

I'm too young to be important,
but I don't forget what you tell me.
Your righteousness is eternally right,
your revelation is the only truth.
Even though troubles came down on me hard,
your commands always gave me delight.
The way you tell me to live is always right;
help me understand it so I can live to the fullest.



119.145-152 I call out at the top of my lungs,
"GOD! Answer! I'll do whatever you say."

1058

My antagonists are t
but I don't swerve
I took one look at th
they walked away
Take note of how I l
out of your life of
Your words all add u
Your righteous de

I've been slandered
but my awe at yo

BASIC QUESTIONS

INVITING OPEN DISCUSSION
ON 6 KEY QUESTIONS ON THE
CHRISTIAN FAITH



ADULT DISCUSSION GUIDE

ROOM FOR DOUBT

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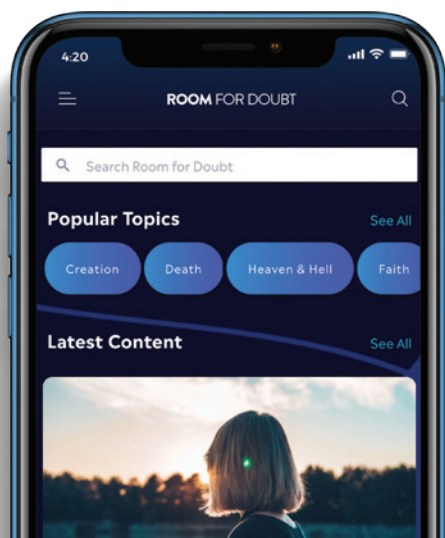
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WELCOME TO THE ROOM FOR DOUBT DISCUSSION SERIES!

This curriculum was created with the conviction that it is acceptable and even commendable to ask tough questions and candidly express doubt.

Spiritual truth is worth pursuing, and this series will help you pursue it and hopefully come to know it. Speaking through Jeremiah, God says, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). This guide will prompt you to seek God and seriously examine some basic claims of Christianity. We pray that it will help you see that these foundational Christian beliefs are reasonable and true. Whether you are a church member looking to fortify your faith or strengthen someone else’s faith, a believer with doubts who is searching for answers, or a skeptic who is willing to consider the truth claims of the Christian faith, this guide will lead you to a fascinating exploration of vital spiritual questions.



Download the Room for Doubt App and access additional resources:

ROOMFORDOUBT.COM



DISCUSSION GROUPS

While this curriculum can be adapted for a more traditional class setting, it is ideally designed to give both Christians and non-Christians a chance to raise questions and investigate the basics of the Christian faith within the safe context of a small discussion group. These groups typically consist of a community of eight to twelve people who gather on a regular basis, primarily to discuss spiritual matters. Groups can meet at a wide variety of locations: homes, offices, restaurants, churches, coffee shops, bookstores, or park district picnic tables!

This curriculum is intended to enhance these group discussions and create a fresh approach to exploring the Christian faith. All people, no matter where they are in their spiritual journey, are welcome to join the discussion. It is our greatest hope that each participant will be challenged to consider earnestly whether he or she should accept the claims of Christ and pursue a meaningful Christian way of life that is based on a growing love for God.

Another purpose of this curriculum is to help Christians explore answers to the tough questions that others are asking. If you are already a Christian believer, the process of wrestling through these issues will not only strengthen your own faith, it will provide you with insights for entering into informed conversations about Christianity with your friends and family.

DISCUSSION GUIDE FEATURES:

BACKGROUND STORY

At the beginning of each session is a short, continuing story. You may want to read this before your group meets. Or, depending on time, you may want to ask someone in the group to read this introduction aloud at the beginning of each meeting. This optional introduction is simply a way to get participants thinking, and to inspire everyone to engage in the discussions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each session in this curriculum contains about a dozen questions your group can discuss. You may find that it is difficult to get through all of these questions in one session. That's okay. The important thing is to engage the topic at hand—not to get through every question. Your group facilitator may even wish to choose the questions ahead of time that are most relevant to your group. In any case, the questions in these sessions are designed to give everyone the opportunity to process their thoughts and express them out loud.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

At the close of each session is a brief thought to include in your closing prayer time and some suggested actions to pursue in the days ahead. The discussions themselves are just the start of what God fully intends.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

The sessions are designed to generate dialogue rather than provide short, simple answers. Strictly speaking, these sessions are not Bible studies, though they regularly refer to biblical themes and passages. And they are not crafted as lessons with packaged material to be taught. Instead, they are topical discussions meant to get everyone to disclose what they think and feel about some of the most important issues of life. You will be invited and encouraged to share your experiences, questions, and perspectives as each meeting unfolds.

Your time together will be more rewarding and more productive if you keep the following suggestions in mind as you prepare for, and participate in, the group discussions:

- 1.** You may be using this curriculum as part of a church-wide effort that includes weekend messages on the same topics that are presented in a particular order. However, if you are using this material as a stand-alone curriculum, the lessons do not need to be discussed in any specific order. The topics can be discussed independently of each other, based on everyone's interests and questions.
- 2.** Read over the material before each meeting. Familiarity with the topic will greatly enrich the time you spend in the group discussion.
- 3.** Be willing to join in the group interaction. The facilitator of the group should not lecture, but rather encourage everyone to openly discuss their viewpoints, including their agreements and disagreements. Plan to share your ideas honestly and candidly.
- 4.** Be sensitive to the other members of your group. Listen attentively when they speak and be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage quieter members to participate. Always remember to show respect toward others in your group, even if they don't always agree with your position.

