

Reproducible
Handouts
included

the top **13**
thirteen
questions
about
GOD

How can I know God exists?

Intense Discussions
For Youth Ministry

What is Salvation all about?

Group

How can I hear God communicate to me?

the top **13**
thirteen
questions
about
GOD

Intense Discussions
For Youth Ministry

Group
Loveland, Colorado



Group's R.E.A.L. Guarantee to you:

Every Group resource incorporates our R.E.A.L. approach to ministry—a unique philosophy that results in long-term retention and life transformation. It's ministry that's:



Relational

Because student-to-student interaction enhances learning and builds Christian friendships.



Experiential

Because what students experience sticks with them up to 9 times longer than what they simply hear or read.



Applicable

Because the aim of Christian education is to be both hearers and doers of the Word.



Learner-based

Because students learn more and retain it longer when the process is designed according to how they learn best.

**This is EARL.
He's R.E.A.L.
mixed up.
(Get it?)**

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”

—Matthew 10:16

The Top 13 Questions About God: Intense Discussions for Youth Ministry

Copyright © 1998 and 2002 Group Publishing, Inc.

2002 edition

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without prior written permission from the publisher, except where noted in the text and in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write Permissions, Group Publishing, Inc., Dept. PD, P.O. Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539.

Visit our Web site: www.grouppublishing.com

Credits

Contributing Authors: Bob Buller, Jan Kershner, Steve Saavedra, Amy Simpson, Michael D. Warden, and Paul Woods

Editor: Karl Leuthauser

Chief Creative Officer: Joani Schultz

Copy Editor: Janis Sampson

Art Director: Ray Tollison

Computer Graphic Artist: Randy Kady

Cover Art Director: Jeff A. Storm

Cover Designer: Lisa Chandler

Production Manager: Dodie Tipton

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Top 13 Questions About God: Intense Discussions for Youth Ministry

p. cm.

ISBN 0-7644-2426-2

1. God-Proof-Juvenile literature. I. Group Publishing.

BT107.S79 1998

268'433-dc21

98-5947
CIP

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02

Printed in the United States of America.

Contents

Introduction

We're Not Going to Lose Them Anymore	4
How to Use This Book	4
A Few Particulars.....	7

Discussions

1. How Can I Know God Exists?	8
2. Which Is Right: Evolution or Creation?	15
3. How Is Jesus Different From Mohammed and Buddha?.....	22
4. What Happened When Jesus Died on the Cross and Was Resurrected?.....	29
5. What Is Salvation All About?	35
6. Will God Forgive Any and Every Sin?	41
7. Why Would a Loving God Send People to Hell?.....	47
8. Why Does God Allow Suffering?	54
9. Who Is the Holy Spirit?.....	61
10. How Do Demons and Angels Influence My World?	68
11. How Was the Bible Written?	75
12. How Can I Understand the Bible and Apply It to My Life?.....	81
13. How Can I Hear God Communicate to Me?	88
Endnotes	95

Introduction

We're Not Going to Lose Them Anymore

"I was raised in the church, but there are just so many things about the Christian faith I find so unbelievable. How could a loving God send people to hell? Why does he allow so much pain on earth? There are millions of Muslims in the Middle East who believe in Allah with all their hearts. Are you going to tell me that they're all *wrong*?"

So many of the young adults in our youth groups return from their first year in the "real" world downcast and doubting. Ask anyone you know who grew up in the church and has fallen away from the Christian faith why he or she doesn't trust and believe in Jesus Christ. The person will either point to the behavior of Christians or to one of the questions found in this book. Is the message of the gospel so illogical? Is Christian morality and truth so stale and easily forgotten? Why are we losing the ones we have worked so hard to bring to Jesus?

Whether you're a youth pastor or a volunteer youth worker, your group must *prepare* for the philosophical onslaught that is soon to come. This book offers the opportunity to help your students grapple with the big questions of Christianity in a safe Christian environment. Christianity is not illogical, irrelevant, or untrue. The discussions in this book will help your group see how rational and vitally important Christianity is today. Use this book to prepare your group. We're not going to lose them anymore.

