

PRECIOUS TO GOD!



1. How much **value** do you think you have (not your possessions, but who you are)? Rank yourself on the scale below.



2. Check out **Psalm 8**. What question does David ask in verse 4?

David then lists some things God has done to show how much he values people (verses 5-8). Which one is your favorite?

3. Now read **John 3:16**. Because of his great love for people, what did God do?

What does this tell you about how God values you?

4. Check out **Romans 8:31-32**, then use the scale below to rate how much you think God values you.



5. What is **one word** that describes how you feel knowing that God will always love you?

PRECIOUS TO GOD! [God's love for people—Psalm 8]

THIS WEEK

God values each of your kids so highly. This may be hard for teenagers to understand—most junior highers struggle with self-esteem. They can't image someone loving them completely for who they are. On top of that, some of your kids may struggle with feeling unloved by parents, ditched by friends, and unappreciated by others. Use this TalkSheet to point out that value comes from God, and not from themselves. That's what makes their lives worthwhile and meaningful!

OPENER

Show your students a dollar bill or a dollar coin and ask your kids why they think it's valuable. Point out that the dollar is just paper (or a simple coin!)—not very valuable in and of itself. You may want to describe or show pictures of other things that have no real value other than what people attach to them—a famous painting, an expensive baseball card, a rare CD, and so on. Point out that many things are valuable only because people have decided to attach value to them. The world's most expensive painting, for instance, would be of no value at all to a monkey or a pet cat. Why do your kids think they're valuable? Who has attached value to them?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. How did your kids rank themselves? This will be a good indicator of their self-esteem. Be careful not to ask for specific rankings, as they may not want to share their personal feelings about themselves. Instead, ask them how junior highers in general would rank themselves.
2. What question did David ask in verse 4? Have your kids ever asked the same question? You may want to ask your group to rephrase David's question in everyday language. Knowing that God has done a lot of awesome things for them, which one is the favorite of your kids? Why?
3. By now your students should be convinced that God values them highly. Read Romans 5:8 to your group and point out that Christ died for people even while people were yet sinners. That is, he loved people even when people were in total rebellion against him! How many of your kids would've done that if they were Jesus?
4. In question 1, your kids ranked themselves. How do they think God values them? Point out that God's love is based on his nature—not on how popular, cute, talented, rich, or funny people are. His love is unconditional, never-ending, and

always the same. All of your kids should put themselves at the highest end of this scale.

5. You may make a list of the words that they chose now that they know God loves them all the time, no matter what. Ask for a few volunteers to explain why they chose the reaction they did. Did any of them respond negatively? Some of them may have a hard time understanding the concept of God's love. Take some time to talk about these reactions, too.

THE CLOSE

Take a moment to affirm your appreciation and love for your students. Point out that each of them is extremely valuable to the group and that you appreciate the different characteristics that they bring to the group. The uniqueness of your kids brings variety to the group. You may want to illustrate this by using some colored markers. Pick a color (say, red) and say that red stands for humor, blue for loyalty, green for enthusiasm, and so on. Each of your kids brings color and wholeness to the group—as they do to the family of God! Without that variety, a group would be dull. Close with a time of prayer for your group and for each person in it.

MORE

- You may want to brainstorm with your kids practical ways that your kids show their value for someone else—a friend, family member, teacher, pastor, and so on. What could your kids do this week for someone that they appreciate? Encourage them to follow through with it—it may be a simple e-mail, note, or phone call. Did this action change the relationship in any way? How did the other person respond?
- How does the media and society shape what people value? You may want to spend some time talking with your kids about how TV, movies, and music have affected what others think of each other. For example, what do movies say about sexual respect and genuine love? Who does society hold in high esteem? And is that person worthy of ultimate respect and admiration? How do these influences compare to your kids' individual admirations and high regard for others? What about Christians at large?

IS HE FOR REAL?



