

WHO IS GOD ANYWAY?



1. When do you think about **God**? Check one.

- A lot—he's big in my life
- When I'm in church
- Sometimes, but not a lot
- Only when I take time to pray
- When I hear someone curse his name
- Not very often
- Never

2. Put an arrow ⇨ by **three** descriptions of God that seem true to you.

- A big policeman in the sky
- A guilt giver
- A wimp
- A comforter
- A shepherd
- A supreme being
- A nice old man
- A party animal

- A friend
- A lifeguard upstairs
- A babysitter
- A spectacular super hero
- A sinless big saint
- A cosmic Santa Claus
- A religious figure for my parents
- Other—

3. In which **direction** you are moving in your relationship with God?

Place an X on the line below



Closer to God

Away from God

4. How do you think your relationship with God is affected by your concept of God (what you think of him)?

5. Check out the verses below. How would you answer the questions?

Romans 11:33-36—How does this describe God?

Romans 12:1-2—How should you respond to God?

WHO IS GOD ANYWAY? [G o d]

THIS WEEK

No one has ever seen God—but the Bible is filled with metaphorical descriptions of him. This discussion will allow you to talk about what your students believe—what they think God is like and how their belief in God makes a difference in their lives.

OPENER

For this intro, you'll need some balloons and slips of paper, one for each of these questions—

- If God were to visit your church, where would he sit?
- What color of hair do you think God has?
- If God were to talk with you, what tone of voice would he use?
- What might God say is the funniest-looking animal he created?
- What do you think God does for fun?

Write one question on each slip of paper and put one question in each balloon. Then blow up and tie the balloon.

At the beginning of your meeting, ask for some volunteers to participate and give them each a balloon. Each person must sit on the balloon to pop it and to retrieve the question inside. Then they have to answer the statements on the slip of paper. Feel free to add more questions to vary the discussion, depending on the size and maturity of your group.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. You may want to get a show of hands or an anonymous vote for this one. Then get an overall average of how often your kids think of God. How has their view of God changed since they were younger? When and why do they think more about God?
2. Encourage your kids to share their ideas of God and to add any additional ideas as well. What misunderstandings or myths about God have they heard? Why do some people think of God differently?
3. How would your kids rate themselves on this scale? If they don't want to share, address this from a general point of view or ask for anonymous answers. Where would they put an average person their age?
4. What people think about God has an impact on their relationship with him. If you view God as mean, it'll be hard to have a close personal friendship with him. If you see God as forgiving and warm, then you'll probably open up to him

more. Ask your kids how they feel about their relationship with God. How is it affected by their thoughts about him?

5. Take some time to talk about the connection between who God is (Romans 11:33-36) and what your kids' responses should be to God if they fully understand him (Romans 12:1-2).

THE CLOSE

Challenge the group to rethink their view of God. Some people have distorted views of him, which limits what God can do in their lives. He commands people not to worship idols, but to focus on him and his power. Pay attention to the views your kids have. Why have they formed these views of him? What have their parents or teachers taught them about God? Do some of them lack trust in God because of poor relationships with parents or guardians? Point out that every person has a unique relationship with God—because everyone relates to him differently!

Close in a time of prayer and encourage your kids to take a few moments with God alone. The best way to understand and get to know God better is to spend some time with him. What are some ways that your kids can get closer to God?

MORE

- Take this discussion further into the Bible. Ask the kids to pick and read five Bible stories. Read the stories with the group and have them write down five new things they learned about God.
- Consider pursuing a Bible study with some of your kids to look at the attributes of God. A recommended study for junior highers and middle schoolers is *Wild Truth Bible Lessons—Pictures of God* and *Wild Truth Journal—Pictures of God* (Youth Specialties). For more suggested resources and information, check out the Youth Specialties Web page at www.YouthSpecialties.com.

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 [p r o b l e m s o l v i n g]

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.
- Alana started dating Caleb two months ago and he wants to have sex. But she's not sure.
- 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?

FOLLOWING THE LEADER

1. Try to remember a time when you were a kid when you got lost or separated from your parent. Circle the **two words** that describe how you felt.

Unconcerned

Shocked

Dismayed

Panicked

Worried

Confused

Curious

Terrified

Sad

Fearful

Confident

Alarmed

Abandoned

Relaxed

Dumb

Unafraid

2. If you were to go anyplace in the world to explore, where would you go?

Would you want a **guide** with you?

Why or why not?

3. Do you think people need a guide to get them through life? Why or why not?

4. Check out **Psalm 23** and complete the phrase in your own words from what the Bible says.

He is the shepherd—

He makes me—

He leads me—

He guides me—

He is with me—

His rod and staff—

He prepares—

He anoints my head—

5. From what you've read in Psalm 23, how would you describe the condition of a person if God was **not** a shepherd and guide.

