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WRESTLING WITH
DOUBT
FINDING FAITH



LEADER GUIDE

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SESSION 1

IS THERE A GOD?

Planning the Session

Session Goals

Through conversation, activities, and reflection, participants will:

- identify reasons they believe in God,
- identify questions and doubts related to their faith in God, and
- consider the relationship between faith and science.

Biblical Foundation

- Psalm 19:1-2

Before the Session

- Set up a table in the room with name tags, markers, Bibles, and extra copies of *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith* if these will be needed.
- Have a whiteboard or chart paper and markers or a chalkboard and chalk available for recording participants' responses.
- At the top of a board or large piece of chart paper write the heading "Is There a God?" Under the heading draw a vertical line to make two columns. At the top of the first column write "Yes" and at the top of the second column write "Questions/Doubts." This will be used in the Leading into the Study activity.

- Read the Optional Activity and decide if you want to include this in your lesson plan.

Getting Started

Opening Activities

Greet participants as they arrive. Invite them to make a nametag and pick up either a Bible, or a copy of *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*, or both, if they do not have them.

Introduce yourself and share why you are excited about facilitating this study of *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith* by Adam Hamilton.

Invite each participant to introduce himself or herself and then respond to this question:

- What sparked your interest in participating in this group study of *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*? (Let participants know it is fine if some of the reasons are repeated.)

Housekeeping

- Let participants know you will be faithful to the time and encourage everyone to arrive on time.
- Encourage participants to read the upcoming chapter before each session.
- You may want to invite participants to have a notebook, journal, or electronic tablet for the study. Explain that these can be used to record questions and insights they have as they read each chapter and to take notes during each session.
- Share any necessary information about your meeting space and parking.
- Ask participants to covenant together to respect a policy of confidentiality within the group.

Leading into the Study

Call attention to:

- the title of the book: *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*,
- the title of the introduction: “In Praise of Honest Doubt,” and
- the title of chapter 1: “Is There a God?”

Read these two quotes from the introduction:

Doubt is not only natural, it is healthy, provided it spurs us to further reflection and a search for what is true. (p.3)

One of the premises of this book is that doubt and questioning are not the enemy of faith, but often a path to a deeper and more authentic faith. (p. 4)

Invite participants to reflect on the question stated in the chapter title, “Is There a God?” Then invite responses to the following two questions. Record responses in the appropriate column on the board or chart paper (see Before the Session). Explain that for this activity the group is simply making a list. Do not invite discussion of the responses. Also note that there are no right or wrong answers.

Ask:

- What are your reasons for answering “Yes, there is a God”?
- What doubts or questions do you have, or have you had, about the existence of God?

Opening Prayer

Holy and loving God, thank you for your continuing presence in our lives. Thank you for Jesus, who modeled a life of faith for us to follow. Thank you that you accept our doubts and our questions. Give us courage to voice our questions and doubts. Open our hearts and our minds to your word as we seek answers so that we may grow stronger in our faith and closer to you. Amen.

Learning Together

Video Study and Discussion

Play the session 1 video using your DVD player or Amplify Media. Discuss the following questions:

- Did anything specific stand out as you watched the video?
- What is one thing you learned that you did not know before?

Invite the group to keep the video in mind as well as the book and Bible passages throughout the rest of your discussion.

Bible Study and Discussion: Psalm 19:1-2

Share Hamilton's observation that "throughout most of human history, the order, beauty, and sheer existence of this world led humans to faith in a Creator" (p. 10).

Invite participants to read Psalm 19:1-2 together as printed in *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*, chapter 1 (p. 10).

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge. (NIV)*

Ask:

- How does creation lead you to faith in God the Creator?
- What do you learn about God the Creator from observing creation?

Book Study and Discussion

Call attention to Hamilton's plan for this book, which is to consider a variety of questions and struggles that may lead us to doubt. The focus of chapter 1 is the relationship between faith and science.

Share Hamilton's introductory remarks about Dr. Hawking at the beginning of chapter 1 and then read the excerpt from Hawking's writings printed there.

Note Hamilton's observation that the Creation stories in the book of Genesis are "one source of some of the conflict between science and religion" (p.12).

Read or recruit volunteers to read the two Creation stories in the Bible, Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–3:24.

Invite participants to refer to the section of chapter 1 titled "Science vs. the Bible's Creation Stories" during the discussion of the following questions. You may want to record responses on a board or large piece of chart paper. Ask:

- What are the similarities between the two Creation stories?
- What are the differences between the two Creation stories?
- What are these stories not intended to be? (*science lessons*)
- What is the purpose of these stories? (*Theology—to teach us about God, God's relationship with humankind, and humankind's relationship with God and creation.*)
- What do we learn about God from these two Creation stories? (Hamilton's observations are listed here.)

Encourage the group to share other ideas as well.)

- ◇ God is behind all that exists;
- ◇ God's creation is good and beautiful;
- ◇ God's creation is a gift;
- ◇ God created humankind;
- ◇ Humankind bears God's image in the world;
- ◇ Humans struggle with loneliness, relationships, temptation, and sin. (This is shown in the second creation story in Genesis 2:4b–3:24.)