How to Use This Book

Before each meeting, photocopy the Christian perspective, the "Faith Challenge" page, and the "My Response" page for each person.

This book is designed to provide the "substance" of your meetings. You may want to begin your meeting with food, drinks, and fellowship. For the last ten minutes of the food time, have group members read the Christian perspective of the lesson and complete the journaling section that follows. If you don't have time to do this during your meeting, have group members complete the reading and journaling before the meeting. You might also want to suggest that everyone in your group memorize the Scripture following the journaling section before the meeting. But if you have time,

have group members memorize the Scripture during the meeting. Test each other on the Scripture throughout the meeting time.

Then use the rest of the lesson to lead discussion. Before you start discussion, you may want to set down some rules. You can come up with these as a group or use the following suggestions.

- Only one person in each group should be talking at any given time.
- You are welcome to disagree, but please don't argue or fight.
- Never attack a person for his or her opinion.
- Listen before you speak.
- It's OK to say "I don't know."
- If the leader changes plans or interrupts a discussion, be flexible.

Before the discussion, pray that God will help you understand and find his truth. Ask God to take your group where he wants it to go.

During your discussions, you may encounter difficult questions that no one in your group can answer. When this happens, encourage your students to investigate the questions through outside reading, prayer, studying Scripture, discussion with their pastor, discussion with their parents, or discussion with respected adults in your church. Make sure you follow up on the question the following week. It's OK to have questions about faith, but it's foolish to let the questions linger without a sincere attempt at finding accurate answers.

But sometimes it takes a considerable amount of time and study before you arrive at an answer that satisfies the question. As your students search and wait, help them remember the prayer that one man said to Jesus, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

“You can keep a faith only as you can keep a plant, by rooting it into your life and making it grow there.”¹

