KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Community Group Material

Matthew 11:2-24

Week of 1st to 8th of October

John's Crucial Question

Leader Preparation

Read through the passage so that you are familiar with it. Read through the material on pages 24-28 of the CG leader manual, familiarising yourself with the parts that were not taught in the sermon. It will not be possible to discuss all of the questions! Focus on those most relevant to your group in the discussion time.

This week's theme is "Dealing with Doubt". This is something that most Christians have experienced at some time. It can be comforting for people to hear that this is a "normal" part of the faith experience – but also helpful for them to learn about helpful and unhelpful ways of dealing with doubts that arise. There may be some discussion about the doubts that people have currently – focus on helpful ways to deal with them, but try not to get caught up in arguing the specifics of these questions.

Spend some time praying for the members of your group, and asking God to guide you as you lead your time together. Read through the questions, particularly looking for ways to share openly with your group. Remember, sharing in a genuine and open way yourself is the best way to encourage group members to be honest and open in the group.

A note about answering questions:

As leaders, we often want to give people answers. Actually, sometimes just closing off discussion with the 'right' answer is less helpful than modelling how to handle uncertainty. You could arrange to meet up to read up about the question, or go together to speak to a pastor about it. If you have someone in your group with serious doubts who needs help, be sure to contact the church (with their permission) to arrange to put them in touch with someone.

Group time

Opening questions

Start with one of the following questions:

In some instances, doubts show discernment, and protect us from wrong decisions. Try doing this quiz as a group to see whether you could identify which of these is legitimate, and which is a phishing scam:

https://www.sonicwall.com/phishing-iq-test/#

(yes the link is safe 😉!)

How comfortable are you living with mystery? Do you approach life like a scientist, trying to define each variable and boundary, or like an artist, finding beauty in the smudged lines, blended colors and ambiguous meaning of a painting?

Time allowance:

Different groups meet for different times. Here is a suggested time allocation for your group get-together:

Tea / coffee	15min
Sharing	10min
Bible discussion	45min
Response & prayer	20min

Exploring the Passage

READ Matthew 11:2-24

Sincere Doubt (v2-15)

During his time in prison, John the Baptist experienced sincere doubt about Jesus' identity.

- What signs was John looking for that Jesus was the Messiah?
- What signs did Jesus remind him were the signs of his identity? Compare the description in v5 to Isaiah 35:5-6.
- Sometimes when things don't go the way we think they should in our lives, we doubt God. What are some incorrect expectations that people have about how life should be when they follow Jesus?
- Have you ever had a door close in your life that made you question your faith? Did that "what now?" moment lead you to disillusionment, or to an unexpected gift?
- How has God used a past struggle with disbelief to strengthen your faith?
- Is there a painful experience in your past that serves as a source of ongoing doubts?
- Would you rather follow a leader whose character has been refined through difficulties or a leader who has known only prosperity and success?

Jesus' Response (v4-15)

- How might you have expected that Jesus would respond to this man, the long-awaited prophet, questioning his credentials?
- What wrong assumptions might the disciples at that time, or believers today make about John on hearing these questions?
- Do you think Jesus' reply to John would reassure him? Why / why not?
- Is Jesus' view of John harmed by needing to answer his questions?

Hardness of Heart (v16-24)

- Have you ever encountered someone whose questions about Jesus were just a diversion and would never be satisfied?
- How have you had opportunities to know about Jesus and to experience him in your world? What does Jesus say about those who reject him when they have had access to this teaching and his presence? How does this differ from those who have honest doubts or questions?

"The danger to faith when things seem to go wrong in a believer's life comes from the wrong view of God. If you view God as a protective parent who will keep you from falling and scraping your spiritual knees, you will feel unloved and abandoned when life brings injury. If you view prayer as a magic formula to make your desires come true, your faith will hit a brick wall when things don't turn out according to your plans."

Christina MH Powell, Questioning Your Doubts

"God . . . shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

CS Lewis

"I believe in the sun even when it isn't shining.
I believe in love even when I am alone.
I believe in God even when he is silent"

Believed to have been written by a Jewish believer in hiding in Germany in 1945

There is a mystery to faith, as there is to life, that I don't fully understand… When we take seriously the reality of faith and doubt, the most important word in the phrase is the one in the middle…Because most people I know are a mix of the two"

John Ortberg, Know Doubt: The Importance of Embracing Uncertainty in Your Faith

Response

1. Do you have any particular doubts you are struggling with at the moment? How can you direct them to Jesus and address them?
2. Ephesians 6:14-17 speaks of how God protects us from attacks on our faith and helps us to stand firm. What is one thing you could do to protect your faith and shelter you from doubt?
3. One of the ways God suggests to protect us from doubt is the discipline of remembering. (See Joshua 4:1-7) Perhaps during the week you could take some time to write down some reminders to yourself of how God has been real to you in the past.

Prayer

Spend some time praying in your group about these responses and any needs you may have.

You might like to do a silent prayer time:

Play some quiet music and give each person a piece of paper. Ask them to write down any areas of doubt in their lives that they are wrestling with. Then make a place where they bring that piece of paper, reminding them that they are bringing themselves, with their doubts before Jesus and asking him to reveal the truth to them. You may like to close off the time with a prayer at the end.

Lord Jesus

In the garden of Gethsemane, even you experienced the loneliness of unanswered prayer. Many of your prophets and leaders experienced doubts that led them to falter in their walk with you.

Yet you encourage us to share with you both our faith and our doubts, our trust and our uncertainty.

Help us to live an authentic life with you, trusting you in the things that we understand, but also holding on through the difficult times where your purpose seems unclear.

Thank you that although now “we see only a reflection as in a mirror, then, we shall see [you] face to face.” (1 Cor 13:12)

Amen