6. Who do you think guides **you** the most through life?

My friends

My youth pastor

My parents

Another relative

A teacher

Another relative

My boyfriend or girlfriend

God

A little of everyone

I have no guide

Myself

Other—



FOLLOWING THE LEADER

[following Christ—Psalm 23]

THIS WEEK

Life is a journey and those who've been on the path long enough realize that it's full of pitfalls and dark passages. This journey is a serious and potentially disastrous the trip that requires a guide—someone who knows every turn, every safe resting place, every refreshing stream. Psalm 23 paints a picture of the care and guidance that each of people needs. Submitting to the leading of God is an act of wisdom and personal safety.

OPENER

Introduce this topic by emphasizing the importance of having a leader or guide. You may want to go with your kids to a place that they don't know and are very unfamiliar with. (Of course, alert their parents and your church leaders of the plan first.) Maybe take them to a house in a nearby place they're unfamiliar with (this is easy to do with junior highers, because they can't drive yet). If you do this activity with a large group, you may want to split your kids into small groups—but be sure that there's an adult leader (who knows what's going on) with each group. Don't give your kids a map. They can't ask the adult leader for help or guidance—no phone calls either. They must either find their way to a specific spot or figure out how to get home from there. Later, have your leaders drive the kids back to a central meeting spot and debrief on the activity. How did your kids feel knowing that they had no idea where they were or how they were going to get home? What did they do to find the answers? Did they feel alone or stranded? Use this intro to jump into your TalkSheet discussion on Christ as the leader.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Have a few student volunteers describe their experiences, sharing how they felt and any lessons that they learned. What was their first reaction? How long did they feel this way?
2. Point out that there are some places on earth where most of people would really want to have an experienced guide traveling with people—the Sahara desert, Mount Everest, or the Amazon jungle. Where would your kids go and would they want a guide? Why or why not?
3. Discuss the need for a guide in the lives of your kids. Why do your kids think a guide would be important or necessary? If so, in which areas of their lives—only some, or all of their lives? Have your group brainstorm the qualities that would make the ideal guide, and list those qualities on a whiteboard.

4. After your students have completed the sentences in their own words, ask them to explain how these verses apply to their lives today. For example, what is a "green pasture" to your kids?
5. What would a person's life be like with out God as guide? What would be different about their lives than the lives of a Christian? What are some other guides that people turn to in their lives? Why?
6. Ask your students to honestly consider who or what guides them through life—a parent? Boyfriend or girlfriend? The desire to have things? Talk about the wisdom of making God the only voice people listen to for advice on the path of life.

THE CLOSE

Reemphasize the idea that everyone is a stranger to life—no one knows the road ahead. Encourage your kids to make Christ their guide now—he can help them and get them through the pits, dead ends, and unknown trails that abound in life. Explain how God guides them with his word and comforts them with the Holy Spirit. What better leader could they ask for?

MORE

- Psalm 23 is often recited at funerals or in times of pain and sorrow. Point out that although verse 4 is a great comfort, the whole psalm is extremely valuable to their lives. You may want to split this psalm by verse and have small groups take a closer look at the verse. What does each verse say to your kids and those their same age? Encourage your kids to rewrite the verse in their own words and then construct the group's version of the psalm when they've finished in their groups.
- You may want to ask your kids to think about the analogy of God as the shepherd and people as the sheep. What characteristics of sheep do humans have in this analogy? Point out that sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd for provision, guidance, and protection. With God as the shepherd, people are his sheep—not frightened, passive animals, but obedient followers. In this context, the sheep are wise enough to follow the one who will lead them in the right places and in right ways

FRIENDS

1. What do you like the **most** about your friends?

What do you like the **least** about your friends?

2. What do you think?

My parents should have a say in my choice of friends.

- I could live with that
- Maybe
- Sometimes
- No way

3. Which of these are **true** for you?

My friends—

- pressure me to do things that I know are wrong
- like to hang out with me because of who I am
- are fun to hang out with
- have the same beliefs and morals that I do
- don't really care about me

4. What advice would you have for each of the following situations?

"I have a friend who lies to me about big things and little things, too, but I'm not sure I want to lose her friendship because she's popular."

"My group of friends makes fun of me. I think they do it just for laughs. I have told them I don't like it, but they haven't stopped."

"I just moved here from out of state. I find it hard to make friends. My mom says to make friends I have to be a friend. Give me a break—I need some advice that really works."

"I have a friend who is doing something wrong. I don't want to say what it is, but I do want to help my friend."

"There are three different groups of friends at my church. I quit going because I can't break into any of the groups."

5. Check out the Bible verses below, then circle those that focus on friendship. What do the verses say about friendship?

