PAGE FOUR – CHOOSING OPTIONS

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 resources or images that they might have brought to this session.

This final page of WAYS OF KNOWING – DATA AND BELIEF: THEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS is designed to help youth focus on both the scientific and religious methods of learning about and understanding the world.

To begin the session, open the website and review the first three pages of

WAYS OF KNOWING – DATA AND BELIEF: THEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

Ask the group members to share one significant thing they may have learned or discovered about the scientific and religious views of how we learn about and gain knowledge of 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, read the following opinions to the group about knowledge and belief from the website:

http://askville.amazon.com/difference-belief-knowledge/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=2572218

If desired, look over the site for additional examples of opinions for this conversation, taking care to evaluate responses for inappropriate or judgmental language before sharing the information with the group. It might be helpful to print the responses listed below to facilitate conversation among group members.

1) Ultimately, everything that we "know" is a matter of perception. We could be just brains-in-vats, and everything we "know" is just an illusion.

So there's no clear line between knowledge and belief, but in general the line is a difference in repeatability. I "know" that my cell phone is in my pocket because I can go check it. Every time I repeat the experiment, my cell phone is there.

And I "know" that there is a city called Toronto in Canada, because I can go check it. I don't actually have to go there and prove it, because I know that I could. Other people report that they've done the experiment, and that'll be good enough for now. So I call it "knowledge", and I'll revise what I know if I start hearing reports that Toronto is actually a kind of citrus fruit.

The ironic point is that the experiment could fail. The possibility of failure is critical. If I could have said, "Well, I put my hand in my pocket and my cell phone isn't there, but I'll say that it is anyway," then my experiment wouldn't really prove much. We'd just say, "My cell phone is there, whether it really is or not", and that's not terribly useful.

By contrast, "belief" is for stuff, which we can't

demonstrate. I believe that we will some day cure cancer, even though I can't do an experiment to show it. I could wait a hundred years, but if it hadn't been found, it might just need another hundred years.

So that's the difference: knowledge is belief you can test. And by "test", I mean the possibility of proving that it isn't true. If you believe it and no evidence could convince you otherwise, then the belief isn't particularly useful. You might well act on it, but you cannot be sure that it's true.

There are some beliefs that people choose to believe that absolutely cannot be refuted. We can call these "faith". (We also have "faith" that the sun will rise tomorrow, but that's a less interesting sense of the word.) There is no inherent problem with faith; since it can't be tested it can't be proven wrong. Many people find that it helps them get through their day.

The only problem comes when my immovable faith meets your unstoppable belief. Then people get hurt. But until then we all get along pretty well despite (and, often, because of) our faiths.

Written by: PamPerdue

A person can believe that the world is flat. It can be proven that the world is not flat, but the person can still believe it is. A person can know that the world is not flat, because it has been mathematically proven to him, but still choose to believe that the world is flat.

Belief has a more personal tone to it. We each have our own beliefs. Knowledge has a more

generalness. Everybody "knows" that the world is round. Some choose not to believe it.

Belief also has a personal judgment to it. A person can believe in ghosts or UFOs. Their beliefs cannot be tested, and so people who have not had personal sightings of either cannot "know" that they exist. I believe UFOs exist, but I don't know if they exist, because I have never seen one. I could be wrong. I have never traveled around the world, but know it is round because of my studies in science and history. I don't think I could be wrong about that.

I hope this helps,
Manimal

Discuss with the group the first opinion and ask for their response to the statement that knowledge and belief are a matter of perception. If desired, refer to Lesson 4: PRAYER AND FAITH – MIND, BODY, SPIRIT: ARE THEY CONNECTED? and click on the tab entitled: MORE THAN ONE ANGLE for more information on perception and illusion. Allow conversation for as long as time allows. Continue the discussion by reading the second opinion. Encourage the group to think about the differences between how knowledge and belief are understood by others. Ask each member to offer their opinion of how these two differences might be defined.

Next, look at page four, CHOOSING OPTIONS, and review the information listed on the page. Discuss with the group the different ways that our brain receives information and how this might or might not affect our thoughts and feelings about the world.

Reinforce the concept that even though others might disagree with our beliefs or ways of interpreting knowledge about the world, they are using the same tool of the human brain to choose their way of understanding the world. It is important to consider more than one option when learning about and making sense of the world and to refrain from taking a rigid perspective that limits input from other sources. Help the group understand that this learning 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 learning in this lesson. Encourage the group to consider ways to respond from both a scientific and religious viewpoint. Ask the group to reflect on how their understanding of this issue may or may not have changed.

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