5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. By all means participate, but allow others time to speak.
6. Try to stick to the topic being examined. There normally won't be enough time to handle the peripheral questions and issues that may come to mind during your meeting.
7. Each lesson will likely have more questions than you have time to cover in one session. Feel free to select the questions that seem most relevant and valuable for your group. However, some questions tend to build on one another, so it would generally be better to follow the basic progression of the discussion items as numbered.
8. It would be helpful for your group to use a good modern translation of the Bible. You might prefer using a Bible that includes notes, such as *The Journey Bible: Revealing God and How You Fit Into His Plan* (Zondervan, 2014). This could be especially helpful to those who are relatively new to the Christian faith or who just don't know much about it. Unless noted otherwise, biblical quotations in this series are from the New International Version (NIV).

As you wrestle together with these issues and questions, be assured that satisfying, reasonable answers are waiting to be found. God bless you on your spiritual journey!

“
**SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND;
KNOCK AND THE DOOR WILL
BE OPENED TO YOU.”**

– Jesus (*Matthew 7:7*)

This discussion guide was written by Garry Poole with additional contributions by Dr. Richard Knopp, Program Director of Room For Doubt at Lincoln Christian University in Lincoln, Illinois. The “Basic Questions” series includes message manuscripts; videos for discussion starters, message introductions, leader training, and event promotion; as well as recommended resources for each of the six questions covered. See the searchable website at www.roomfordoubt.com for more information. ©2019. All rights reserved.

SESSION 1

1 2 3 4 5 6

IS DOUBT ALWAYS BAD?

“NOW FAITH IS THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR,
THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN.”

HEBREWS 11:1

BACKGROUND STORY

Tom grew up going to church with his family. When it came time for him to “declare his faith” by getting baptized, there was no doubt he was ready. That’s what he wanted to do. It was a given. After all, it’s not like he didn’t believe. Plus, he received lots of support and encouragement to take this step from his family and the church crowd. But Tom began questioning his faith when he entered his freshman year at an out-of-state university. Suddenly he was thrust into a world filled with skeptics. They raised some of the questions he had wondered about in high school, but he had quickly dismissed them because he didn’t want to disappoint anyone—especially his parents. He wanted his faith to be true but felt uncomfortable questioning it. But now that he was far from home, he felt the freedom to entertain these doubts. It didn’t help that most of his friends, and even his professors, scoffed at the claims of Christianity. So, for the first time in his life, he gave himself permission to consider carefully the questions he had long had about his beliefs. Initially, he was fearful about allowing himself to raise issues about a faith he treasured so much. But the more he did, the bolder he got.

Isn’t the Bible outdated and full of mistakes?

Why are there so many different religions?

Who really knows what’s true?

How could Jesus be God?

Is there really life after death or is this life on earth all there is?

What evidence is there for God’s existence?

Are Christians just arrogant and narrow-minded?

He began reeling as these questions swirled in his mind. But even worse, Tom felt like he had no answers. And he dared tell no one.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Maybe you can relate to Tom. How open and honest do you feel you (or others you know) can be around Christians about your spiritual doubts? Elaborate. What makes you (or others you know) feel safe and secure enough to be able to express spiritual questions?
2. In what ways can doubts sometimes be a good thing? Can you give an example where a doubt in your life led to something positive?

“Doubt is but another element of faith.” - St. Augustine

3. Do you think it is possible to have a sincere and genuine faith and yet still have questions and doubts? Why or why not? Someone once said to Jesus, *“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief”* (Mark 9:24). What do you think the person meant by this?
4. Discuss a particular doubt about the Christian faith that you or someone else has faced and try to identify its primary cause. For example:
 - Is it emotional or *psychological*?
(E.g. “I find it hard to be personally confident about anything”)
 - Is it *relational*?
(E.g. “I had a bad experience with a professing Christian or church leader”)
 - Is it *spiritual*?
(E.g. “I never feel good enough”; “I just can’t be sure that God can accept me”)
 - Is it *intellectual*?
(E.g. “Some Christian beliefs don’t seem reasonable”)
 - Is it *volitional*?
(E.g. “I don’t really want to believe”)

Do you think it’s important to recognize different causes for doubt?
Why or why not?

“Father, we can see and understand only a little about you now, as if we were peering at your reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see you in your completeness, face to face. Now all that we know is hazy and blurred, but then we will see everything clearly, just as clearly as you see into our hearts right now. And, Father, we can have confidence in that because of what you have already chosen to reveal to us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

1 Corinthians 13:12, Living Bible

“
**THE PROUD MAN NEEDS TO
DOUBT BECAUSE THE SENSE OF
HIS OWN IMPORTANCE DEMANDS
IT. IT IS NOT IN HIS NATURE TO
BOW TO ANYONE.”**

- *Os Guinness*

5. Read the quote by Christian thinker, Os Guinness. To what extent can our attitudes or our will influence our susceptibility to doubt our beliefs? If you can, use an example.

6. It seems undeniable that we cannot know all the answers to our faith questions in this life. On a scale from 1-10, how much does this bother you and possibly cause you to doubt? (10 means “a lot.”) Do you think it’s possible to lack absolute certainty and still have a faith that is adequately supported?

7. What does it mean for faith to be “blind”? Do you think it’s okay—at least sometimes—for faith to be “blind”? If so, under what circumstances? Do you think it’s possible to have a “reasonable faith”? How important do you think it is to have a reasonable faith? (For some relevant Bible passages, see Acts 1:3; Acts 17:2-4, 30-31; 1 Peter 3:15.)

8. Without mentioning names, is there someone in your life who is dealing with doubts about Christian beliefs? What practical steps could you take this week to encourage and strengthen them in their faith? If you are wrestling with some doubts, what practical steps could you take this week to address them?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Pray that your discussion will lead you to be more open with your questions and more open to some answers. Express your honest doubts and heartfelt need for God’s guidance this week. Perhaps you could write a brief letter to God that expresses your key questions and your doubts.

