

IS HE FOR REAL?



1. Match the word in the left column that you think matches the description in the right column.

☐ Agnostic	a. Isn't sure if there is a God or not
☐ Atheist	b. Believes in God, but not sure which one
☐ Theist	c. Believes that God doesn't exist

2. Put an arrow by the **three things** below that you think show that God does exist.

Music	Conscience	Science
Nature	Love	History
Babies	Evil	Disasters
Death	Stars in the sky	Feelings
The universe	Logic	Common sense

3. Do you **A (agree)** or **D (disagree)** with the following statements?

- ☐ Sometimes I doubt that God really exists.
- ☐ It would be better if God made himself more obvious.
- ☐ God is obvious but people aren't looking or don't care.

4. Check out **Psalm 53:1-4 & 6**. In your own words describe the problems of people who say there is no God.

Who is the one who answers the prayer of verse 6?

5. There are a lot of ways people can help those who doubt God's existence. What are **three positive ways** you could explain God's existence to people without turning them off about God or threatening them?

What would be **three negative ways**?

IS HE FOR REAL? [the existence of God—Psalm 53]

THIS WEEK

The idea of God's existence has been debated for centuries. Doubters and skeptics are found even among young teens. And then there are those who claim to believe but are actually practicing atheists—they may verbally acknowledge God's existence, but they act as if he isn't alive. This Talksheet is designed to spark thinking and discussion about the existence of God and their way of dealing with those who deny him.

OPENER

Stand by the light switch for this introductory discussion. Ask your students if they have ever seen electricity (none of them have!) Hit the light switch and ask if they are seeing electricity. Point out that they have never seen electricity but only the results of electricity. Ask how many believe in electricity. Ask how many have felt electricity. Use this as a starting point to show its similarity to their faith in God.

Another approach is to use the idea of gravity, again something they've never seen. Pick one of your students to help you illustrate this idea. Have this person lie on the floor with her arms under her back. Hold an egg over her head, and then tell your students that you have come to the conclusion that because you have never seen gravity, there is no such thing. You are now going to "prove" that gravity doesn't exist. Allow your victim to try to talk you out of dropping the egg by arguing that gravity does exist even if you can't see it—it's up to you whether or not you're convinced enough to not drop the egg!

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Take some time to talk about these phrases and what the words mean. Make sure that the students know the difference between an atheist (one who believes God doesn't exist) and an agnostic (one who isn't sure).
2. Which things most strongly support God's existence for your kids? Why? What other items would they choose that aren't on this list?
3. Did your kids agree or disagree with these statements? How do they feel about God's existence or his apparent silence? Talk about the ways God is apparent if people care to look—in the lives of others, through his presence in prayer, through his Word, and the like. Allow those with real doubts and questions to have them.
4. Take some time to talk about this description of the human heart. You may want to make a list of their responses on a whiteboard or poster board.

How is human vileness and corruption in evidence today? Have your students discuss examples. Point out the hope that has come to people through Christ's birth, death, and resurrection.

5. What do your kids think are positive—and negative—ways to explain God's existence to others? What is challenging about trying to prove that God is real? How would your kids respond if someone were to challenge their ideas and faith?

THE CLOSE

Summarize the points made about the foolishness of the human heart when it denies God. Point out that those who act as if God doesn't exist are just as guilty as those who profess he doesn't exist. Discuss the fact that there are solid reasons to believe in God, and that faith isn't the same as wishful thinking. Let the students know that it's common to have doubts. But doubts can be resolved by taking time to consider the wonders of God, our experience with him, and the inner voice that tells us he really does exist.

MORE

- You may want to have your kids search the Internet for evidence on the existence of God—or if that's too hard, maybe ask someone in your church or community who can prove the existence of God to speak to your group. Be sure that he or she keeps the material simple enough for your kids to understand. Ask your kids to think of questions to ask and be sure to debrief with your group.
- What other groups—including world religions and cults—are there that deny the existence of the God of the Bible? Some of your kids may have heard about these at school or in class. Wicca, New Age, Theosophy, Buddhism, Eastern cults, Confucianism, and Islam are just a few examples. For more information, check out the Cult Awareness & Information Centre Directory (www.caic.org.au/zentry1.htm) or the World Religions Index (<http://wri.leaderu.com>).

