

# **I Believe the Holy Spirit: God's Activity in the World**

## **SESSION THREE LEADER GUIDE**

This leader guide is designed to follow each page of the third session: "I Believe in the Holy Spirit: God's Activity in the World" with background for the leader and helpful references for expanding the learning. This third lesson may be taught as one longer continuous session, such as at a retreat setting, or as separate sessions (approximately one hour) that cover each page of the session. You may wish to have youth view the website, or individual pages, on their own, then gather as a group to discuss and explore the learning. The website is also useful within the classroom as a teaching tool to introduce the material, then youth may revisit it later to reinforce learning at home.

While the curriculum offers prompts for guiding conversation and offers direction for teaching the material, it is important to prepare your own answers for questions and notes for discussion. Sharing your personal experience and insight with the group is a valuable resource for these lessons.

## **OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this session, the students will be better able to:

- Identify the differences between scientific and theological explorations of how powers and forces work in the world
- Express an understanding of the ways in which God is present and active in the world

## **THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The conversation between faith/religion and science can be difficult to navigate with youth who live in a world where they are bombarded by a great amount of information and opinions. It is important to first set a safe learning environment where differing opinions are respected and confidentiality is secured.

You may also want to consult with parents/guardians prior to beginning this session to alert them to the concepts taught in this session, and invite them to preview the website. Many adults are unfamiliar with ways to talk about both science and religion, or may have beliefs that are challenged by this learning.

Within any group of youth you will find a wide range of maturity and development levels. In general, adolescent-aged students (12-14) are able to engage in more complex thinking, reason deductively, and are better able to form concepts about the past, present, and future than their elementary counterparts. As adolescence is achieved, they can synthesize values and beliefs with their own experiences to create meaning and understanding for life. This is also a time when a sense of personal identity is being formed, and this extends to their identity as it relates to the concepts of science and faith.

## **SUPPLIES FOR SESSION ONE**

- Computer and access to Internet
- Poster board, markers, and tape

## **TO BEGIN:**

Gather youth and provide an overview of lesson(s) to be covered in I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: GOD'S ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD session(s). If this lesson is held separately from the previous lesson, review the need for a safe and confidential environment. Ask youth to recall ways for their group to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. If possible, review these ideas previously listed on a white board, or a computer document and read the completed list. Ask all present, youth and adults, to agree to follow these guidelines for the duration of the learning time together.

## **PAGE ONE – I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: GOD’S ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD**

Begin the lesson by reviewing the definition of a statement of faith or a creed: A statement or set of formal beliefs, usually Christian, or a set of guidelines that define how you live.

Ask: How would you describe or define the Holy Spirit? Allow all answers. How would you describe or define natural powers in the world? Allow all answers.

Next: Review the information on the first page of lesson three: I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: GOD’S ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD. Discuss ways that the group has experienced conversations or statements about how God might or might not work in the world. Allow discussion to continue for as long as time allows.

Next: Have the group watch the video clip in the link from the movie “Bruce Almighty.”

Discuss with the group why they feel that some Christians and some scientists disagree about the claims of how power and forces work in the world. Be attentive to the need for each group member to honor the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of each other. Allow the discussion to continue for as long as interest is maintained. You may continue on with the lesson to PAGE TWO – THE TWO CLAIMS, or bring the session to a close. If the session will end, encourage students to keep track of any conversations they observe or have experienced with friends or family regarding the claims of how powers and forces work in the world. Encourage students to bring this information back to future sessions.

## **PAGE TWO – THE TWO CLAIMS**

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another’s opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members to relate any conversations that they might have observed or experienced with others regarding the claims of how powers and forces work in the world.

For additional leader preparation, consider reviewing an interview entitled, “If God Exists, Why Can’t Science Prove It,” with Rev. George L. Murphy who is both a pastor and theoretical physicist and quoted in this lesson. You may access this interview at:

<http://www.theevidence.org/article/78/programs/archives/theevidence/episodes/all-programs/episode-123>

To begin, review the information on PAGE TWO under the heading: THE SCIENTIFIC CLAIM. Ask the group to recall and discuss any scientific discoveries that have been important to the understanding of how powers and forces work in the world. Take time to briefly research any noted works by scientists such as Albert Einstein, etc.

Click on the link to watch the video with Michio Kaku and Bill Nye. Discuss the video and encourage students to recall how the scientific method is used to develop theories and laws for how the universe works.

Ask: What is the difference between understanding how something works and understanding its purpose in life? *Allow all answers. Help students think about the difference between the function of forces and powers in the world and an intended meaning or purpose for how these forces and powers affect living things. For example: Gravity is a force that pulls us to the earth, but it is not for the purpose of making our life better or worse, it is simply a force that pulls us to the earth.*

Next: Review the information under the heading: THE CHRISTIAN CLAIM. Discuss each definition using the following questions to encourage conversation:

*Deism: Did God create the world, and then let things run on its own, or is God still working today? Why or why not?*

*Omnipotent: What is your image of how God works? Is God always the main cause of every event and controlling every small detail of our life?*

*neo-Thomist: Does this view change your understanding of our ability to make choices, without divine intervention, in life?*

*Kenotic: Does this view change your understanding of how powers and forces work in the world?*

Help students think about their view or “picture” of how God might work in the world and ask them to consider which of the four understandings may or may not make the most sense for each of them. Reinforce the understanding that the differences between these and other viewpoints of God’s power are between people who believe in God and not with scientists. Promote respectful listening as each group member offers his or her personal view.

Next: Ask the group to think about the similarities and differences between the scientific and religious claims of how powers and forces work in the world. Discuss the reasons for why others might disagree about these two ways of viewing these issues.