SESSION 2

1 2 3 4 5 6

DOES GOD REALLY EXIST?

“WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD,
BECAUSE ANYONE WHO COMES TO HIM MUST BELIEVE
THAT HE EXISTS AND THAT HE REWARDS
THOSE WHO EARNESTLY SEEK HIM.”

HEBREWS 11:6

BACKGROUND STORY

After Tom left his hometown, his church, and his parents and got settled in his university life, the first issue he had to come to grips with was the question of a Divine Creator. Up until now, the existence of God was something he had simply accepted. After all, how could there not be a God? But he could no longer accept this belief simply because others told him to. He was done basing his beliefs on what others said or expected him to accept. He was convinced that it was time for him to take a step back, remove the blinders, and think for himself.

That’s when things started getting scary. He began posing questions with abandon. One day, over coffee with a friend, he heard himself articulate an argument that took him to a whole new level of disbelief.

“Look,” he said, “if God exists, then he must not be all powerful, because he’s unable to stop all the evil and suffering in the world. But then again, maybe God is powerful enough to stop it, but is simply unwilling to do so. If that’s the case, then he must not be all loving. Or worse yet, maybe God is both unloving and powerless. In any case, God must at least be either unloving or powerless. And if God is either unloving or powerless, then he certainly isn’t the God of the Bible. Perhaps it just makes more sense to believe that God doesn’t exist at all.”

Tom found himself welling up with emotion as he spoke these words. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest. He was actually starting to convince himself of something he thought he would never conclude — not in a million years. He was beginning to doubt the very existence of God...



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the anti-God viewpoints or arguments you've encountered? How have these impacted you? Have you searched for some good responses to them? Were you able to find any?
2. What considerations most convince you of God's existence (perhaps including one you heard in this week's sermon from the Room For Doubt series)? What doubts do you have about them?
3. If someone asked you for advice because he or she was struggling with doubts about God's existence, what would you do? What would you say?
4. Regarding helping others navigate through their spiritual doubts, some say it is best to "start where the other person is, not where you are." What does this statement mean to you? Do you think this strategy makes sense? Can you think of a time when you've done this?
5. If the universe began to exist, then there must be someone or something beyond the universe that caused it to exist. Do you agree with the premise that the universe had a beginning? If so, do you agree with the conclusion that the universe must have a cause beyond itself? Try to think of some reasons for your responses.
6. Most, if not all, scientists would accept that (a) whatever begins to exist must have a cause and that (b) the universe began to exist. Do you think it's reasonable to believe that the ultimate cause of the universe was God, or at least could be God? Explain. Why do you think that some scientists do not believe that the cause of the universe could be God?
7. Psalm 19:1 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the skies proclaim the work of his hands." What do you think David, the ancient author of this verse, meant by this? Is it still true today? Explain.

"A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature."

- **Agnostic/Atheist Astronomer Fred Hoyle**

“IF YOU DO NOT BELIEVE IN A PERSONAL GOD, THE QUESTION,
‘WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?’ IS UNASKABLE AND UNANSWERABLE.”
J.R.R. TOLKIEN

“
**GOD USED BEAUTIFUL
MATHEMATICS IN CREATING THE
WORLD.”**

- *Paul Dirac, physicist and Nobel Prize winner*

8. Try to give one example of how the universe seems “fine-tuned” to allow for the existence of life. In other words, what’s an example of a characteristic or constant of nature that must be precisely as it is in order for life to exist? (You might think of some characteristics of the entire universe, our galaxy, our solar system, or our planet that make human life possible on earth. Some of these might have been shared in the message this week. For instance, what about the distance between the earth and the sun or the strength of gravity? For relevant passages, see Romans 1:18-20 and Psalm 139:13-14.)

9. What does it mean to say that something is objectively true or objectively false? Do you think that humans have a sense of what is objectively morally right and what is objectively morally wrong? Can you think of examples? If there are such objective moral values, how might this point to the existence of a Divine Creator? (For a relevant passage, see Romans 2:14-15.)

10. Share an experience when you sensed God’s presence or intervention in your life. To what extent did that experience confirm your faith in God’s existence?

☰ FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Pray that your discussion will lead you to be more convinced of God’s reality and relevance in your own life and more willing to strengthen the faith of others. Commit yourself to watch for God’s presence in your life this week. Jot some down to share later.

SESSION 3

1 2 **3** 4 5 6

ISN'T THE BIBLE FULL OF MYTHS AND MISTAKES?

“ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND IS PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS; SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE ADEQUATE, EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.”

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

BACKGROUND STORY

Tom’s move to the university away from home forced him to take seriously some questions, and doubts, about his Christian faith. But for several weeks, Tom pushed his spiritual doubts aside and tried to suppress the questions in his mind. It was becoming difficult for him to face the possibility that he was turning away from God, and he needed some space. After all, he knew that he might be walking away from something he had believed his whole life.

But then something caught his attention. One morning as he was leaving a restaurant near campus, he noticed a girl, about his age, reading a Bible. As Tom walked down the street, he couldn’t get that image out of his head. It seemed to Tom that the credibility of Christianity rests entirely on the validity of that one book. Before he knew it, he was walking back to the restaurant.

He barely introduced himself before plopping down in the booth across from Tami. “Look,” he explained, “I have to ask you about that Bible you’re reading.” Tami was slightly taken aback, but she invited him to join her in her booth.

