

Overview

Intro to all Studies

These are NOT studies of Dear Bob! They are based on issues that the book highlights - **leaving home, being single and doubting the existence of God.** They are designed to be used with young people aged 14+: church youth groups and 6th school/Uni CUs (the study which is an exception to this is 'leaving home'. This is most suited to young people who are about to leave home or who have recently left home. Perhaps this session could be done in the 1st semester of a year, with the older students sharing their experiences of 'leaving home' and even giving advice!).

For each study there are 3 printable sheets - one for the group leader, one for your group during the session, and one for the group to take away with them. It is all for YOU to use just as you please. All groups differ - ages, ability, likes/dislikes, background, etc. Some may have a mixture of church and unchurched, and so on. You know what suits your group best, so just adapt away!

Have fun...!



Some further comments on how to use these studies:

dearbob-bit:

Options - read it out yourself, get one of group to read, just refer to it and summarise. (You might also be able to think of a suitable topical film clip, or clip from a music video, that will also help to introduce the issue in question.)

intro-bit:

There are tick charts or scenario sheets to hand out to your group to get them thinking about the subject - the feedback from them might steer the emphasis you place on certain issues later in the session. For example, when doing - 'leaving home', if the feedback from the tick chart reveals that many in your group are freaked out about having to make their own (important) decisions when they leave home - worried they might make big mistakes... when you do the bible-bit you might focus mainly on the fact that Abraham made mistakes when he left home, but he always put God first, and God didn't dump him for messing up - he bailed him out and continued to love and help him, etc.

bible-bit:

Options - read it out yourself, get one of group to read, type it up pretty big and stick it somewhere prominent, so it can be seen clearly by all throughout the session. You are given a bit of an 'intro' bit, to read out, or to recreate in your own style!

Arrange your group into pairs (or 3's/4's, etc) ensuring that each 'pair' has a Bible. The questions in this bit can then be given either to all pairs, or you could give different questions to different pairs.

so-what?!-bit:

This will generally involve getting your group to think back to their tick charts/scenarios and relate how they think/feel about the subject to what they've read about in the Bible passage. Use the handout to help prompt them, if necessary, but let them do most of the talking!

extra-weeks:

Sometimes the initial session might raise issues/ thoughts/concerns from some in your group, that they would like to discuss in further detail. For example, you might find that during the session on 'leaving home' a lot of the group express that they have particular problems being tempted by alcohol (!). You might then want to look at this further over the following 2-4 weeks.

This 'extra-weeks' section also includes suggestions of types of people you might like to get to 'visit' your group for a question and answer type thing. For this, get your group to come up with questions the week before. This ensures that they get THEIR questions/concerns addressed, and don't suffer at the hands of what we assume they want/need to know! Also make it clear that if anyone wants to submit questions to you in private during the week, that is OK too. Make the whole 'questioning' thing as creative as possible... write questions out on separate pieces of paper... attach paper clips... get group members to 'fish' them out using a magnet on piece of string... or whatever! If the visitor in question is unable to come to your group... go to them... take a camcorder! You could then play back the answers to your group's questions in stages, giving the group a chance to discuss what's being said.

extra bible-bit:

This is for use in the extra weeks.

books:

See the 'lynx' page on www.dearbob.com for general web sites and books. Mentioned on the leader's notes for each study will be further suggestions of those that specifically relate to that issue.

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Scripture
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God Who?!

(Doubting the existence of God) leader's notes

The Study

stuff:

Pens, 1 tick sheet per group member, bibles (enough for 1 per 'pair'), Dear Bob book, video clip or similar (optional), main verse written out big (optional), books to lend to group (optional).

dearbob-bit:

Check out pages 11-12... Jude gets cross and confused about what she believes and why... and invents some 'expressive' emails to people from her past! (This excerpt is printed on the handout).

intro-bit:

Hand out tick sheets ('200% sure') to get them thinking about the subject. Give them a couple of mins to complete, then spend a few mins doing feedback.

bible-bit:

Have someone read out... John 20:19-29 (in a modern version).