Read the following quote by Rev. George L. Murphy: “Finally, it is faith, our trust in the God revealed in Christ, that enables us to “see” God at work in the world. Our belief that God supplies our daily bread is something different from our knowledge of the processes that enable grain to grow, farmers to harvest it, and the economic system to put the bread in the store.” Discuss this statement and the role of faith in seeing God’s active presence in the world.

Ask: How can we know if it is God or just natural powers at work when events, especially natural disasters, occur? *Allow all answers. Encourage the group to understand how each person’s viewpoint might reflect each of the four different understandings discussed above.*

To close this portion of the lesson, ask the group if they can tell one way that they might talk to others about how powers and forces work in the world. Encourage members to make a list of “I Believe” statements that include both understandings. If the session will end, encourage students to ask family and friends about their understanding of scientific and religious views of natural processes and to bring those ideas back to future sessions.

### **PAGE THREE – WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?**

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another’s opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding any conversations they might have had with family or friends regarding their understanding of how powers and forces work in the world.

Preview the article by Rabbi Brad Hirschfield. This article has information that is more complex and it would be good to have an understanding of the material in order to help students interpret its meaning.

Prior to gathering the group to review this third page, preview the slide show at the top of the page and become familiar with the following information:

*The slideshow displayed at the top of this page contains a number of images that represent the subject of God’s power and powers and forces in the natural world. These are images that are among the many available in the media and on the Internet and are only a small representation of what youth might encounter. The group will view these images during this portion of the lesson. From the start of the slide show they appear as follows:*

*A tornado,*

*A sign asking, “Who Knows?”*

*A quote by Carl Sagan: “Science is not perfect. It’s often misused; it’s only a tool, but it’s the best tool we have.”*

*A sign “Beware of God,”*

*A satellite view of a hurricane,*

*A picture stating, “No Matter What Happens.... Trust God!!!”*

To begin this portion of the lesson, have page three visible to the group and together watch the video links on the page.

Discuss the following with the group, encouraging each member to offer a response:

How do you respond to people or situations where people claim to have been kept from harm due to God’s power?

How do you respond to people or situations where people claim that God has created natural disasters to punish people?

Do events such as a tornado, hurricane, or an earthquake change your views on how God might/might not be working? Why or why not?

Does a scientific understanding of how natural forces are at work change or affect your view of how God works?

*Encourage the group to think about both understandings as operating at the same time.*

Next, have the group look at the slideshow at the top of the page, and ask that everyone wait until all pictures are viewed before making comments.

Invite the group to respond to the images and allow time for each member to add to the conversation.

Using the information provided at the beginning of this session, talk about each of the images. (Remind the group to be respectful of each other's response.) The white dots that appear at the lower right of the slideshow can be used to select and navigate through the images.

Ask the group to share what each image might mean to them, or how the image might cause them to respond to the understandings of how powers and forces work in the world. Use the following as prompts for discussion:

A tornado might be an example of weather systems that are affected by global warming, or natural occurrences that can be predicted using scientific methods. Others might have been exposed to opinions that indicate that natural disasters are the result of God's punishment for sin.

The statement "Who Knows?" poses a question that is commonly asked by those with both an only religious viewpoint and those with only a scientific viewpoint. This question points to the ways in which theologians are continuing to ask questions about how God works in the world.

This quote by Carl Sagan claims science is the best tool we have. How does the use of science as a tool compare to the use of faith as a tool for understanding the world?

The "Beware of God" sign might be a result of viewing God as a "mean kid with a magnifying glass." What are viewpoints you have observed in others with regard to God's power?

The satellite view of a hurricane might be seen as a symbol of God's power in nature, or of the natural forces in nature.

The "Trust God" slide is opposite of the "Beware of God" slide. Is one more accurate than the other? Why or why not?

Discuss with the group their experiences in talking to others about a scientific understanding of how forces and powers work in the world and God's power. What is most difficult, or easiest to talk about?

*Help the group understand that a Christian belief in God's active presence in the world, or the power of the Holy Spirit, does not see God as one power along side of other powers. A Christian understanding sees the natural powers and forces as a part of what God has created. Creator and creation are separate, not equals.*

To close the session, talk about what these images might promote that is challenging or helpful to the conversation about scientific and religious views of powers and forces. Ask that they spend time at home looking at the website and researching other information about ideas covered in the lesson. Ask each member to bring a copy of any images that represent their understanding of the material.

## **PAGE FOUR – LISTENING WITH TWO EARS**

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding any research they might have completed that tells about the ideas covered in the previous lesson. Ask the group to share any images that they might have brought to this session.

This final page of I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: GOD'S ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD is designed to help youth focus on both the scientific and religious view of how powers and forces work in the world.

To begin the session, open the website and review the first three pages of I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: GOD'S ACTIVITY IN THE WORLD. Ask the group members to share one significant thing they may have learned or discovered about the scientific and religious views of how powers and forces work in the world. Discuss how they might have engaged other youth or family members in this learning and any conversations that might have occurred, either in person or in a social media setting.

Next, look at page four, LISTENING WITH TWO EARS, and review the information listed on the page. Reinforce the concept that science is tasked with discovering how things work and tries to provide proof, and religion looks at why things happen and looks for a purpose. Help the group understand that this is a basic way of looking at this issue, and that just like science and religion, their ideas will change and become more complex.

Next, ask the group to consider how they might respond to others about the cause of natural disasters, or natural forces as a result of the learning in this lesson. Encourage the group to consider ways to respond from both a scientific and religious viewpoint. Write the responses on a poster board and attach any images brought to the session. Keep the display to reinforce learning for future lessons.

For additional learning, ask a member of the congregation or other source who has a career in physics or science to come and share how they integrate their faith and scientific beliefs.