Tom went straight to the point. He leaned forward as he raised issue after issue about the Bible. “There’s so much riding on the reliability of that book,” Tom warned. He questioned her wisdom in putting so much stock in one source of information. “Besides,” he continued, “what about all the people who don’t have any access to a Bible? They don’t have a chance. Isn’t there a better way to get God’s message out than to rely on some outdated book that might be full of myths?” (He remembered a professor making that claim the week before.) Tom was on a roll. Tami was listening intently. He objected to how confusing the Bible is and how most Christians seem to pick and choose the parts of the Bible they want to believe and ignore the rest. He was so energized as he was expressing his doubts, he was beside himself! Finally, he blurted out, “I mean, what if the Bible is just a bunch of bunk, leading a whole bunch of people astray—including you, Tami?”

When Tom finally stopped talking, Tami only smiled. She had not grown up in a Christian home and had not attended church until recently. But when a friend gave her a Bible as a gift, she took up the challenge to read it. That decision led her on an amazing journey that eventually convinced her that the Bible is not only worth reading; it is worth believing.

“Tom,” she explained, “there came a moment in my life when I had to decide what I was going to do with all the so-called ‘outlandish claims’ of the Bible. I became convinced that this is no ordinary book. It’s God’s Word to the world. It contains a supernatural message from a supernatural God. When we have time, I want to tell you my story!”



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Growing up, what did you hear and believe about the credibility or reliability of the Bible?
2. How has your view of the Bible changed over the years? Explain.
3. What specific doubts, if any, do you have about the Bible? What objections about the Bible have you heard from others?
4. Is there any evidence to indicate that the New Testament was written by eyewitnesses or at least based on eyewitness accounts? (While other considerations are important, here are some relevant Bible passages: Luke 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-9; 1 John 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16-21; John 20:30-31.)
5. Many Bible scholars believe that most of the New Testament books were written within 50 years of the death and resurrection of Jesus and some of them within 20 years. Given this timeframe, do you think it's possible to have a reliable record of the life of Jesus? Why or why not?
6. To what extent do the claims of miracles recorded in the Bible help or hinder your trust in the Bible? What do you think about the objection that we can no longer believe in miracle claims in our modern scientific world because we know that the world operates according to the laws of nature?

Compared to other sacred texts, the Bible is unique in its portrayal of the human reaction to miracles. People are described as “terrified” or “surprised,” or they “disbelieve” until they verify the event for themselves. These reactions, missing from other religious texts where miracles are described, support the truth of the Bible’s claims. Ironically, their initial doubt eventually made their testimony more credible.

God didn’t speak into a dictaphone or some kind of recording device to produce the Bible. Instead, he guided people with different personalities and experiences to give shape to his words. John explained, “What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you” (1 John 1:3). Peter described how the Old Testament books were written by “holy men of God [who] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). And Paul summed up the process in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired by God.”

“THAT WHICH WAS FROM THE BEGINNING, WHICH WE HAVE HEARD, WHICH WE HAVE SEEN WITH OUR EYES, WHICH WE HAVE LOOKED AT AND OUR HANDS HAVE TOUCHED—THIS WE PROCLAIM CONCERNING THE WORD OF LIFE.”

1 JOHN 1:1

“
**ALL THAT I AM I OWE TO JESUS
CHRIST, REVEALED TO ME IN HIS
DIVINE BOOK.”**

—*David Livingstone*

7. What are your thoughts on this statement? “If a supernatural God does exist, then the miracles and supernatural events recorded in the Bible could easily have been orchestrated by God.”

8. According to historian Gary Habermas, there are at least 39 ancient sources outside of the Bible that collaborate over 100 facts about Jesus’ life, teachings, death, and resurrection. If this is true, how would this impact your confidence in the Bible?

9. Do you have any examples of something in the Bible that appeared (or that appears) to be historically inaccurate or a contradiction? How have you dealt with it? Is the example about something really significant or about some matter of smaller detail? Does it make any difference to you? Should it make any difference? Explain.

10. To what extent have you actually read the Bible? Would you be willing to read a portion of the Bible this week? If so, where will you start?

11. Share an example of when you sensed God speaking to you from a passage in the Bible. What message did you hear? What difference did it make in your life?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Pray that this discussion will lead you to be more open to what the Bible says and more convinced of its truth and its application to your own life. Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17 each day this coming week. Specifically consider how the Bible is being used to teach, to rebuke, to correct, and to train you in righteousness. Make a list as the week goes on.

SESSION 4

1 2 3 **4** 5 6

WHY DO CHRISTIANS SAY THAT JESUS IS GOD'S SON?

"THE MESSAGE OF EASTER IS THAT GOD'S NEW
WORLD HAS BEEN UNVEILED IN JESUS CHRIST AND
THAT YOU'RE NOW INVITED TO BELONG TO IT."

N.T. WRIGHT

“FEW PEOPLE SEEM TO REALIZE THAT THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS THE CORNERSTONE TO A WORLDVIEW THAT PROVIDES THE PERSPECTIVE TO ALL OF LIFE.”

JOSH MCDOWELL

BACKGROUND STORY

Tom knew he would find Tami again. Sure enough, there she was one day, sitting in the same booth in the restaurant where they talked the first time, reading the same Bible.

“I figured if I came in here often enough I’d run into you again!” Little did she know Tom stopped by just about every day hoping he’d “run into her again” so he could pick up the conversation right where they left off! “So, can you chat?”

“Sure!” she replied. “But only for a few minutes, because I have to head out for an appointment.”

“No worries,” Tom said, as he proceeded to blurt out the question lingering in his mind since they had first met. “So what convinced you to become a Christian? I mean, what was the turning point for you?” It was a question more significant to him than Tami realized.