"You might think that 'doubting Thomas' is a bit pathetic... fancy him doubting that Jesus had come back from the dead - what a loser! But hang on just a minute... what about when the sandal's on the other foot? Have you ever doubted God - that he's real? If not, then that's fine - it's not a compulsory phase to go through! But if yes... then it's time to have a peek at the world of Tom..."



(please read the 'stuh-dee - intro to all studies' page before you read this!)

Arrange your group into pairs (or 3's/4's). Split these questions between your 'pairs':

Was it reasonable for Tom to demand such physical, visual evidence of the resurrection of Jesus?

Previous to seeing the risen Jesus, do you think he'd EVER believed or understood that Jesus was God?

What happens to his view of God after he's seen Jesus?

Do you think Jesus minds the fact that Tom has doubted him?

so-what?!-bit:

Have a feedback time on the above activity...

Ask group to think back to the tick sheets - have they any further thoughts on these, in the light of John 20? What are the main things they've picked up from the passage, that relate to doubting God's existence?

Use the 'handout' (don't give it out yet) to draw out the relevant points from the passage... but let them do most of the talking!

Don't forget to give out the handouts now that you've reached the end of the session!

books:

Questions of Life
by Nicky Gumbel

Challenging Issues
by Nicky Gumbel

Where is God?
by Selwyn Hughes

extra-weeks:

Possible visitors for question/answer session:

a Christian who's been through 'doubt' but worked through it, and has come out the other side!

You could also use the quotes from the 'y's werds' or 'da teem' pages from dearbob.com to spark off discussion on the subject of 'doubting God'.

Possible follow-up topics::

- back to basics about God, the Bible, etc.
- hard questions about life - suffering, science, other religions, etc



extra bible-bit:

Psalm 13 - a prayer for God to be near.

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200% sure...?

OK, so what do we REALLY know is real/factual/truth?

Please circle each statement that you're at least 200% sure of:



Simon Cowell will never win 'Britain's Got Talent'

The Pope will never marry

Tuesday comes after Monday

David Beckham will always be rich

Jesus had 12 disciples

God exists

Have you ever doubted God - that he's really there... that all this Christianity stuff is real?

If yes... what do you think prompted these doubts - tick those that apply:

- Hard questions that you couldn't find decent answers to (suffering/science/other religions, etc)
- Seeing Christians you thought were all 'sorted' either lose their faith and have doubts, or mess up - some big unmentionable sin. Not feeling you can trust them any more - if they don't believe in or obey God, then why should you?
- Some kind of suffering/tragedy - death in the family, depression/ illness, etc.
- You changing - possibly due to change of location/lifestyle/friends, etc.
- Other?

If no...

Do you think you'd pack your bags for Atheist-ville at the 1st sign of doubts entering your mind, or would you stick with it? (Just choose 'pack' or 'stick'!)

- Pack
- Stick

What do you think would be the thing most likely to effect your level of faith, or cause you to doubt in some way. Number these points 1 to 5 in order of likelihood:

- Hard questions that you couldn't find decent answers to (suffering/science/other religions, etc)
- Seeing Christians you thought were all 'sorted' either lose their faith and have doubts, or mess up - some big unmentionable sin. Not feeling you can trust them any more - if they don't believe in or obey God, then why should you?
- Some kind of suffering/tragedy - death in the family, depression/illness, etc.
- You changing - possibly due to change of location/lifestyle/friends, etc.
- Other?



God who?!

What can we REALLY be 200% sure of:

- that David Beckham will always be rich?
- that Simon Cowell will never win 'Britain's Got Talent'?
- that the Pope will never marry?
- that God really exists?

Thur 23 Sept

... Is it poss that I'd never really believed in God in the 1st place?

Yeah, course I'd believed in God... well, think so... hmmm. Maybe. Probably. Oh... sorry... goodnight.

12:07am Can't sleep. Getting quite cross (understatement of the millennium) with several people, all at once. Going to invent some emails to help me... errrr... organise my thoughts (vent my anger)...

