

SESSION 4: REVEAL

TOPIC: Is God Real?

GOAL

The goal of this session is to challenge the teens to ponder the existence of God and provide them with proofs of His existence.

KEY CONCEPTS

God's existence is philosophical, not scientific. Science can only tell us about the measurable, physical world. God, because He is infinite and pure spirit, cannot be measured by science.

God, in His infinite goodness and wisdom, chose to reveal Himself to us in time so that we could know and love Him.

God does not merely reveal Himself to us, He also nourishes us and sustains us so that we might experience the goodness of life.

KEY TERMS

Divine Revelation: God's communication of Himself, by which He makes known the mystery of His divine plan, a gift of self-communication which is realized by deeds and words over time, and most fully by sending us His own divine Son, Jesus Christ.

Natural Reason: The ability to use our human reason, innate and given by God, to determine God's existence.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:25-31

Psalms 19:1

CATECHISM

31-35

36-38

50-52

ABOUT THIS CONFIRMATION SESSION

The Gather is a small group game of "two truths and a lie." The Proclaim grapples with the question of God's existence and explains several proofs that support the claim that it is more reasonable to believe in the existence of God than to believe He does not exist. The Break includes a small group discussion about the teaching and a Scripture study on anxiety and worries. During the Send, the teens write a letter to God that explains any doubts they have about Him or worries they have about the future.

AS YOU GET STARTED

For an alternative break, consider having a large group Q&A. Following the Proclaim, invite the teens to ask any questions they may have about the existence of God. Give the teens a few minutes to compose their questions, writing them down on a piece of paper. After several minutes, have the teens — one by one — ask their questions. Consider forming a panel of qualified and diverse individuals to answer the questions.

GATHER

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Welcome them to the session and begin in prayer.

Two Truths and a Lie (10 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space and instruct them to remain with their Confirmation small groups. While in small groups, each teen comes up with two truths and one lie about themselves. If needed, the teens can write them down on a piece of paper so they do not forget them. The teens then take turns saying their three statements aloud. After a teen shares their statements, the other teens in the group guess which are true and which one is false. Continue this process until all of the teens have shared their truths and lies.

Big Questions Video (5 min)

Play the video “Big Questions” and then transition into the teaching.

PROCLAIM

“Reveal” Teaching (20 min)

Does God Exist?

Consider beginning by asking the group to close their eyes and raise their hands to answer some “big questions,” anonymously. Start by asking some more light-hearted questions and close by asking, “Have you ever doubted God’s existence? Do you ever struggle to believe in a personal God that loves you? Do you feel like there is a contradiction between faith and reason?” This will give you an idea of where your group falls when it comes to their current faith.

One of the most profound questions we will ever ask is whether or not God exists. It has been a question that almost every person in history has tried to answer, at least in a personal way. For most people in history the answer has been yes, God does exist, even if they have disagreed on who or what God is.

In 2011, a study was completed at the University of Oxford. Called the Cognition, Religion, and Theology Project, this study lasted three years and was the culmination of more than 40 different studies that took place in 20 different countries. The researchers who led the project concluded that to believe in God and the afterlife is a part of our human nature.

This is a big deal. It means that, as humans, we are hard-wired to believe in a higher power and life after death. This alone does not prove that God exists, but it supports the existence of God. Ultimately, God’s existence will not be proven by studies, history, or even science, but will be verified by philosophy.

Philosophy vs. Science

You may be wondering why science will never be able to prove God's existence. The reason is that science can only examine and give answers regarding the physical and material universe. In that way, science is limited. But God is not physical. Nor is He a part of our material universe. If God were a part of the universe, He would not be God.

Ask the teens to name some non-physical things that are real. If they struggle to come up with answers, point out ideas like truth, beauty, justice, and love. Ask the teens questions like: How do you define these terms? Who determines which definition is the best one? How do we measure these different ideas?

So, there are things that are real even though they are immaterial. When we attempt to define and explain these immaterial realities, we engage in philosophy. Philosophical proofs, though, are less like mathematical proofs and are more like reasonable arguments. Even the best philosophical proofs, because they cannot give physical evidence, rely on the use of sound reason. If those listening to the argument are not using reason properly, they will not be convinced.

So when it comes to a philosophical proof of God's existence, we are simply saying that we are going to develop logical arguments for God's existence. The goal is that someone who hears these arguments will recognize that it is more reasonable to believe that God exists than to believe that He does not exist. There are many philosophical proofs of God's existence. The most common are those from St. Thomas Aquinas, developed in the 13th century.

The Five Proofs

Saint Thomas Aquinas gave us five ways that we can come to know God's existence. They are the Argument from Motion, the Argument from Causation, the Argument from Contingency, the Argument from Degree, and the Teleological Argument, also called the Argument from Design. It is important to note that although he was a Catholic philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas was not arguing the existence of a Christian God in these proofs. Rather, he was arguing the existence of something that we can call God.