“Alright, Tom, I’ll give you my 5-minute version,” Tami said as she began packing up her things. She explained that she never had an issue with whether or not Jesus said what was recorded in the Gospels—that was a given. For her it all came down to one issue: Is Jesus really who he claimed to be? That question put her on a quest that ultimately changed everything.

After reading several books on the matter, she concluded there really are only a few options: (1) Jesus deliberately lied about who he was; (2) Jesus was delusional and didn’t know what he was saying; (3) Jesus was a mere legend who was fabricated by his followers; or (4) Jesus really was, and is, what scripture affirms—God in the flesh, a miracle worker, and the only one who can offer a remedy for human sin.

At this point, Tami was standing up and ready to go. “Tom,” she quietly confided, “I’m someone who has no doubt about needing God’s forgiveness. There’s no getting around that. But when it struck me that Jesus Christ was willing and able to cover my sin-debt once and for all, I didn’t hesitate to take him up on his offer. So now, you’re looking at someone who, spiritually speaking, is totally and completely debt-free!”

Tom was speechless. He was taken aback by her confidence and certainty. It took him off guard because, spiritually speaking, he had neither. Tom reached over and snatched the bill out of her hand. Tami smiled. “Well, thanks for taking care of that debt, too. I owe you!” And with that, she was gone.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you think of Jesus Christ, what's the first word that comes to mind? Why?

2. How confident are you that Jesus actually claimed to be God?

[Maybe use a 1-5 scale.] What's the basis of your answer?

3. Read Matthew 16:13-17 and John 5:18-24. Given these references from the Bible (and other similar passages such as Mark 2:5-11, John 8:54-59, and John 10:30-33), does it appear to you that Jesus is claiming that he is divine—that he is God? Why do you suppose that some people are not convinced that Jesus ever claimed to be God?

4. It is one thing to believe that Jesus claimed to be God and quite another to believe he was right. Of the following considerations, which ones do you think offer the best evidence that Jesus was, and is, God? Why?

- *Messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus*
- *Jesus' sinless life*
- *Jesus' miracles*
- *Jesus' resurrection*

5. Look again at the list of considerations that support Jesus' claim of divinity. Which reasons are the most difficult for people to accept? How could these be addressed?

6. Jesus' resurrection is often pointed to as THE most crucial piece of evidence that Jesus was everything he claimed to be. Do you tend to agree with this? Why or why not? (See Matthew 12:39-40 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 as you think through your answer.)

7. As far as you understand (or can recall from the Room For Doubt sermon on this topic), what evidence is there that Jesus really rose from the dead?

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”

1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

“
**I CONCLUDED THAT IT WOULD TAKE
MORE FAITH FOR ME TO MAINTAIN
MY ATHEISM THAN IT WOULD TO
BECOME A CHRISTIAN!”**

- *Former Atheist, Lee Strobel after spending nearly two years
investigating the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.*

8. Below are some of the evidences that support Jesus' resurrection. Which one most convinces you that he did indeed rise from the dead? Are these evidences more convincing when we consider all of them together rather than considering each of them separately? Explain.

- **Jesus' tomb was empty.** He was buried in a known tomb that was discovered empty, first by a group of female followers and then by two of his closest male disciples.
- **Eyewitnesses saw the resurrected Jesus.** The risen Jesus was personally seen by all of his closest followers and over 500 in total, including skeptics like Saul (later Paul) and his half-brother, James. (Note 1 Corinthians 15:3-9; 1 John 1:1-4; and 2 Peter 1:16-18.)
- **The accounts of Jesus' resurrection were early.** The public preaching of Jesus' resurrection began in the same city in which Jesus was crucified (Jerusalem) just 50 days after that crucifixion (Acts 2:32). Also, written accounts of Jesus' resurrection were relatively early. The earliest letters of Paul that proclaim the resurrection (e.g. Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 Corinthians) were written just 20-25 years after Jesus. The Gospels we know as Mark, Matthew, and Luke were written 30-50 years later, and John about 60 years later. Why does this timeframe go against the claim that Jesus' resurrection was a mere legend that had developed? (Note 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Galatians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 4:13-14.) (We should also keep in mind that first-century Palestine was more of an oral culture where teaching and news were reliably communicated by mouth. They didn't have printing presses, email, or text messaging.)

(Continued on next page)

- ***The disciples of Jesus earnestly believed in the resurrection of Jesus so strongly that they were willing to die for this belief.*** (This belief is especially notable because faithful Jews at the time of Jesus did not expect that the Messiah would be killed and rise again. Furthermore, the Jews did not expect any resurrection from the dead until the end of the world.)

9. Of course, if there is no God, then Jesus cannot be the Son of God and could not have been raised from the dead by God (Acts 2:24, 32).

(a) Discuss the following statement: “It would actually take more faith to be an atheist than to become a follower of Christ.”

(b) Do you think that the resurrection of Jesus and the evidence for that resurrection also give support to the very existence of God?

10. If Jesus really is who he claimed to be, what significance does that have for you personally? How might his claims, if true, impact your life? Elaborate.

11. If Jesus really is the Son of God, how important is it that we share this truth with the people in our lives? What most motivates you to tell others about him?

12. Are Christians being unloving to others if they try to get them to accept the truth-claims and resurrection of Jesus? Are Christians being unloving to others if they DON'T try to get others to accept the truth-claims and resurrection of Jesus?

“
IF JESUS CHRIST BE GOD
AND DIED FOR ME, THEN NO
SACRIFICE CAN BE TOO GREAT
FOR ME TO MAKE FOR HIM.”

- *C.T. Studd*

FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Pray that the reality and the identity of Jesus will become increasingly confirmed for you and more frequently affirmed to others by you. Read John 20:30-31 each day this week. What comes to mind each day? In what ways does this passage bless you or challenge you?

