



Where Do My Beliefs Come From and How Do I Know They're Legitimate?



Session Objective

Our beliefs are shaped by our families and friends as well as influences such as media, culture, education, where we live, and so on. We trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in all of these forces, but there's still a lot of sifting, questioning, and testing to be done. This session introduces participants to the process of discernment, giving them tools to help in the ongoing struggle to grow in faith.

Faith Statement

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts; and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word: by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

—Westminster Confession of Faith (6.078)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What are your earliest memories or thoughts relating specifically to faith and God?
- How has your faith changed since you were a child? How has your faith *not* changed since you were a child?
- Who or what has been the biggest influence (positive or negative) on your faith and beliefs?
- Do you ever have doubts about whether your beliefs are legitimate or "correct"? If so, what sorts of doubts have you had?



Explore

Read Galatians 1:11-17 and the faith statement together and explore the following questions:

- Why might it have been important to Paul that his beliefs came directly from God?
- Why might it have been important for Paul to tell the Christians in Galatia that his beliefs came directly from God?
- In what ways does the faith statement connect with Paul's claims and experience? In what ways does it differ?
- Would Paul approve of the faith statement? Why or why not?
- What guidance does this faith statement provide for clarifying, testing, and strengthening our beliefs?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- In what ways do you resonate (or not resonate) with the source of Paul's beliefs?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Where do your beliefs come from and how do you know they're legitimate?"
- How does your response to the question for this session affect how you live your life?



Exit

Close your time together in prayer, giving each participant an opportunity to thank God for the gift of faith.





Session Objective

Though many Christian faith traditions and denominations differ significantly in some of their beliefs, the belief in the good news of Jesus' saving death and resurrection lies at the heart of Christianity. This session aims to help participants explore the meaning behind that core belief, with the ultimate goal of helping them to arrive at a point when they can embrace that belief and make it their own.

Faith Statement

Question 22. What, then, must a Christian believe?

All that is promised us in the gospel, a summary of which is taught us in the articles of the Apostles' Creed, our universally acknowledged confession of faith.

—Heidelberg Catechism (4.022)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What element of the Christian faith do you find easiest to believe? What element of the Christian faith do you find hardest to believe?
- Which beliefs are common among all Christians? About which beliefs do some Christians disagree?
- How would you sum up your Christian beliefs in one sentence?
- What makes stating your Christian beliefs easy or hard?



Explore

Read Mark 16:1–8 and the faith statement and explore the following questions:

- Compared to the other stories about Jesus Christ in the Gospels, in what ways is Jesus' death and resurrection the most foundational story of our faith?
- How can understanding the events and emotions in this story affect our beliefs?
- What elements of the Scripture passage are included among the essentials of the Christian faith as laid out in the faith statement and the Apostles' Creed?
- What essentials of the Christian faith are missing from the faith statement and Apostles' Creed?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- In what ways does the Apostles' Creed explain what you believe?
- In what ways does the Apostles' Creed fall short in explaining what you believe?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "What do you believe?"



Exit

Give each participant an opportunity to name one thing that he or she believes, starting with the words "I believe. . . ." Encourage participants to state their belief with conviction and enthusiasm. After each person makes a belief statement, have the rest of the group respond by saying, "Amen!" Close the session in prayer.





Session Objective

There's a difference between belief and faith—between believing that something is true and putting your trust in someone. Believing that Jesus died for you is only the beginning of faith. True faith, grounded in a trusting relationship with Jesus, is deeper and longer lasting than simple belief. This session aims to help participants begin to move from simple belief to lasting faith, from being a member of a church to being a member of the body of Christ.

Faith Statement

In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.

—A Brief Statement of Faith (10.1)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What is belief? What is faith? What is trust?
- What is the difference between belief and faith?
- Is *trust* a good word to describe what it means to believe or have faith in someone? Why or why not?



Explore

Read Matthew 15:21–28. Explain the following:

- The location of this story (Tyre and Sidon) indicates that Jesus and his followers were in Gentile (non-Jewish) territory. The Canaanite woman was a Gentile.
- In verse 24, the “lost sheep of Israel” refers to the Jewish people.
- In verse 26, Jesus is speaking in a metaphor where Jews are the “children” and Gentiles are the “dogs.”

Explore the following questions together:

- What surprises you about this passage?
- What was Jesus' initial reaction to the Canaanite woman? Why do you think he treated her this way?
- How does Jesus' reaction to the woman change at the end of the Scripture passage? Why did his response to her change?
- What can this Scripture passage teach us about what it means to believe in Jesus?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- What actions, events, and dialogue in Matthew 15:21–28 illustrate each particular phrase of the faith statement for this session?
- What actions, events, and conversations in your own life illustrate each particular phrase of the faith statement?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, “Who do you believe in?”



Exit

Close the session in prayer, giving each participant an opportunity to pray for the person on his or her right.





How Do My Beliefs Affect How I Live My Life?



Session Objective

Coming to faith is just the beginning of the Christian life. When we have a faithful, trusting relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit works in and through us to be Christ's body in the world. This session explores the effects of faith and introduces young people to the risks and rewards of living out their beliefs.

Faith Statement

The new life does not release people from conflict with unbelief, pride, lust, and fear. They still have to struggle with disheartening difficulties and problems. Nevertheless, as they mature in love and faithfulness in their life with Christ, they live in freedom and good cheer, bearing witness on good days and evil days, confident that the new life is pleasing to God and helpful to others.

—Confession of 1967 (9.23)
Inclusive language version



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- How do your Christian beliefs make you a different person from the person you would be if you weren't a Christian?
- In what specific ways do your beliefs directly affect how you live your life?
- What are the consequences of not having beliefs affect your life?



Explore

Read Galatians 5:13–25 and the faith statement and explore these questions:

- Who is your neighbor? What does it mean to love your neighbor?
- What does it mean to be guided by the Spirit?
- How would you summarize the meaning of this Scripture passage in one sentence?
- Is it hard, or even impossible, to live up to the standards Paul puts forth in this passage? If so, what do we do?
- Does the faith statement complement or contradict Galatians 5:13–25? How so?
- Would Paul approve of the faith statement? Why or why not?
- How do the faith statement and Scripture passage respond to the question, "How do my beliefs affect how I live my life?"



Express

Have each participant write down three things that he or she believes on a sheet of scratch paper. Then, ask: In what specific ways can you put the beliefs you listed into action in the coming week?

Continue the conversation with the following questions:

- Who in your life lives his or her life based on his or her beliefs? How can you tell?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "How do your beliefs affect how you live your life?"



Exit

Close the session in prayer, giving each participant an opportunity to pray for the Spirit's guidance in a specific area of his or her life.