1 Samuel 18:1

John 5:7

Philippians 2:25

Job 19:19

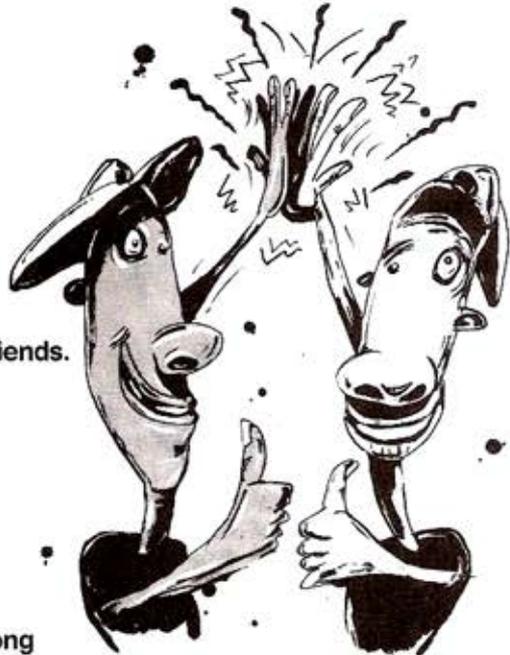
John 15:13

1 Timothy 1:16, 17

Mark 14:50

Romans 1:11, 12

2 Timothy 4:10



FRIENDS [f r i e n d s]

THIS WEEK

Friendships are vital for teenagers. Because a family can only go so far in providing for the needs of kids, young teens crave friendships. And since friends teach each other so much, the friendships they establish can literally make or break their adolescent years. The TalkSheet discusses the importance of friendships and the influences that friends have on each other—both positive and negative.

OPENER

Start by asking your group to think of all the TV shows where they've seen friendships—there will be a ton of these, since almost every TV show revolves around friendships and relationships. Make a list of these shows and how friendship is portrayed. What have your kids learned about friendship from these shows? What makes these shows successful? What is the difference between opposite and same-sex friendships? Why do the characters value each other as friends? How have these friendships been abused or damaged?

How well do your group members know each other? Are they friends among themselves? Whether they are or not, encourage them to get to know each other better! Have each person in your group write two things (or more) about themselves on a piece of paper. Then collect all the papers and read each one aloud to the group. See if your group can guess who the person is based on the facts given. What was surprising about some of the facts given? What did your kids know or not know about each other? Who had an extra unique fact that no one knew? What keeps your kids from getting to know each other better?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Create a master list of likes and dislikes, then circle those qualities that are mentioned more than once. What can your kids do about the qualities they like the least? Does everyone have these characteristics or are they unique among some people? Are they things that can be overlooked? Should they be overlooked?
2. Some kids get defensive when friends and parents are mentioned in the same sentence! You might get a variety of responses, but most will say that their parents shouldn't have a say. How can your kids choose their own friendships and still communicate with their parents? How are they going to handle their parents' disapproval of certain friends?
3. What are the reasons for their responses? Based on these questions, how do they treat their

friends? How do their friends treat them? How often do they influence their friends to do the wrong things? What is important to have good friendships?

4. You may want to pass out 3x5 cards and let the kids write their own answers, then read them as a group. Or create a discussion among the group. How would they handle these situations? What advice would they have? Is this advice good or bad? Why or why not?
5. What do these verses say about friendship? Ask the group to identify some of the characteristics of friendship found in the verses. Why do they think God created friendship?

THE CLOSE

You may want to wrap things up by talking about the important aspects of friendships. Point out that to *have* friends, you've got to *be* a friend. And emphasize healthy friendships versus unhealthy friendships. Do their friends pressure them into doing drugs? Drinking? Being sexually active? Challenge your kids to choose friends who build them up and encourage them to be their best—friendship is about supporting and caring for each other for who they are. Jesus is an example of a loyal, loving friend—he cared for his disciples and cares for each person today. How close are your kids to their forever Friend? What can your kids do to be better friends to others and to be a better friend with God?

MORE

- You may want to have your group take a look at biblical friendships. A few examples include David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18 and 19), Jesus and Lazarus (John 11), Moses and God (Exodus 33), and Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14). What makes these friendships good? What qualities of friendship were shown? Are these still important today? Why or why not? What can your kids learn from these friendships? What other examples of friendship in the Bible can they find?
- It's important to have friends both inside and outside the church. How close is your group? How could your group grow closer to each other? Consider planning a special event for your kids to let them get to know each other better—a service project, a night to hang out and do something fun, or a weekly lunch at school with you. Or form an e-mail distribution list with your group and keep each other up to date on what's going on within the group, including sharing prayer requests, questions, and concerns.

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—

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