SESSION 5

1 2 3 4 5 6

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW TRAGEDY AND SUFFERING?

“GOD WHISPERS TO US IN OUR PLEASURES, SPEAKS IN OUR CONSCIENCE, BUT SHOUTS IN OUR PAINS: IT IS HIS MEGAPHONE TO ROUSE A DEAF WORLD.”

C.S. LEWIS

“THE WORLD IS A DANGEROUS PLACE TO LIVE; NOT BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE EVIL, BUT BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE WHO DON’T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

BACKGROUND STORY

It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon, and Tom and Tami were enjoying the outdoor setting. Earlier in the week, when Tom had asked her to meet him at their favorite booth at the restaurant, Tami suggested they move their “God Talks” to the nearby park where she and some of her friends were planning to hang out for the afternoon. While the others played a game of Ultimate Frisbee, they sat at a park bench and continued their month-long discussion.

Tom was especially concerned about why a good and loving God would allow suffering and evil. “That just doesn’t seem right,” Tom said. Reversing roles for a moment, Tami asked Tom a question. “Why does God allow free choice?” “What?!” Tom quickly replied. “What’s that got to do with it?” Tom was growing impatient. “I’m angry that God would create a world where there is so much evil and suffering. Why would he do that? That really bothers me.”

Tom poured out his heart in sharing all the hurt he’d experienced losing his dad to Parkinson’s disease. It was the most difficult loss he had ever gone through, and the wounds were still raw and painful. How could God allow that? It seems so unfair, so cruel, and so wrong. Tami listened intently, and it appeared as if she was grieving his loss too, even though she had never met Tom’s father.

“You must have loved your dad very much, Tom.” He could only nod. No words sufficed. After several minutes, Tami whispered her question once again. “But why does God allow free choice?” Her concern for his distress gave him the motivation to hear her out. “What do you mean, Tami?”

“Tom, the many disappointments in my life once made me so angry at God that I promised myself I would never believe in him, even if he did exist. But then I stumbled on this concept: Real love always involves a choice. It’s not possible to truly love without the freedom not to love. And that freedom also means that bad choices are possible as well. Tom, the ability to really love your dad wasn’t possible unless you truly had the choice not to love him. The same is true in our relationship with God. God gave us the freedom that was necessary for us to love him. But that same freedom also made it possible for us to reject him and not love him. It has resulted in terrible evil and suffering in our world.”

Tom turned to watch one of Tami’s friends make a daring catch to win that round of Ultimate. He’d never thought about it this way before, but her words were starting to make sense. Maybe God really does allow us the freedom to make bad choices—so that we’ll be able to make good ones as well. And maybe this is a clue to why the world is such a messed up place.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time when you or a friend experienced what seemed like an unfair tragedy or suffering. Why did it feel unfair? How did you or your friend deal with that difficulty?
2. What would you say if a friend asked you, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Ultimately, what do you think is the primary reason behind the hardship and evil we see in our world?
3. Do you agree with the claim that real love requires freedom? Is there such a thing as “forced love”? Why or why not? How does this relate to the issue of God and the reality of suffering and evil?
4. Some propose that evil and suffering are in the world because God created people with the freedom to choose good or evil. This freedom eventually led to moral evil because of evil free choices. But it also led to much natural evil because nature itself was corrupted as a consequence (see Romans 8:19-22), and humanity was forced to face suffering and death (Genesis 3:16-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). How do you react to this line of thought? Give some reasons for your response.
5. “While God gave humans freedom, which has led to great amounts of evil, he is not the ‘creator’ or the ‘cause’ of evil.” Discuss this claim. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
6. To what extent do you think we can fully understand the reasons behind the pain and suffering in this world? To what extent are you content to have a limited understanding of those reasons? How do your views affect how you view God and the reality of evil?
7. To what extent can you find comfort, encouragement, and hope in the claim that God can use suffering to accomplish good, even in this life? Give reasons for your response. (For background, see Romans 8:28, 35-39; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.)

Discovering meaning in the midst of our suffering can bolster our sense of hope. If we see something good emerge from our pain, we may find some relief and comfort. If we believe God is at work bringing something new and beneficial out of our suffering, we can perhaps endure it a little easier. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (**Romans 8:28**).

“
**YOU MAY NEVER KNOW THAT
JESUS IS ALL YOU NEED,
UNTIL JESUS IS ALL YOU HAVE.”**

- *Corrie Ten Boom*

8. To what extent are you (or have you been) willing and able to allow the suffering you endure in your life to drive you closer to God/Jesus (as opposed to becoming angry or bitter at God)? Elaborate.

9. Christians teach and the Bible affirms that during times of suffering, faith in Jesus can still produce a sense of peace for the moment, courage to deal with the future, and hope that God will someday “wipe away every tear.” To what extent can you find encouragement in this? (For background, see Romans 8:18, 23; 1 Peter 1:3-9.)

10. What does it look like to turn to Jesus during times of tragedy and suffering? Can you share a story of someone who inspired you by the way he or she turned to God in the midst of struggle or pain?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

Suffering is inevitable for all of us. May we be willing to “bless those who persecute” us and learn to “rejoice with those who rejoice” and “mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:14-15). May we receive, and may we give, comfort when it is needed and find our ultimate comfort in God who has himself suffered on our behalf (Isaiah 53:4-6).

This week, identify particular individuals or families who are suffering or experiencing tragedy. Take some action to offer them encouragement (e.g. a call, a card, an email, a text, a prayer). If you are suffering or facing hardship, ask God to help you see signs of his love and signs of his work in the actions of others.

“Philosophers and theologians can help us deal with the problem of evil, but the ultimate answer will come only when ‘God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes’ (Revelation 7:17).” - Harold O. J. Brown

“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

SESSION 6

1 2 3 4 5 6

IS IT INTOLERANT TO SAY THAT JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY?