WORDS TO LIVE BY



1. Do you think each statement is **T (true)** or **F (false)**?
 - ___ The Bible could be God's Word.
 - ___ The Bible is an old book of myths and fables.
 - ___ The Bible has some of God's words in it.
 - ___ The Bible is God's Word.
2. What do you think? Pick **one** response to complete the sentence.
When people read the Bible, they should—
 - ☐ believe and follow only what their heart tells them to.
 - ☐ believe and follow only what their church or pastor tells them to.
 - ☐ study carefully, then obey what is clearly taught.
 - ☐ see its contents as suggestions rather than strict guidelines.
 - ☐ enjoy it as literature.
3. Many religions have their own holy books. Some groups have added to or taken away from what's found in the Bible. What would you say to someone who claimed to have a new and improved version of God's Word?
4. Check out the following verses and match each one with what it teaches.

Proverbs 30:5	God's Word is flawless.
Luke 11:28	The Word of God is like a sword that cuts to your heart.
2 Timothy 3:15-16	God told the writers what to write.
Hebrews 4:12	Those who hear and obey God's Word are blessed.
5. Why do you think some Christians spend little time reading Bible?
6. Which is true for you?
 - ☐ I read the Bible a lot.
 - ☐ I need to read the Bible more.
 - ☐ I am comfortable with how much I read the Bible.
 - ☐ I read the Bible, but I don't obey much of what it says.

WORDS TO LIVE BY [the Bible—Proverbs 30]

THIS WEEK

The writer of Proverbs tells people that every word of God is flawless. Human wisdom can't even come close to the incredible illumination that comes from God's word. Are your kids bored with the Bible? Do they think it dull and inapplicable to their lives?

Through this TalkSheet, your kids will discover that God provides people a refuge, a rule of instruction for living life, a love letter, and an instrument for touching the most private aspects of their lives—all packaged in pages of paper and ink.

OPENER

Bring in an instruction book for any device—from a computer, TV, microwave, radio, DVD player, or more. Ask your group how many of them (or their parents) actually read instruction books. How many tend to avoid them or only read them when they are stuck? Talk about how people can mess up their purchases when people fail to follow the instruction manuals. Compare this with the Bible—God's instruction manual for human beings. How do people mess up their lives by not following his word?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Take a poll of your group members to see how they responded. Discuss the various viewpoints on the authority of the Bible. Where have your kids learned about the Bible?
2. Ask for a few volunteers to share their responses. What does your group think? How should a person respond to the Bible, if they love and honor God?
3. How could your kids respond in this situation? Point out that the Bible has survived innumerable attacks, alterations, and other abuses—and still powerfully testifies to a risen Christ. Is it hard to defend the truth and authority of the Bible? Why or why not?
4. What does the Bible say about itself? You may want to read each verse with the group and discuss them. How does this information relate to the previous questions?
5. Why do your kids think this happens? Maybe because some fear that it's hard to understand, fear of seeing challenging commands from God, and so on. Have a few willing students share why they may have trouble spending time in the Bible, and share your struggles (if you have any) with regular Bible reading.

6. Ask your students to evaluate how seriously they take the Bible to be God's Word. Talk about ways to make the Bible easier to access for them—topical Bible discussions, devotional guides, and the like.

THE CLOSE

Point out that it's important to spend time reading about God and his word in the Bible. You may want to brainstorm and format at least one devotional plan that your kids could implement during the week. What realistic, tangible goal will they set for themselves? How much are they willing to commit to spending time with God? And can they come through on their commitment?

Brainstorm ways that your kids can get into the Bible. Recommend student versions of Bibles including the *Teen Devotional Bible* (Youth Specialties) or the *New Student Bible* (Zondervan). Encourage them to find a version of the Bible that works for them. If a typical NIV is too hard for them to understand, have them find a version that is easier to read. You may also want to suggest some study tools or have them check out some student Web sites (such as www.christianteens.net or www.teens4god.com) where your kids can download devotions, find information, and learn more about how to grow in their faith.

MORE

- You may want to consider doing an in-group Bible study with your group, or part of your group. There are a lot of tangible Bible resources out there for junior highers and middle schoolers, including the *Wild Truth* series. For more information on these resources, check out www.YouthSpecialties.com.
- There are quite a few stimulating, challenging Bible trivia games available. These are great ways to teach your kids while learning new stuff, too. Play one of these games with your kids or create a Bible trivia game with your group. Have them write their own questions based on the Bible. The game can be played at your next meeting or retreat. You can find helpful Bible trivia questions at www.Biblequizzes.com or www.bible-trivia.com.