Saint Thomas Aquinas' first three arguments hinge on the same idea: a series of events that must have a first. For example, take the Argument from Motion. Saint Thomas Aquinas argued that we see things moving that are incapable of moving themselves. Therefore, something must have made them move. But you cannot have an infinite line of things being made to move by other things, so there must be something that was already moving and was not caused to move. This, we call God.

CCC 32, 34

Perhaps this analogy will make it clearer. Imagine you were in a car and came across a train crossing some train tracks. Imagine that the beginning of the train already passed by the time you get there, and that the train is so long you cannot see the end of it. All you see are the individual box cars passing in front of you. These box cars cannot move themselves; each is being moved by the one in front of it. But it would be absurd to conclude that the train is an

infinite line of box cars. Therefore, you must conclude that there is a car at the front that can move on its own. This is called the train engine.

Our Desires Can Be Satisfied

There is another proof from C.S. Lewis that is worth mentioning. Lewis said that all of our natural human desires are able to be satisfied. When we experience hunger, we know that food will satiate our hunger. Likewise, when we are thirsty, we can find something to drink that will satisfy our thirst. But he also said that humans have some desires that cannot be satisfied on Earth. We desire things like beauty, goodness, truth, and justice. There has never been anyone who has said, "I have seen enough beauty. I do not want to see any more."

Lewis concluded, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." It is perhaps this quote that St. John Paul II had in mind when he said, "It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is He who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise."

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity; CCC 33

The Catechism tells us that, "...God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason." This is what St. Thomas Aquinas' arguments allow us to do. But we must move beyond the simple certainty that there is a God and encounter Him because He is a personal God, a God who desires to love us and be loved by us in a unique way.

CCC 36

What Is Next?

Knowing with certainty, then, that God exists, we must proceed to ask the next logical question: What can we know about this God? God, because He desires to be known by us, chose to reveal Himself to the world in what we call divine revelation. This divine revelation complements our natural reason, by which we came to know that God exists. Divine revelation allows us to know God as He is. Without it we could never know God in a personal way and would be in serious danger of misunderstanding Him. Natural reason and divine revelation are like learning about someone on the internet versus learning about them in person, face to face. Yes, you can know many things about someone from their Instagram, but you will not truly get to know them until you meet them and spend time with them.

CCC 35, 37-38, 50

If we want to know God in a personal and profound way, we must turn to the Church because the Church is how God chose to reveal Himself. It began with Abraham and the Israelites in the Old Testament and culminated in the person of Jesus in the New Testament. The Church, inspired and safeguarded by the Holy Spirit, has recorded and preserved God's revelation of Himself so that you and I might meet God in a personal way today. We can do this, especially in Scripture, because "in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet His children, and talks with them."

CCC 81, 84, 104

The Invitation

God's revelation of Himself to us is an invitation. God reveals His love for us in and through His Son, Jesus Christ, and invites us to love Him in return — not because He needs our love or because He gains anything by our love, but rather, because He knows that loving Him is that for which we were created. Ultimately, we will only find true joy and fulfillment when we do that for which we were created.

CCC 51-52

But God does not merely reveal Himself to us and then abandon us and wait for us to figure it out. God is a patient teacher, who walks with us step by step and sends the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds so that we might better understand Him. He sustains us and holds us in existence so that we might enjoy the beauty of the created world and through it, come to a deeper knowledge of Him.

CCC 32; 1 Corinthians 12:3

You and I are utterly dependent upon God. We did not create ourselves nor can we keep ourselves in existence. We can stay healthy, exercise, and eat well, but even then, tomorrow is not guaranteed. This is the goodness of our God: He continues to hold us in existence moment to moment, even when we turn our backs on Him and doubt His existence. And as He holds us in existence, He constantly seeks to remind us of His undying love for us. The question is, will we open our hearts to encounter the God of the universe?

CCC 30; Matthew 6:25-31

BREAK

Small Group Discussion (15 min)

Divide the teens into their small groups. Begin in prayer and then use the following questions to facilitate a discussion:

- Have you ever doubted the existence of God? What inspired this doubt?
- What are some reasons you have heard as to why people do not believe in God?
- What is significant about the University of Oxford study? How does this study influence our proofs of God?
- How do you feel about the idea that it is more reasonable to believe God exists than to believe He does not exist? Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
- What are St. Thomas Aquinas' five proofs for God's existence? Which proof do you agree with most? Do you struggle to understand or agree with any of these proofs?
- What is your go-to proof for God's existence? Have you shared this proof with others?
- How can Scripture help you come to know God more fully and develop a personal relationship with Him?

Scripture Study (10 min)

Invite a teen to read Matthew 6:25-34. Use the following questions to facilitate a discussion about the passage:

- What stands out to you in this passage?

- What are you currently worried or anxious about?
- How do your anxieties and worries affect your belief in God?

SEND

Letter to God (10 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Give each teen a piece of paper, a pen, and an envelope. Instruct them to write a letter to God, including any questions they have for Him, doubts they have about Him, or fears they have about the future. Once they are finished writing their letter, invite them to seal it in an envelope with their name on it. Collect the envelopes and give them back to the teens when they have been confirmed, so they can see how far they have come in their relationship with God over the course of the preparation program.