

## Overcoming Doubt

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**MEETING AIM:** To help young people face their doubts about God without being discouraged. This session aims to promote thoughtfulness and inspire courage.

You will need toilet rolls, big sheets of paper, pens and bibles.

**PREPARATION:** Spend time praying and thinking about your own doubts. Recall how God has been at work in your life. Thank God that He loves the world so much that He gets involved. Thank him for getting involved in your life; remember those who worked with you as a young person.

Consider this – ‘To follow Jesus Christ is to choose to live in his adventure. How in the world could you ever imagine a life of faith that does not require risk? Faith and risk are inseparable. It should not come as a surprise to us then that a life of faith is a life of courage. While faith as a noun may be about belief, having faith is all about action. You cannot walk by faith and live in fear. You cannot walk with God and not face your fears. God calls you to dream great dreams and to have the courage to live them. Great dreams require great courage.’

*From Uprising, 2003 by Erwin McManus.*

### **Toilet paper handcuffs (10 mins)**

Ask if anyone thinks it is possible to make handcuffs out of toilet paper. Split into teams and challenge them to handcuff a member of another team using 1 toilet paper roll. At the end, invite those handcuffed to escape their shackles. Award the strongest handcuff makers.

Say: We often need to make judgements in life about what is and isn't possible, but how do we know what is? There are some rules (e.g. gravity) that inform us, but how do we know which are true? Do we believe what sounds believable? Or do we pursue the truth, ask questions and investigate? Ask the group what they KNOW is true; question them as to how they know. Do not be afraid to make them uncomfortable, it will bring growth.

### **Call my bluff (10 mins)**

Each person thinks of two true things about themselves and one false, and after telling the rest of the group their three 'facts' everyone guesses which is false.

Ask: What makes something sound believable? Why did you believe some things about people and not others?

### **God: Too good to be true? (10 mins)**

It is unusual for people to be perfectly sure of God's existence, completely able to trust Him, and totally confident of His love and plan for them. It is normal for us to have doubts. This is partly because God is SO amazing that it blows our minds and we start thinking that God is just too good to be true....

Draw an explosion and ask, what blows your mind about God? Say: God already knows your heart and loves your honesty, and is more than able to cope with your doubts about him. We are more able to grow as followers of Jesus when we are real about our faith. Pray together that God will speak to each person about their particular doubts.

**KEY POINT: Saying 'you don't need to pretend with God' is not saying 'you don't need to try with God'. He works in us, with us and through us as long as we work with him.**

### **Walking on custard? (10 mins)**

Read Matthew 14:22-36 together and challenge your group to retell the story in their own way e.g. rap/ drama/ news report in small groups where everyone is involved.

Why not try to reproduce this with a paddling pool and cornflour based custard? See if anyone can walk on top of it!

**Getting out of the boat (10 mins)** Say: Four of the disciples were fishermen, as was Peter, and had never seen or heard of someone walking on the water. This (Matthew 14:22-36) was a 'blow their minds' moment from God. The world they worked in had rules, and one of them was that people couldn't walk on top of the water. They immediately assumed it must be a ghost because they couldn't even consider it a human. Jesus reassures them saying 'Have courage, it is I' but this challenges their understanding of who he is because he is doing the humanly impossible at the time.

Peter dares to believe that Jesus could walk on water, but is not foolish enough to jump straight out of the boat. Ask: Why do you think that Peter asks before he leaps? Consider your own / your church's position on this. Be careful not to disrespect the chaotic work of God. Instead aim to emphasise the need for discernment within it.

There is a fine line between bravery and stupidity. Some Christians believe that faith means not thinking but just doing whatever you 'feel' the spirit leads you to do. Ask: Why might this be unhelpful? Share a story to illustrate this point.

Peter doubts it is Jesus on the lake, saying 'Lord if it's you...' which shows him evaluating the situation.

**KEY POINT: Doubt is sometimes seen as a dirty word by Christians. Some might even think it is sinful to doubt, but faith involves risk (see quote). We know that taking risks requires courage and means we have to face the possibility of failure. Facing our fears and doubts and overcoming them is**

## what God calls us to do.

### Success or Failure (10 mins)

Read Peter's part in the story (verses 25-32) and discuss these questions in small groups.

1. Why might Jesus have invited Peter to walk to him on the water? (God wants to help us grow in our ability to believe that nothing is impossible with him)
2. What did Peter doubt that led to him sinking? (Himself? Jesus? Both?)
3. Is Jesus having a go when he says to Peter 'you of little faith, why did you doubt?' (No! this is a helpful question, Peter needed to see that faith requires courage to face doubts and overcome them so in future he would be able to believe that nothing is impossible with God).

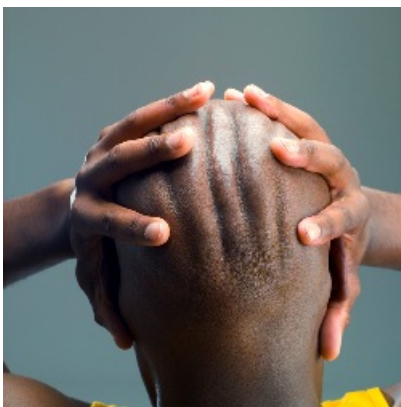
Get feedback from each group and say: God loves our faith, just like he loves our attempts at serving him, loving others and following Jesus. He knows we're not perfect, and he can cope with that. He sent his son to the cross to deal with all our inadequacies so that he could work with us in our imperfections. Read 1 John 4:4 and encourage people to overcome anything that gets in the way of them moving on with God.

**KEY POINT: Try to balance reassuring the group that they are accepted with encouraging them to pursue deeper faith and relationship with God. We pursue God out of a heart that desires to know him who saved us, not earn our salvation.**

### Spot the miracle (5 mins)

Split into pairs and share stories of God's work in your life and the lives of people you know. Share a few stories altogether.

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