To: ma&pa@cityofboredom.com
Subject: Brainwashing

Mum and Dad why did you brainwash me into becoming a Cn, and not let me decide for myself?

To: jim@indrivingseat.com
Subject: Dictating

Jim, why did you dictate my feelings and beliefs to me, without letting me stop to think it all through?

To: homechurch@wackyland.com
Subject: HUH?

Pastor Vic, all that leaping up and down and speaking in tounques and stuff you encouraged me to participate in, what was that all about? God? Me? The church? Loonies Anonymous?

To: libs@wildchild.com
Subject: Chucking up and chucking in

Libs, why are you expecting me to chuck it all in and follow you in your quest for lads and liquor? How do you expect me to cope with more than 1 Dry B per evening?'

(taken from 'Dear Bob')

'Does God exist? This subject is relevant to every single person on the face of this planet! At some point or another every one of us needs to accept or reject the truth of God's existence. If you have ever doubted the existence of God you need to know that you are not alone in your thinking... "phew, huge sigh of relief!"'

(Mark, aged 23, director wljw.org)

Check out John 20:19-29 - OK, so we all know about 'doubting Thomas'... or do we? It might be fun to have a bit of a laugh at poor old Tom, but what about if/when we find ourselves in his situation? Who's laughing then, eh? So let's look at what happened, put ourselves in Tom's sandals, and try to get our head round it all...

Tom insisted on visible, physical, tangible, evidence that Jesus had been raised from the dead. We might find ourselves demanding the same kind of thing - "God, if you're really there... take away the cancer", "God, if you're real - make my girlfriend a Christian" etc. He MIGHT give us such signs... but he might not. **Faith is believing in what we can't see, hear, touch, etc.** He COULD send us one of his angels, at the 1st sign of our doubting, to reassure us that all is well... but it wouldn't require much faith/trust on our part, which is what God longs to have from us.

Tom went through change, from when he was with Jesus before the crucifixion, to the point when he doubted the resurrection. His feelings about Jesus changed. His level of commitment changed. Perhaps his view of God even changed. But **Jesus didn't change** - coz he's like that! So don't think that God's gonna get moody if you start to question the church, the Bible, or even if he even exists or not... **he'll wait for you, love you, allow you your space to work things out**, just like Jesus did with Tom.

Was it possible that Tom had an **ulterior motive** for saying he had doubts about Jesus? Might it have been that he was thinking over how much he'd have to 'do' in terms of evangelism, and how he'd be persecuted for the rest of his life... IF Jesus really was God? It might be worth us examining our doubts for such motives... what if it'd be more convenient for us if God didn't exist... coz we want to go out with a non-Christian... coz we want to earn lots of money and do what we want with it... coz we don't want people to laugh at us for being a Christian... and so on? Let's make sure that if we DO doubt, they are all **honest doubts** - genuine confusion about God, and **not just 'cop-out' doubts**, to make life easier for us, or to justify doing something wrong.

Make sure your faith in God, is just that - YOURS, and not your parent's, your friend's or your youth group leader's, etc. Question all the 'bits' of Christianity as you go along - make sure you understand it, to whatever extent is satisfactory for YOU.

If you find yourself doubting God... be a Tom- he didn't chuck it all in at the 1st sign of something wrong... he stuck with it - went to find out for himself. Get back to the basics about God... or, if you're uncomfortable thinking about God... think about 'right and wrong' and take it from there. Ask older/wiser Christians to tell you if they've ever doubted, and how they 'came through' it. Don't expect to get all the answers straight away - take it one step at a time. Tom 'came through' his doubting phase, and seemed to

find more faith and understanding about Jesus than before (v28). So, **stick with it... you might find God is nearer than you think!**

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'It's important to have a faith of your own and not that you inherited. [Uni] can be a confusing and lonely time. My hardest times have been when I've struggled with my faith and living the Christian life. However through those times God has taught me loads, and made my faith stronger.'

(Rach, aged 24)