU CARE?

OBJECTIVE: The point of this lesson is to give our students a proper understanding of God's shepherding nature and unconditional love. When applied, this knowledge can help our students in times of loneliness, hurt, and despair, giving them a confident and calm disposition towards others because of the character of God.

OPENING: On a chalkboard or overhead, draw a chart with two columns, much like what is on their handout. Ask the students to brainstorm problems that exist in the world, both global and personal. After you fill up one side, ask the students to share attributes of God and list them in the other column. Have them follow along with you on their handout. Ask your students: "If God is really all these things we listed, then why do these problems also exist?"

BODY: If possible, have the students complete the remainder of the front side of their handout in small groups, with each group having a leader that can adequately engage them in conversation.

1. Have the students finish these two statements:

- ♦ "I'm not sure about God's care for me when..."
- ♦ "I really feel God's care when..."

You could draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper and put the responses in 2 different columns: "Doubt God's Care" and "Feel God's Care."

2. Read the following situations (one at a time) and have the students discuss how they would respond to this person. What advice or help could they give?

- ♦ "I wish I could say that I believe in Jesus and that He loves me, but I no longer believe that. I've been through a lot of tragedy in my family, and now I find myself wondering if God even exists. If God loves me, why doesn't He show it?"
- ♦ "I was sexually, physically, and emotionally abused by my father when I was young. I've been in counseling for a long time, but I still can't stop being angry about this. I want to know where God was when I was being abused. Why didn't He make my dad stop? I grew up feeling hopeless and helpless and believing God didn't care about me. Now I can't trust God. I can't turn to Him for help. I begged for His help before and it never came. It isn't enough to hear God cares, or that He really was there, because I feel the effects of my abuse much more than I have ever felt God's help. I want to know why God let this happen to me."

3. Bring the group back together and study **Psalm 23**, using the following help and insight. Read each section and discuss the corresponding questions.

Verses 1-3 How did David describe the Lord? David said, "I have everything I need." Can you say that? Why or why not? How did God help David? How has God guided you through difficult times? David spoke of a shepherd and a sheep. How would you picture your relationship with the Lord?

Verse 4 What were David's fears (most commentators think David wrote this psalm when he was being pursued by Absalom)? What are some of your fears? How hard would it be for you to say, "I will not be afraid."? How can you follow David's example in dealing with your fears? How far does God's guidance and protection reach?

Verses 5-6 What did the Lord give to David? What do you think David meant when he said that his cup overflowed? How did David feel about his future? How does this passage encourage you to face the future?

4. Do a responsive reading of **Psalm 23** as part of a worship time (Use a modern translation that is not rote to the students), but share its background first as a way to set the tone and atmosphere for the responsive reading. It may have been written in response to a question David was asked, such as "Is this really what following Jehovah is all about?" For instance, imagine you are one of King David's followers. You have fled with him from his own son Absalom. Though this is the mighty, highly-revered, godly king of Israel, you are sitting with him around a campfire with a rag-tag group of the faithful. You have traded the royal palace for the wilderness. "David, what is God doing?" you might ask. Imagine King David looking into the fire, lost in thought, possibly about his boyhood days. When he answers you, he simply says, "God is shepherding me. Through it all, I know He loves me."

5. Share the 3 assurances that David gave in Psalm 23, confirming to your students that whatever happens in their lives, they can be assured of three things:

- ♦ "I shall not want" - God is in control of my **needs**
- ♦ "I fear no evil" - God is in control of my **fears**
- ♦ "I will dwell with the Lord forever" - God is in control of my **future**

When we understand that God is shepherding us through our lives, we can go through tough times with these assurances. In light of this truth, have your students write the things for which they need help and prayer in the columns that pertain to those issues. Some will fit into all three; others in only one. They will use this list for their prayer time in the closing.

CLOSING:

Lead your students in a silent prayer time. Have them pray about their needs ("I shall not want"), their fears ("I fear no evil"), and their future ("I will dwell"). Close with a corporate prayer.

PSALM 23

- vs 1-3 "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."
- v 4 "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."
- vs 5-6 "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

MY NEEDS	MY FEARS	MY FUTURE



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