“THE THIEF COMES ONLY TO STEAL AND KILL
AND DESTROY; I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY
HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL.”

JOHN 10:10

“ONLY THROUGH REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN CHRIST CAN ANYONE BE SAVED. NO RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY WILL BE SUFFICIENT, ONLY TRUE FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST ALONE.”

RAVI ZACHARIAS

BACKGROUND STORY

Tom intentionally arrived late and slipped into the back row. He wasn't even planning to be there, but when he received Tami's texts reminding him of the occasion, he knew he had no choice. Besides, none of Tami's family members were going to show up.

Even though it was a large church, Tom didn't want to run into anyone he knew. After all, this was his church too, except that he had stopped attending the services several months earlier—at about the same time Tami started visiting. He was in no mood to answer questions from people wondering why they hadn't seen him around.

“Baptism is rich in meaning,” the pastor explained. “The people you'll see getting baptized today are making a public declaration that they've decided to place their faith in Jesus Christ. This is their moment to make a bold statement, and we are here to celebrate and cheer them on.” Yes, Tami was getting baptized, and it was a big deal.

Tom's mind began to drift as he gazed across the auditorium to try to pick out his friend from among the scores of people fidgeting with anticipation as their big moment drew near. He was abruptly jarred back into focusing on what was happening in the service when he heard the pastor welcome Tami up front to the microphone to share her faith story. Tom had no clue this was coming.

The crowd hushed as Tami spoke with confidence and clarity. She was transparent about how, until recently, her life lacked meaning as she made poor choice after poor choice, rejecting the God who loved her unconditionally and who invited her to live the fulfilled life that he had intended for her. Then she shared the part in her journey when she opened up the Bible for the first time and began to explore some life-changing spiritual matters she'd never considered before.

Tami admitted having many doubts and fears, but she explained that something struck her. “I came to the realization that Jesus was real, his claims were true, and he was my only way to forgiveness and fulfillment. In fact, I concluded that if Jesus wasn't the way to God, then his life was unnecessary, and his death was in vain. But instead, I became convinced that God sent his son into the world to die on my behalf, because he was the only one qualified to pay for my sins.”

Tom was hanging on every word, and it felt as though God was tugging on his heart. “I definitely don't have all the answers,” Tami concluded, “and I'm unsure of a lot of things. There's so much to this I don't understand. But there's one thing I do know. There's one thing I have no doubt about. I was lost but now I'm found. I was blind but now I see.”



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is the meaning and motive behind the bumper stickers that invite people of all religions to “COEXIST”?
2. One popular perception is that Christians are intolerant. Can you think of examples where this is true?
3. What do you think it means to show tolerance toward people of differing beliefs? Does being tolerant require us to compromise our own beliefs? Can we be tolerant of another person’s beliefs even though we disagree with those beliefs? Explain.
4. Respond to the claim that “everyone is equally right, and it’s fundamentally wrong to disagree with or challenge another person’s beliefs.”
5. What would you say to someone who says that all religions are basically the same?
6. When Christians insist that Christianity is “true” and that Jesus is “the only way,” does this mean that other religions and philosophies have no truth at all?
7. When Jesus was brought to trial and said that “everyone on the side of truth listens to me,” the Roman governor named Pilate retorted, “What is truth?” (John 18:37-38). How would you answer Pilate’s question? Is anything true for everybody? What examples can you think of? Can some things be true for one person but not for another person? What examples can you think of? IF Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), would this be an example of a truth for some but not others, OR a truth for everybody? Explain.

If we compiled a list of what all the world’s great religious leaders taught about how to find God, live a good life, and reach a “heavenly state,” a striking commonality comes into view. Each religious leader pointed to a path, a method, or a strategy—except Jesus, who pointed to himself (**John 14:6**).

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.” - **C.S. Lewis**

“TRUTH IS SO OBSCURE IN THESE TIMES, AND FALSEHOOD SO ESTABLISHED, THAT, UNLESS WE LOVE THE TRUTH, WE CANNOT KNOW IT.”
BLAISE PASCAL

“
**IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, THE
NEW CREATION HAS COME:
THE OLD HAS GONE, THE
NEW IS HERE!”**

- 2 Corinthians 5:17

8. How would you respond to someone who says that the Christian idea that Jesus is “the only way” to God is arrogant, narrow-minded, and bigoted? Is it “narrowminded” to try to convince someone of something that is true? Share some examples of when it is narrow-minded. Share some examples of when it is not narrow-minded.

9. According to your understanding, what considerations help to show that Jesus is unique and the only one worthy or qualified to save us from our sin?

10. What practical steps could be taken to help you understand and apply the claims of Christ in your own life? What practical steps could you take to help others understand and seriously consider the claims of Christ?

☰ FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

May God lead you to encounter the claims of Christ with an open heart and an open mind. May the Spirit of God increase your conviction regarding Christ and grant you greater compassion for those who need the fullness of life that he provides.

This week, take some specific action that symbolizes your commitment to open the door to Christ like never before or share him with someone else like never before. What more can God do with you? Who needs God’s fullness that you can share?

This discussion guide was written by Garry Poole with additional contributions by Dr. Richard Knopp. Visit RoomForDoubt.com for more resources on this topic.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS

Thanks so much for participating in this important series on “Basic Questions”! We hope that it has prompted valuable reflections, productive conversations, and enjoyable experiences. And we pray that it has offered helpful guidance for your spiritual walk.

However, this is only one leg of your journey. It’s critical that you keep walking. Where do you go from here? What’s your next step? How can you assist others in their journey? Fortunately, many excellent resources are available and easily accessible, and we want to help you find them. Here are some suggestions.