Highlight this quotation:

The stories are not attempting to explain the *how* of creation, but the *why* and *who* of creation. When Christians seek to

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read Genesis 1–2 as science and history, the result is a false conflict between science and faith. (p. 14)

Read again Genesis 2:7. Invite participants to imagine the divine hands lovingly forming the human person and then bending close to breathe into the human the breath of life.

Note that Psalm 8 affirms the special place God has given humankind in creation. Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 8:3-9. (Verses 3-4 are printed in the section titled “Has Science Rendered God Unnecessary?”)

Instruct participants to turn to the section titled “Has Science Rendered God Unnecessary?” Do one of the following:

1. Instruct participants to search this section for answers to the following two questions:
 - What scientific evidence do people cite to support the viewpoint that God is unnecessary?
 - What scientific evidence do people cite to support the viewpoint that God is necessary?

-OR-

2. Present a summary of the information in this section, noting the evidence presented for each side of the question.

After doing #1 or #2 above, state Hamilton’s question again, “Has Science Rendered God Unnecessary?” Call attention to his statement that “your answer is a choice you make, a decision to believe that the magnificence, vastness, and beauty of creation is a lovely accident, or is the result of One who said ‘Let there be light’” (p. 17). Then read the last paragraph of this section. Invite discussion of the ideas presented there.

Read this paragraph from *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*:

I love the apostle Paul’s words, quoting the ancient Cretan poet, Epimenedes, when he said of God, “In him we live

and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28 NIV). There is nowhere that God is not. God sustains all that is. God’s presence permeates all creation. Yet God also transcends the universe, being both within the universe and beyond it. God is not the universe and the universe is not God. But God’s glory and presence saturate the universe. (p. 21)

Call attention to the section of chapter 1 titled “The Plausibility of a Personal Transcendent God.” Share these key points from this section:

- Hawking and others interpret the vastness of the universe as evidence against the Christian belief in a personal God who intimately knows all of humankind.
- In contrast, there are many scientists who made significant discoveries and contributed to the body of scientific knowledge of the universe while remaining faithful Christians.
- Scientists who held a strong faith in God include Copernicus, Galileo, Johannes Kepler, Robert Boyle, Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Blaise Pascal, Sir Isaac Newton.

If you would like to learn more about the scientists who were also people of faith, follow the instructions for the Optional Activity below.

Optional Activity: Research—Scientists Who Professed Faith in God

In *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith* Hamilton identifies eight scientists who professed faith in God (section titled “The Plausibility of a Personal Transcendent God”).

These scientists include:

- Copernicus,
- Galileo,
- Johannes Kepler,
- Robert Boyle,

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- Francis Bacon,
- René Descartes,
- Blaise Pascal, and
- Sir Isaac Newton.

Offer time for participants to research information about these scientists on the internet using their phones or other devices.

Depending on the size and nature of your group, participants may work as individuals, in pairs, or in small groups.

Assign one or more scientists to each person, pair, or group so that all scientists are assigned.

Partner participants who do not have access to an electronic device with participants who do.

Instruct each person/pair/group to be prepared to share three or four key pieces of information about the scientist's faith and contributions to science.

Wrapping Up

Closing Activity

Call attention to the factors Hamilton identifies in the introduction to *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith* that contribute to our faith. These include exploring answers to our questions, examining the evidence for faith, weighing the testimony of other believers. and studying the testimony and witness of the Bible.

Review Hamilton's faith story in "Personal Experiences and the Power of Faith."

Ask:

- What experiences or relationships played a key role in your becoming a Christian and professing faith in God? (If you have a large group you may want to invite participants to share responses in pairs and small groups.)

Encourage participants to read chapter 2 before the next session.

Closing Prayer

Holy and Loving God, thank you for Jesus Christ. Thank you for the teachings and the witness of your followers that are recorded in the Bible. Thank you for the people and the experiences that have brought us to faith in you. Thank you for accepting our questions and our doubts when our faith falters. Be with us as we search for answers to our questions. Give us the assurance of your abiding love and continuing presence when we find ourselves in times of doubt;. in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Doubt is not the enemy of faith.

“A perfect gift for a questioning heart.”

—Kate Bowler, author of *Everything Happens for a Reason
(And Other Lies I've Loved)*

“Wherever you are on your spiritual path, you'll find freedom and insight in Rev. Adam Hamilton's new book, *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*.”

—Brian D. McLaren, author of *Faith After Doubt*

Everyone has doubts. Where is God when bad things happen? Does God hear our prayers? Is there a heaven? How can we know? Whether you're a longtime Christian or someone brand new to faith, *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith* will lead you to a trust in God that is unafraid of hard questions. Wrestle with doubt and find faith—belief and trust, not certainty; mystery rather than simple answers.

The Leader Guide contains everything needed to guide a group through a six-week study of *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*.



Adam Hamilton is founding pastor of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, one of the fastest growing, most highly visible churches in the country. *The Church Report* named Hamilton's congregation the most influential mainline church in America, and he preached at the National Prayer Service as part of the presidential inauguration festivities in 2013. Hamilton is the author of more than thirty books, including *Why?*, *Creed*, and *The Lord's Prayer*.

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