—Phillips Brooks

Phillips
Brooks

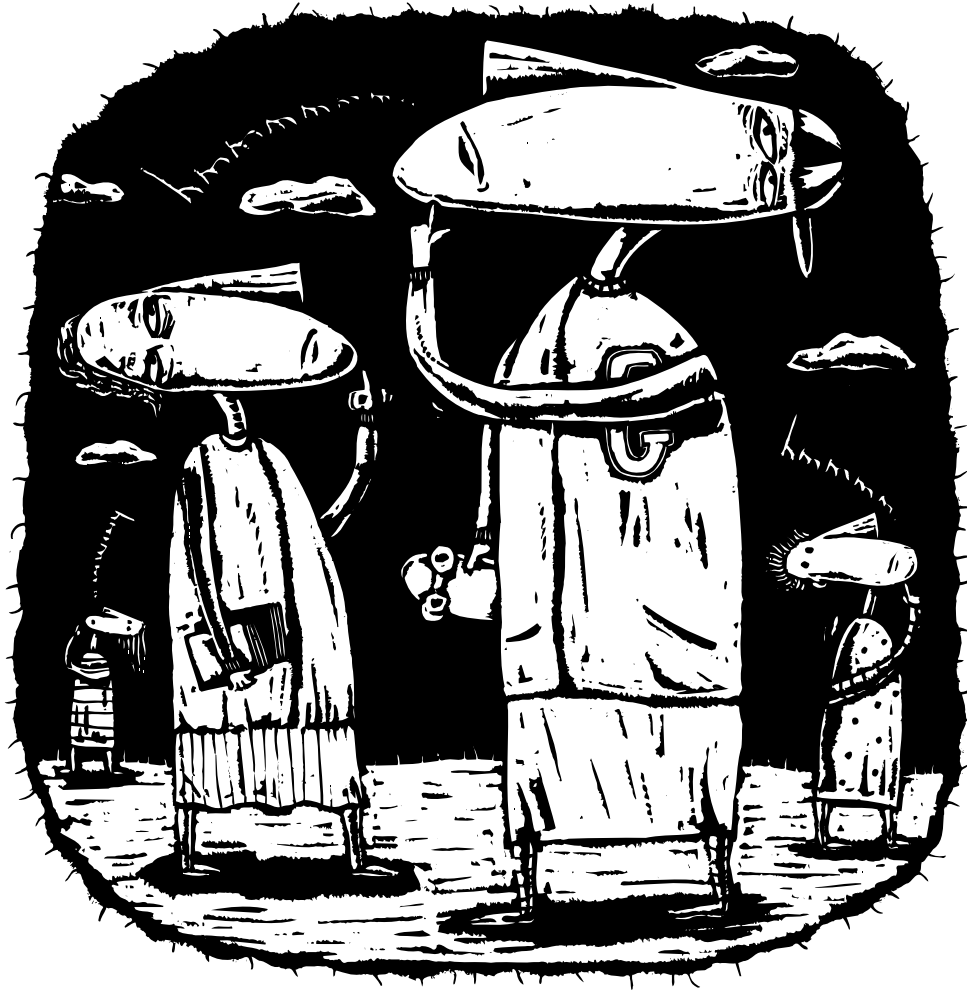
A Few Particulars

As you help people overcome the intellectual challenges they have regarding Christianity, some group members may want to become Christians or reaffirm their commitment to Christ. To help a person do this, consider using the following model.

- Admit that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness.
- Acknowledge that Jesus paid the price for your sins through his death.
- Ask God to forgive you for your sins.
- Tell God that you want him to take control of your life and that you give him control of your life.
- Thank God for forgiving you and making you his child.
- Tell someone about the steps you took and why you took them.
- Talk to your pastor about what it means to belong to a church.

If circumstances arise in your group that you feel are inappropriate or out of control, notify your pastor as soon as possible. If a group member reveals suicidal thoughts, physical or sexual abuse, or identifies himself or herself as a runaway, consult your pastor immediately.

It is our prayer that this book will help you and the members of your group come to truly know Jesus, to put your trust in him, and to come to an understanding of why you believe what you believe.



1. How Can I Know God Exists?

INDIVIDUAL WORK

One Christian Perspective to Think About

OK. This is a biggie. This issue is one that everyone deals with and that can pretty much determine the way you live every day.

So how can we know that God exists? We can't see or touch God. And sometimes we think we can't even see evidence of God's presence in the world. And for many of us, if we can't see, touch, and prove beyond all doubt that something exists, then sorry—it just doesn't exist.



Permission to photocopy this handout from *The Top 13 Questions About God* granted for local church use.
Copyright © Group Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539. www.grouppublishing.com

A lot of people have a lot to say on this subject. Christianity traditionally holds to three naturalistic arguments for the existence of God.

The cosmological argument—This argument basically says that God must exist because the universe exists. The universe around us must have a cause, and God is the cause—the most adequate explanation for the existence of the universe. Since something can't come from nothing, there must be a creator out there responsible for making the world. At the least, believing in God requires no more faith than believing the world came into existence in some other way. In fact, it takes less faith because it makes the most sense (see Genesis 1:1–2:3).

The teleological argument—This one goes beyond the *existence* of the universe, focusing on the *kind* of universe we live in. Our world and the creatures, systems, and structures in it are amazing. The genetic code in DNA molecules is incredibly complex. The balance of the earth in space is precisely what it needs to be to sustain human life. The food chain, the rotation of the earth, and the intricate systems of the human body all point to a designer who created the universe for a purpose. According to this argument, there must be a God who created the world we live in. It couldn't have come into being by chance (see Psalm 19:1-6).

The anthropological argument—This argument focuses on humanity and the way *we're* made. As you look around the universe, it should be obvious that humans have abilities, thoughts, and other attributes that the rest of creation doesn't have. One thing that makes humans unique is their longing to know who they are, why they're here, and where they came from. Humans also have a sense of right and wrong—a conscience. Humans form support groups, write, draw, start revolutions, commit suicide, read, calculate complex math formulas, and invent new technological tools. Our intricate makeup points to a God who has created humans in his image. We ourselves provide evidence of God's existence because we exhibit some of God's nature every day (see Psalm 139:13-16).