1. Match the word in the left column that you think matches the description in the right column.
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agnostic | a. Isn't sure if there is a God or not |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atheist | b. Believes in God, but not sure which one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theist | c. Believes that God doesn't exist |
2. Put an arrow by the **three things** below that you think show that God does exist.
- | | | |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| Music | Conscience | Science |
| Nature | Love | History |
| Babies | Evil | Disasters |
| Death | Stars in the sky | Feelings |
| The universe | Logic | Common sense |
3. Do you **A (agree)** or **D (disagree)** with the following statements?
- ☐ Sometimes I doubt that God really exists.
- ☐ It would be better if God made himself more obvious.
- ☐ God is obvious but people aren't looking or don't care.
4. Check out **Psalm 53:1-4 & 6**. In your own words describe the problems of people who say there is no God.
- Who is the one who answers the prayer of verse 6?
5. There are a lot of ways people can help those who doubt God's existence. What are **three positive ways** you could explain God's existence to people without turning them off about God or threatening them?
- What would be **three negative ways**?

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

THIS WEEK

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

OPENER

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

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

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

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

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

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

THE CLOSE


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

MORE

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

SMART LIVING



1. Where or who would you go to if you wanted to get help for a problem?
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A music legend | <input type="checkbox"/> A teacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A college professor | <input type="checkbox"/> A psychic hotline |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An advice columnist | <input type="checkbox"/> An Internet chat room |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A book called <i>Smart Answers for Dummies</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> A parent or adult relative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A football star | <input type="checkbox"/> A complete stranger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A bag lady | <input type="checkbox"/> A telephone hotline operator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A minister or youth pastor | <input type="checkbox"/> A person with a college degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A friend your own age | <input type="checkbox"/> A police officer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An older brother or sister | <input type="checkbox"/> Other— |
2. From the list above, put an arrow by those that you respect and trust.
3. Suppose you were about to be ushered into the presence of God himself. Circle three words that might describe your feelings.
- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Curious | Terrified | Self-assured |
| Relaxed | Happy | Fearful |
| Upset | Concerned | Awestruck |
| Embarrassed | Respectful | Nervous |
| Joyful | Reckless | |
| Cautious | Unconcerned | |
4. Read **Proverbs 1:7** and then write in your own words what you think this verse means.
5. What do you think your behavior should be like if you take this passage seriously?
6. Put an X on the line to show the degree of fearful respect you think you have toward God.
- ◆  ◆
- None at all All of my awe

SMART LIVING [respecting God — Proverbs 1]

THIS WEEK

This TalkSheet is designed to help students consider the relationship between a respectful fear of God and the ability to make wise choices. Since teenagers often seek wisdom from many not-so-good, unwise sources, it's vital to establish the rationale and source for godly wisdom. By the end of this session, students will be able to determine their own degree of respect for God.

OPENER

Start off this discussion by asking your students if they've ever received an electrical shock. What was the experience like? Did they stick their fingers in a socket? Rub their stocking feet on the carpet and then touch someone else? How did they get the shock? Were they surprised at the power of a regular house current? And most importantly, what did they learn in relationship to electricity?

From the day they're born, kids are taught to respect the power of electricity—not to touch downed wires, to be careful around appliances and water, and to keep away from power outlets. And you still can't see electricity, even if you try.

God's awesome power is parallel—people should fear and respect his person and the wisdom that comes from this reverential fear.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Who do your kids most value and respect for their wisdom? Make a list of their top choices and ask them to explain who or what they chose and why. Did your group list any other sources?
2. See how many of your kids arrowed the items from the list that they checked. If so, why did your kids pick these people for both wisdom and respect? Point out that wisdom and respect go hand in hand.
3. How would your kids feel in the presence of God? Get a feel for the group's feeling as a whole. Point out that a healthy view of God is one that mixes awe, reverence, and respectful fear (such as how one would approach electricity after a good shock). Many people today have lost the sense of God's tremendous majesty and incredible power. People rarely seek wisdom from individuals they don't respect.
4. Ask for a few willing volunteers to share their paraphrases and comments. You may want to write these on a whiteboard and come up with a group paraphrase of the verse.