HEART TO HEART TALK

1. Check the one prayer pattern listed below that describes you.

- ☐ I hardly ever pray.
- ☐ I pray but usually only at church or before meals.
- ☐ I pray more than just at church and before meals.
- ☐ I pray quite a bit.
- ☐ I pray all of the time.

2. How satisfied are you with your prayer life?

- ☐ It's cool.
- ☐ It needs some improvement.
- ☐ It stinks.

3. **Y (Yeah)** or **N (nope)**? Have you ever—

- ___ Wondered if God was really listening when you prayed?
- ___ Felt especially close to God while praying?
- ___ Wondered if God really answers prayer?
- ___ Received an answer to a prayer request?
- ___ Not wanted to pray, but did so anyway?
- ___ Wanted to pray, but didn't know what to say?

4. Would you consider these statements to be **T (true)** or **F (false)**?

- ___ People who pray are generally happier than people who don't pray.
- ___ People who pray are better Christians than those who don't.
- ___ Prayer is a way to strengthen relationships with God and others.
- ___ God listens to some people's prayers more than others.
- ___ People can pray any time, anywhere—God always listens.
- ___ If I think my prayer might sound dumb, I won't pray.
- ___ God listens to adult prayers more than kids prayers.

5. Read **Hebrews 4:14-16** and write down one new thing you learned about prayer.



HEART TO HEART TALK [p r a y e r]

THIS WEEK

Prayer is an essential part of the Christian life! Your kids need to be encouraged to talk—and to listen—to God. Despite the importance of prayer, many teenagers spend very little time doing it, for a number of reasons. Maybe they don't know how to pray or what to ask for, or doubt if God listens. Use this TalkSheet to discuss prayer, its role in Christian growth, and how it brings people closer to God.

OPENER

Hand out a paper lunch bag, some small pieces of paper, a marker, and a pen or pencil to each member of the group. If you have a big group, you can split it into smaller groups and give each group a paper bag. Have your group members write prayer requests, short prayers, thanks, or anything else they'd like to say to God on some pieces of paper. Then have them put these papers inside the paper bags.

Now have each person (or group leader) write the word HEART on the outside of the paper bag. Point out that the bag represents each group member's heart. And inside is their thoughts and requests. Explain that God knows each person's heart and what's on their heart—including their fears, anxieties, sorrows, and joys. He is their friend and he wants to help them with their struggles and worries. Prayer comes from the heart and God knows their hearts.

Tell the kids (or group leaders) to hang on to the bags until the end of the discussion.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. You may want to take a poll to determine a group average. If your kids don't want to share, that's okay. Maybe have a few volunteers share their answers. Then use this item to evaluate how much your kids pray and why or why not.
2. Are your kids satisfied with their prayer lives? Why or why not? What keeps them from praying more? What can they do to pray more?
3. What have your kids wondered about? What questions do they have about prayer? How they answered these statements will give you a good indication of where they're at. Encourage them to ask questions.
4. As a follow-up to question 3, how did your kids react to these statements? What were the true and false statements? Why or why not?
5. Ask for volunteers to share what they learned

about prayer. You may want to let the kids use a Bible concordance to look up additional passages about prayer.

THE CLOSE

To close, you can do a few different things with the bags from the opener—

- Collect the bags and make a list of all the prayer requests and praises. You can filter through them to see which ones are too personal to share with the group. Then pray together as a group, either with one prayer leader or popcorn style.
- Have your kids pull out the papers that they'd like to share with the group or pray about. Collect those and make a list of these prayer requests and other items to pray about.
- Let your kids keep their bags for prayer on their own. Then give them time to spread out in the room and pray to God alone, going through the papers in the bag and bringing those requests to God.

Either way, point out that writing down prayer requests, praises, and so on helps a person pray. Especially for those who don't know what to say to God. But prayer is a conversation between a person and God. Encourage your kids to find a prayer style that's comfortable for them and to set a goal for their prayer life—maybe to pray everyday for a short time, to pray a certain time during the day, or whatever works for them. The closer they come to God, the closer he'll come to them (James 4:8).

