



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



Aim

To explore reasons why teaching we can believe whatever we want may produce results we are not happy with.



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 biography, Jesus confronts Pharisees and teachers of the law. These are very sincere religious people who believe they know how to please God and spend a lot of time and effort doing it. However, it turns out they are very wrong.

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 v.6-8?

Jesus tells the Pharisees and teachers they are hypocrites. He tells them their worship is in vain and they don't really love God. They are more interested in their own man-made rules than pleasing God.

The Pharisees were very sincere – but God is not interested in their outward religious performance or good deeds. He is interested in what they are on the inside.

Read Mark 7:14-23

The Pharisees followed rules about washing themselves and did not eat certain foods because they believed these foods made them dirty. Jesus says that what they touch or eat cannot make them dirty on the inside because food and germs pass through the body. It is what is on the inside that shows our goodness (or lack of it) – our attitudes, thoughts and actions.

Discuss

Who do you think was right – the Pharisees who thought that an outward display of good deeds made them good, or Jesus who said that what was on the inside was what counted? Why?

Allow pupils to express their opinions on this. Some may feel it is acceptable to have negative feelings on the inside as long as nobody gets hurt. Others may express that an outward expression is hypocritical if it is done with hatred on the inside.

Do you think it is possible to hold a belief very sincerely but be 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 teaches that what is on the inside is what counts. If every single one of your thoughts and actions were displayed on an Instagram account, how would you feel?

Reassure pupils you are not going to ask for personal details – simply encourage them to reflect on what is on the inside and share how they might feel about the world knowing it. We all have things to hide.

For the Pharisees, these things led to their lives of hypocrisy. If appropriate, share how your personal faith enables you to deal with these things in your own life.

Reflection

Allow a time of reflection most appropriate to your group.

You may wish to reflect quietly on these questions:

- ◆ Are you honest with yourself and close friends and family about who you are on the inside? Are there things there you do not like?



- ◆ Where and to whom can you go with these things?
- ◆ The Bible teaches that Jesus can help us to bring change – reflect on whether you would like to know more about that and speak a team member if you would.

For a more active response:

Draw an outline of a person (or print gingerbread-shape people out beforehand). Around the outside of the outline write down the things people might observe about you – appearance, what you are good at etc. On the inside of the outline write things that only you or close friends or family know about you. Imagine now you can change any of these things – which would you choose and why?



Further resources

Won't God accept people who are sincere in their beliefs? An article from bethinking.org

Does it really matter what I believe? Articles by Josh McDowell Ministry



Headlines

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