- **The R4D website** (www.roomfordoubt.com). Visit our website frequently and point others our direction. We have a growing list of excellent written materials and videos (including YouTube & Vimeo). The website is searchable so you can easily find what you’re looking for. Anyone can also submit questions for us to answer.
- **The R4D mobile app**. This is a new feature that will provide convenient access to many of our materials at all times wherever you go. Download it and use it regularly.
- **R4D Materials for the “Big Questions” series**. Don’t forget to continue using the resources provided as part of this message and discussion curriculum.
- **R4D Recommended Resources**. We offer several sets of recommended resources for adults and youth that are periodically updated. The resources include recommended books and websites with brief descriptions. We maintain resource lists: (a) for church leaders and others on cultural awareness, Christian worldview, and Christian apologetics; (b) for teens and young adults; and (c) on science and the Christian faith.
- **R4D Live Presentations**. Dr. Richard Knopp, R4D Program Director, offers live presentations for churches, conferences, and conventions. Many of his presentation materials are available at www.worldvieweyes.org.
- **R4D Online Instruction & Education**. Dr. Knopp is also Professor of Philosophy & Christian Apologetics at Lincoln Christian University. He offers video-based online instruction as well as college and seminary courses for personal enrichment or for academic credit. One popular course is “An Introduction to Worldviews.” It surveys and evaluates different philosophies and religions; it offers a Christian orientation to topics like science and ethics; and it challenges participants to understand and live a Christian worldview. It’s available for high school students and adults.

More information and access to these “next steps” can be located on our website and in our mobile app. Let us walk with you on your spiritual journey.

THE ROOM FOR DOUBT APP

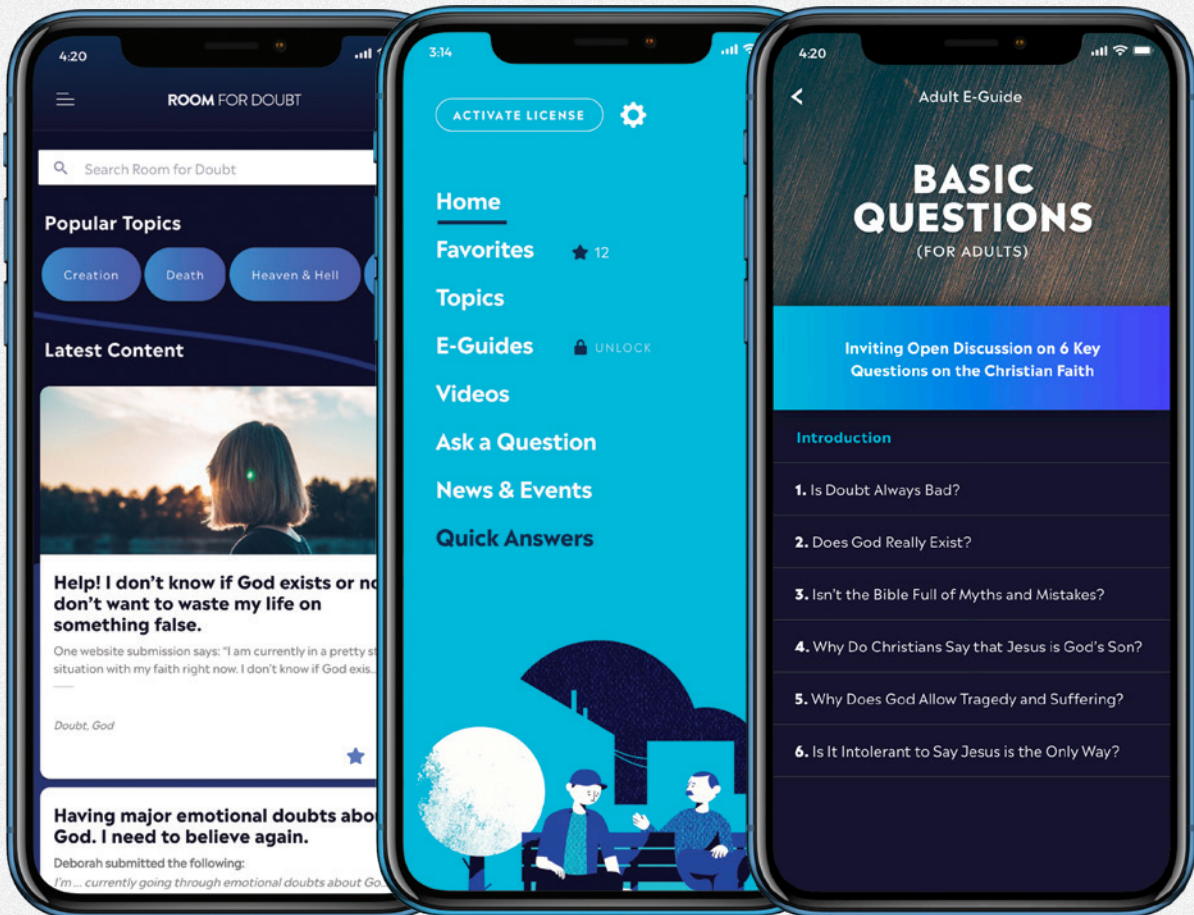
The app is designed as a resource for *everybody* to browse or search for topics and watch videos that will help strengthen faith.

It offers convenient access to our materials wherever you go. For those who purchase our “Basic Questions” curriculum, the app also provides a license key for churches or groups to unlock and access the discussion guides on their mobile devices.



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A primary goal of Room For Doubt is to address the growing need among youth and adults, both inside and outside the church, who have sincere questions and doubts about the Christian faith.

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