



GO DEEPER

SESSION 5: WHY CAN'T YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU WANT AS LONG AS YOU'RE SINCERE?



Aim

To explore the root of beliefs and whether sincerity or reality is a better foundation for belief.



Starter

Show the group the following headlines and invite them to guess which are actual headlines appearing on newspapers or news sites and which are made up.

See page 4 for a version of the quiz that you can print out or project.

- ◆ Dutch court rejects 69-year-old man's request to be 20 years younger (TRUE)
- ◆ Titanic Sinking: No Lives Lost (TRUE)
- ◆ Woman who married dog eight years ago says he's 'perfect' for her (TRUE)
- ◆ Global pandemic can be halted by caffeine injections (FALSE)
- ◆ Court rules woman, 42, cannot have legal identity as beech tree (FALSE)
- ◆ Holocaust Denier Tried for Spreading His Message, Dies at 78 (TRUE)
- ◆ Mobiles to be replaced by inner ear chip by 2025 (FALSE)
- ◆ Babies will disappear in next 100 years (TRUE)

As the real headlines show, people can hold very firm beliefs in things which are not true!



Video

Watch the video [Why Can't You Believe What You Want as Long as You're Sincere?](#) (Running time 3:53)



Questions

Encourage pupils to write any questions on sticky notes as they occur to them.

Answer questions of understanding about the video straight away unless these will be answered later in the session. If there is not time for a question, confirm you will answer it another time. Consider using the 'car park' so pupils know you will not forget.



Exploring the Bible

In the video, Andy Bannister suggested it is possible to hold our beliefs very sincerely, but to be sincerely wrong. In this encounter in Mark's gospel, Jesus confronts Pharisees and teachers of the law.

Read Mark 7:1-8

Discuss

The Pharisees and teachers of the law accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking the religious laws by not completing ceremonial washing before they ate. How does Jesus respond In v6-8?

Jesus tells the Pharisees and teachers of the law they are hypocrites, quoting from Isaiah in this section which the Pharisees would have been very familiar with. He tells them their worship is in vain and they do not really love God. They are more interested in their own man-made rules than pleasing God.

Was it fair of Jesus to criticise the Pharisees for adhering to the Old Testament laws?

Some of the laws the Pharisees kept were God's laws of the Old Testament – but not all of them. They added hundreds of extra laws themselves to ensure they did not even get close to breaking the law, but these rules were burdensome and led to self-righteousness as the Pharisees sat in judgement over those who could not keep them all.

The Pharisees were zealous in their adherence to the law – but God is not interested in their outward religious performance or good deeds. He is interested in their hearts.

Read Mark 7:14-23

The Pharisees followed rules about ceremonial washing and avoided unclean foods to be clean before God. Jesus says that what they touch or eat cannot make them unclean – because food and germs pass through the body. It is what is on the inside that makes them clean or unclean – and their attitudes, thoughts and actions show they are unclean.

Discuss

What things do you sometimes do outwardly to look or feel that you are pleasing God although you know your heart is not really in them?

This could be going to church, Bible reading, prayer, serving etc. Of course, there is always an element of habit and duty in obedience which is not wrong. If we did not set our minds to do these things, we would never do them! However, we do not want to fool ourselves that God wants cold hearted duty.

Have you ever believed something that you then discovered was wrong?

If time allows, you could also ask pupils how much investigating of their own opinions they do (for many of us, this is very little!) and/or if they think they could back down from a previously strongly held belief. Share a personal example if appropriate.

Jesus states that evil thoughts come from within, and we know there are lots of things about us which are not perfect. As we become aware of our sin, God wants us to come to him. What does God promise us?

We are already adopted as God's children through Jesus' death and are loved by him as we are – our sin does not change this love (Romans 5:8-10). We need to keep reading Scripture to remind ourselves of this often. Minister Robert Murray McCheyne advised for every look at ourselves in our sin, we should take ten looks at Christ!

God promises to transform us into the image of Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). That

process will not be fully completed until after we die, but we will see glimpses of change in this life.

We are to persevere in our battle against sin, reminding ourselves of Jesus (Hebrews 12:1



Reflection

Allow a time of reflection that is most appropriate to your group.

You may wish to reflect and pray quietly on the following:

- ◆ Do you feel you are going through the motions with God? Confess this before him and ask him to reveal himself to you as you read Scripture, and to give you knowledge of his love for you, and greater desire to know and love him.
- ◆ Perhaps you are aware of your sin and need to change. Thank him that you are completely secure in his love already and do not need to earn his favour. Pray for his help to see your sin, to confess it, and to change.

For a more active response:

Think about some things you would like God to change in your life. Make them things about your character, not your appearance or future job or possessions. You could make a note of them on your phone. Commit to praying about these things often, and confiding in a trusted friend, family member or youth worker. Ask them to pray too, and to tell you when they notice change.



Further resources

Here is a fuller quote from Robert Murray McCheyne. This is available on page 5 and you could print this out on card for your group to remind them to look to Jesus more than themselves.

*'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV). Learn much of the Lord Jesus. **For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.** He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners, even the chief! Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in his beams. Feel his all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in his almighty arms.'*

You Can Change by Tim Chester or **How People Change** by Paul David Tripp are books that talk about our role in transformation.



Headlines

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