MORE

- Your youth group activities calendar can double as a prayer calendar. The next time you create your calendar, write the names of kids and adults involved in your group in each of the daily squares. Point out to your kids that on different days can pray for the specific person listed. Hand out the calendars and encourage your students throughout the month to keep up their prayer support for members of the youth group. Later follow up with them to see how the activity worked and why or why not.
- What's God's model for prayer? Check out the Lord's Prayer with your group. Break it up into sections and give each small group a phrase of the Lord's Prayer. Ask them to discuss what the section of prayer means and then write it in their own words. Then together as a group, put all the sections of the prayer together and write a master group interpretation of the Lord's Prayer.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. What are **three** problems that kids your age face?
2. Do you **A (agree)** or **D (disagree)** with the statements below?
 - It's easier for Christians to solve their problems than it is for people who aren't Christians.
 - Christian teenagers have more problems than those who aren't Christians.
 - Adults don't understand the problems that young people face today.
 - God cares about only the big problems in my life, not the little ones.
 - I have adults in my life that I can talk to about problems I face.
 - Young people must find their own solutions to the problems they encounter in life.
3. Which is true for you?
My Christian beliefs help me make the right choice when I face a problem.
 - ☐ All of the time
 - ☐ Most of the time
 - ☐ Some of the time
 - ☐ None of the time
4. Read the following verses—what do you think each has to say about **solving problems**?
Psalm 34:19

Psalm 120:1

Romans 8:28

James 1:2-5



THINK IT THROUGH [problem solving]

THIS WEEK

Some junior highers and middle schoolers freeze when they face new or big problems. Most aren't sure where to turn or what to do. This TalkSheet provides the opportunity to discuss different perspectives on problem solving and how a Christian young person can handle them.

Be aware that some kids in your group may be dealing with problems in their lives—drug use, alcoholism, premarital sex, depression, physical or sexual abuse, divorce at home, pornography, and more.

OPENER

Before you start, write some case scenario problems on pieces of paper. A few examples include—

- You're just not doing well in your classes and your parents are angry. But you're trying your hardest.
- Jordan's mom was diagnosed with cancer. She may live only a few months.
- You've found out that your closest friend has started smoking cigarettes.
- Josh got cut from the basketball team and now his so-called friends on the team have ditched him.
- Lorna just isn't fitting in at school—she's tried to dress cool, be nice, and all that. But it hasn't worked.
- Andres came home on Friday to find his parents screaming at each other. They've been fighting a lot.

Feel free to expand on these, leave any out, or add any that you think of—these are to help you get started.

Split your kids into groups and give each group a problem. Then ask them to read the problem and think about how they would handle the situation—realistically. What would the implications be if they made different decisions? How easy is it to find solutions to these problems? Are these realistic teenage problems or not? How often have your kids heard of situations like these? Use this activity to launch into your TalkSheet discussion and keep these thoughts alive throughout the discussion.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Make a master list of all problems—then ask which ones your kids think are the worst. Why do they think these problems are so common? What are the top three problems of kids their age? Are these problems that will go away as they grow up or not?
2. Ask your kids to say whether they disagreed or agreed. Talk about the differing opinions and encourage your group members to explain why they agree or disagree. Be prepared to give your

own views in response to some of the questions, but be sure to let the kids sort out their answers first.

3. Use this question to discuss how Christians can incorporate their beliefs into their decision-making and problem solving. How big of a role do your kids' beliefs play in their decision-making? Why or why not?
4. Be sure to give opportunities for different kids to share their perspectives on the passages. How would God want young people to face the problems they encounter?

THE CLOSE

Remind your group that God is a partner in problem solving. Most Christians would probably agree that God and his people work together—he guides and enables them to solve the problems. Emphasize to your kids that God is able to help in solve problems. But they need to be willing to come to him with their problems and concerns and trust that he is able to handle them!

Some of your kids may be more sensitive to these issues than others. Encourage your kids to find a trusted adult to talk with—including you, if they feel comfortable. Stress that it's vital for them to get help in dealing with these problems.

MORE

- You may want to continue this discussion with a Q&A with your group. Ask your kids to write down problems they are struggling with (be sure to keep it anonymous). Then collect the problems and read them individually to the group. Be sure to screen them for appropriateness before you read them out loud. Then have your group to brainstorm solutions to the problems. What advice do they have for each other? How can God help in the situations? What are some tangible solutions for finding answers?
- What are some ways that that TV and movie characters deal with problems? You may want to show a clip of a TV show or movie and then talk with the group about how the character(s) handled their problems. What could they have done differently? Did they handle the situation effectively? Why or why not? What does advice does society have for dealing with problems? Are these healthy solutions or not?