5. How will your kids apply this verse to their lives? Ask for specific examples of behaviors at home, school, church, and elsewhere. You may want to make a list of these on a poster board or whiteboard.

6. Where do your kids land when it comes to real respect and reverence towards God? If you don't want to ask for specific responses, ask the group (as a whole) how many of them are more toward the right or left of the scale. Where would your kids like to rank themselves in a year? Five years? 10 years?

THE CLOSE

God motivates people to serve him by his incredible power, but he can't and won't force people to respect and have awe for him. Respecting God is a choice, just like choosing to love and serve him. And when he shows people his unconditional love and power, people stand in awe of him more and more. Point out that those who truly fear God have a genuine desire to be obedient to his will. The path to foolish and destructive living is to deny God the respect and position in their lives that he deserves. Where are your kids with their relationships to the one awesome God?

MORE

- Brainstorm with your kids or have your students think of other examples of things they respectfully fear. A few examples include the power of nature—especially the high winds or forceful waves. What other ones are there? Tell them to consider how those things that they respectfully fear compare to God Almighty. Challenge them to reevaluate what they respect and don't respect in light of God's priorities.
- Some teenagers think that they can be fearless—that no one can stand in their way. You may want to talk with your group about fearlessness. What are the dangers of being fearless? What consequences follow when someone does not respect authority, nature, or others? Point out that fearlessness is naive—it is unwise and foolish because no person has the power that God has. What kids or adults do your kids know that display fearless attributes? And is the degree of their fearlessness healthy 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
Panicked
Curious
Fearful
Abandoned
Dumb

Shocked
Worried
Terrified
Confident
Relaxed
Unafraid

Dismayed
Confused
Sad
Alarmed

2. If you were to go anywhere 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 parents
☐ A teacher
☐ My boyfriend or girlfriend
☐ Everyone, a little
☐ Myself

☐ My youth pastor
☐ Another relative
☐ God
☐ I have no guide
☐ 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 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 us needs. Submitting to the leading of God is an act of wisdom that leads to 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 us 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 without God as guide? What would be different about their lives as opposed to a Christian's? 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 we 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, we 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.

WORDS TO LIVE BY



1. Do you think each statement is **T (true)** or **F (false)**?

- ☐ The Bible could be God's Word.
- ☐ The Bible is an old book of myths and fables.
- ☐ The Bible has some of God's words in it.
- ☐ The Bible is God's Word.

2. What do you think? Pick **one** response to complete the sentence.
When people read the Bible, they should—

- ☐ believe and follow only what their heart tells them to.
- ☐ believe and follow only what their church or pastor tells them to.
- ☐ study carefully, then obey what is clearly taught.
- ☐ see its contents as suggestions rather than strict guidelines.
- ☐ enjoy it as literature.

3. Many religions have their own holy books. Some groups have added to or taken away from what's found in the Bible. What would you say to someone who claimed to have a new and improved version of God's Word?

4. Check out the following verses and match each one with what it teaches.

Proverbs 30:5

God's Word is flawless.

Luke 11:28

The Word of God is like a sword that cuts to your heart.

2 Timothy 3:15-16

God told the writers what to write.

Hebrews 4:12

Those who hear and obey God's Word are blessed.

5. Why do you think some Christians spend little time reading Bible?

6. Which is true for you?

- ☐ I read the Bible a lot.
- ☐ I need to read the Bible more.
- ☐ I am comfortable with how much I read the Bible.
- ☐ I read the Bible, but I don't obey much of what it says.

WORDS TO LIVE BY [the Bible—Proverbs 30]

THIS WEEK

The writer of Proverbs tells people that every word of God is flawless. Human wisdom can't even come close to the incredible illumination that comes from God's word. Are your kids bored with the Bible? Do they think it dull and inapplicable to their lives? Through this TalkSheet, your kids will discover that God provides people a refuge, a rule of instruction for living life, a love letter, and an instrument for touching the most private aspects of their lives—all packaged in pages of paper and ink.

OPENER

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

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

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

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

THE CLOSE

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

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

MORE

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