So can we prove beyond all doubt that God exists? Of course not. If we could, he wouldn't be much of a God because he would be subject to the time, space, and logic we live within. God is not material, or physical, as we are. God doesn't have the limitations of material form. The fact that God is a far superior being makes it necessary that we can't fully understand him.

Fortunately, God has chosen not to leave us totally in the dark about his existence or his character. God actively works in the world he has created and in the lives of people. God relates to us as creator, ruler, judge, deliverer, and Father (for more on this, see Genesis 1:3–2:25; 3:8-24; Deuteronomy 1:29-31; Acts 14:11-17; 1 Corinthians 4:4-5; and even Galatians 3:25-27). The fact that God does relate to us in personal ways helps to solidify our faith in his existence.



Nevertheless, belief in God requires faith, just as every other explanation of the universe's existence, the design of the universe, and the nature of humanity requires faith. But that faith can be based on logical arguments from what we know and see every day.¹

My Thoughts, Feelings, and Questions

Write your answers on the back of this paper.

- Has there ever been a time in your life when you questioned the existence of God? If so, what were the circumstances surrounding that time and what were your questions?
- If you've never questioned God's existence, how do you feel about your friends who have?
- Read John 1:1-5. What does this Scripture tell you about the existence of God and the existence of everything else?

Commit It to Memory

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."—John 1:1



QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT AS A GROUP

When everyone has read the Christian perspective and completed the journaling section, discuss these questions as a group.

- What are some things that seem to indicate that God doesn't exist?
- What do you think of the claim that if we could prove that God exists, he wouldn't be much of a God?
- What do you think it would take for everyone in the world to become completely convinced that God exists?
- Read Romans 1:18-25 and Psalm 19:1-6. How can we be certain of God's existence according to these Scripture passages?
- What are a few of the reasons people doubt the existence of God according to these verses?
- What does "futile" thinking look like today?
- Why do you think many people prefer gods they can see, feel, hear, and touch?
- What are some modern false gods?

SMALL-GROUP WORK

Give each student a copy of the "Faith Challenge" handout (p. 12). Ask youth to form small groups of three to five students. In their groups, have students read the challenging perspectives on the handout and discuss the questions that follow each one.

Jump-Start

If your group discussion needs a jump-start, read the following quotations and discuss the questions as a group.

"God is what man finds that is divine in himself. God is the best way man can behave in the ordinary occasions of life, and the farthest point to which man can stretch himself."²—Max Lerner

- Is there a limit to how much humans can improve?
- Can humans eventually become godlike?
- Can divinity and evil reside in the same being? If so, how do you think Lerner would explain the evil in people?

"We cannot get away from God, though we can ignore Him."³—James Elliott Cabot

- What are some of the ways people try to ignore God?
- Why do you think people are so eager to write God out of the equation of life?
- What would a godless society look like?

FAITH CHALLENGE

How Should Christians Respond to the Following Argument?

The concept of God is irrelevant because it has very little to do with liberating humanity from suffering, which is our greatest need as people. The way to reach this liberation is by following the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, a set of guidelines for right living. In Buddhist thought religious theories and theologies are meaningless. Believe in God if you wish—or don't. It really doesn't matter. As Gautama wisely teaches: "Let us avoid the confusing and controversial concept of God, of divinity, and let us immediately work toward the divination of humanity."⁴

- What do you think about the concept that all of us are our own gods?
- Do you agree or disagree with the claim that humans should work toward their fullest potential? Explain.
- Is God relevant to the suffering of humanity? Explain.
- Read Matthew 22:37-40. According to this passage, what's the purpose of our existence? How is this fundamentally different from the Buddhist understanding of life?

How Should Christians Respond to the Following Argument?