GROWING DEEPER

1. Do you agree with this statement?
Growing as a Christian means a person
has to give up having fun.

2. Complete this statement in your own words.
Christians should want to grow as Christians because—



3. Of the list that follows, pick the **top four**. In order to grow as a Christian you should—

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ tell others about Christ | ☐ have only Christian friends |
| ☐ read the Bible on a regular basis | ☐ memorize Bible verses |
| ☐ never sin again | ☐ read some Christian books |
| ☐ learn about biblical doctrine | ☐ feel guilty most of the time |
| ☐ be confirmed | ☐ worship God |
| ☐ find a spiritual mentor | ☐ admit your sins |
| ☐ pray | ☐ believe in Jesus Christ |
| ☐ get baptized | ☐ live what you believe |
| ☐ become a member of a church | ☐ go to youth group |
| ☐ help others willingly | ☐ other— |
| ☐ tithe money to the church | |

4. Do you think these statements are **T (true)** or **F (false)**?

- ___ I've spent time trying to understand Christianity.
- ___ I only pray in church and nowhere else.
- ___ I think about how Jesus would want me to deal with my problems.
- ___ I read my Bible in places besides church.
- ___ I've talked with my friends about what it means to be a Christian.
- ___ I'm regularly involved in activities at church.
- ___ I've helped someone in need during the past month.
- ___ I pray about what's going on in my life.
- ___ I think Christianity is one of the most important influences in my life.
- ___ I've never experienced God's love and forgiveness.
- ___ I realize I need God's continual grace and love.
- ___ I attend church more than once a week.
- ___ I've talked with another Christian regarding my sins.

5. Check out these verses—what do you think is the common theme of them all?

Luke 2:52

1 Peter 2:2

Ephesians 4:14, 15

2 Peter 3:18

GROWING DEEPER [Christian growth]

THIS WEEK

Young teens are capable of becoming like Jesus, and Christlikeness is what Christian growth is all about. For too long the church has neglected this age group's inner, spiritual growth, focusing instead on Bible memorization and quiz teams. Use this TalkSheet as an opportunity to evaluate how well you are meeting the spiritual growth needs of your group.

OPENER

For this introduction you will need to gather a variety of toys for different age levels, such as—

- a rattle
- a doll
- some Legos
- a Barbie doll
- a pair of roller blades
- a soccer ball or basketball
- a tennis racket
- golf clubs
- a squeaky toy
- some action figures
- a water gun
- a board game

If you don't have time or access to these—ask a friend to help who's a parent with young children.

Start out by writing the names of each item on 3x5 cards (or you can use pictures of each, too). Then place the items at random on a table and tell the group that these items are appropriate for three different age groups—babies, children (in elementary school), and adults. What do they suggest the appropriate age group is for each item? What are their reasons for their decisions? Some might include things like “it's not safe for a baby” or “adults think it's boring.”

Explain to your group that just as people grow and mature into different levels of recreation and play, people also grow and mature spiritually—overcoming certain struggles and taking on new challenges with each growth spurt.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Christian growth is not boring! How could your kids become more like Jesus while having fun? Jesus came to set them free and to give them life—Christ never intended following him to be a bore.
2. Why do some people want to grow as Christians? You might get some different answers.
3. Which of these is essential for Christian growth? You may want to ask how teenagers and adults can grow together in Christ. Why do churches have youth groups? What about summer camps or Bible studies? How do adults grow differently than kids?

4. Everyone grows at a different rate and at different times. You may want to ask your kids about their growth. How many feel like they are growing? Why or why not? What makes them grow more?
5. Take a look at each passage and together with the group, decide what the theme is. What does it say about Christian growth?

THE CLOSE

When people talk about Christian growth, they typically focus on an individual's responsibility to become more like Jesus. But people also grow in Christ through community, which is one reason for the establishment of the church. The context for growth is the living body of Christ, with Christ as the head. Take time to close the session by examining with your students how the church can better promote its spiritual growth.

MORE

- It's important for everyone to have spiritual goals. If you feel it's appropriate, ask each of your youth (or those who want to) to write a letter stating their spiritual goals and how they want to grow as Christians. Give them envelopes, which they will address to themselves and seal. Mail the letters to them anywhere from six months to a year later.
- Do your kids want to get involved and learn more? You may want to start a small group Bible study and discussion with those who are interested. Check out www.YouthSpecialties.com for some study tools, including the Creative Bible Lessons or Wild Truth series. You'll also find links to student Web sites (such as www.christianteens.net or www.teens4god.com) where your kids can download devotions, find information, and learn more about how to grow in their faith.