God is an obsolete idea that's no longer useful in a scientific world. Evolution has explained the processes that we once attributed to an unseen intelligence we erroneously called "God." The truth is that the only eternal thing in the universe is matter—not God. Matter has always existed. At one point, the matter that existed exploded in the big bang. This matter blew apart and spread throughout the universe. Eventually it cooled, forming suns, stars, planets, and moons. The matter that became the earth eventually formed the stuff of life—primitive life-forms. These life-forms began to evolve and develop into more advanced life-forms. After millions of years, they had evolved into plants, animals, and human beings. Life continues to evolve into higher forms, but the process is mostly undetectable because it takes so much time. This process of evolution is subject to laws and trends in the universe and does not require a supernatural being to guide it.

- Does the fact that there are natural laws in the universe (for example, the sun rises every morning) exclude the possibility of God's existence? Why or why not?
- Read Genesis 1:1–2:3. How does this creation story differ from the theory of evolution? How is it similar?
- What would you say to a friend who put his or her faith in evolution instead of God?
- Does the Bible address issues of science? Explain.
- Is it possible to believe in God and evolution at the same time? Explain.



Permission to photocopy this handout from *The Top 13 Questions About God* granted for local church use.
Copyright © Group Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539. www.grouppublishing.com

PAIR SHARE

Write the following questions on newsprint or a dry-erase board where everyone can see them.

Ask teenagers to form pairs and discuss the questions with their partners.

- Why do you think people question God's existence?
- Which of these reasons can you relate to personally, if any?
- Tell your partner about a time you were tempted to doubt God's existence and explain why.

Then think of things in which you see evidence of God's existence.

- Are there areas of your life (for example, your leisure time, your habits, and your thoughts) that have not fully come to terms with an ever-present, living God?

GROUP WORK

Pray by name for the people you know who are struggling with the question of God's existence.

Ask God to pursue them and reveal himself in a personal way.

CLOSING

Give each student a copy of the "My Response" handout (p. 14). Encourage youth to write out their prayers in response to God, using the prayer-starter on the handout. Then point out the action plans they can do in response to what they've learned in this lesson.

After time for personal prayer, you may want to finish the lesson with a group prayer.

My Response

Prayer

Dear God: Help me to be more aware of your existence and presence throughout the whole of life. Help me to...



ACTION PLANS

Try these ideas for putting what you've talked about into action.

- Take a walk through a park or a hike through the outdoors to ponder how God's glory is reflected in his creation.

- Keep a journal to record the times God has intervened in your life and made his presence known.

- If you intellectually doubt the existence of God, don't be afraid to discuss it with other people. Most people welcome such meaningful conversation. For example, engage in a heart-to-heart discussion with your leader and ask for more books on the subject.

- Be absolutely still and silent for five minutes and "listen" to God. God's not dead, but with all the noise in our lives God's voice is sometimes hard to hear. Consider using a Bible to help you listen.



Hard Questions. Solid Answers. Rock-Solid Faith.

the top **13** questions about **GOD**

Jesus didn't duck challenging questions. He didn't have to. And neither do your students.

Help students build a faith that can handle the tough questions. Starting with these:

How can I know God exists?

How is Jesus different from Mohammed and Buddha?

What is salvation all about?

Why would a loving God send people to hell?

How can I hear God communicate to me?

Which is right: evolution or creation?

Will God forgive any and every sin?

And six more faith-building questions. 13 questions in all.

In this book you'll find...

- 13 interactive, discussion-provoking lessons on tough questions youth leaders overwhelmingly chose as most pressing for their students.
- Reproducible student pages.
- Flexible format that will work in youth meetings, Sunday school, small groups or in parachurch ministry meetings.

Help your teens build a tough, lasting faith.

Formerly released by Group as **Student-Led Discussions: How Can I Know God Exists?**

www.grouppublishing.com

ISBN 0-7644-2426-2



9 780764 424267



Group

Printed in the U.S.A.

Youth Ministry/
Bible Studies



THIS IS A SAMPLE
The number of pages is limited.

Purchase the item for the complete version.

