

CORNERSTONE 2018 RESOURCE

GodLAB: An Interactive Spiritual Experiment

Eat. Pray. Dare

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SUMMARY:	Atheist? Agnostic? True Believer? Labels may sometimes be helpful, but rarely do they tell the whole story. Join your fellow lab subjects as we explore that which cannot be named through a short "experiment" designed to help us unpack the Great Mystery! - <i>Submitted by Adam Allenberg</i>
TOPIC(S):	God language, prayer language, identity development, spiritual development, spiritual expression
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	At the end of GodLAB, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify similar and different characteristics of another person's experience of mystery with one's own Describe how they understand that which is mysterious and intriguing about human existence
AUDIENCE:	Can be used with children (not younger than age 10 or 11), but is best for teenagers and older; groups should be at least 10 people but can be done in front of hundreds.
TIMING:	Can be done in 30 minutes, but could be stretched to 45 minutes or an hour, depending on the group and how it is used.
APPENDICES:	None!
MATERIALS NEEDED:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blindfolds for a minimum of five "test subjects" (in a group of ten) or up to 15 (in groups of 30 or more.) One white lab coat
SET-UP DETAILS:	<p>This should be done in a space without distractions, that is not too bright. If the lights can be dimmed, even better.</p> <p>The room setup should be comfortable, even calming. If it is daytime, soft, indirect light is best. If it is night time, go for candlelight. Seating should be available, but people should be invited to sit on the floor, stand, lean or sit as they are comfortable. There will need to be a "front" that the group is facing, leaving enough room for your "test subjects" to stand in a line, and for the facilitator to be able to easily walk back and forth in front of the group.</p>

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

00:00 – Group assembles. The facilitator invites the group to join in an experiment, the purpose of which is to uncover language to describe that which we sense in the world – sometimes called God or Spirit or Mystery or Being – but have trouble showing proof of, or demonstrating for others to experience. This experiment asks the question, **What is that sensation? And, equally important, what purpose does that sense serve?**

0:05 – Facilitator asks for at least five volunteer test subjects to come stand in a line facing the group. It is important that the number of test subjects, who will be blindfolded, not outnumber the people sitting and watching. The observers have just as important a role in this as the test subjects. Once the test subjects are assembled, each is given a blindfold. Then the directions are given.

0:08 – Facilitator: “Our test subjects will be asked to blindfold themselves and close their eyes. Once blindfolded I will walk back and forth in front of this group. Every now and then, as I pass by, I will choose to wave my hand in front of one or several of your faces.”

Demonstrate the wave here. It is slow, so as not to produce a breeze. The hand is open with the palm facing the test subject. It is moved slowly back and forth two or three times. Then the hand is retracted and the facilitator moves on.

“If you believe that you sense my hand, I only ask that you say the word “yes”. Let me remind you, you are not paying attention to whether or not I walk past you. That is a given. You want to affirm whether or not my hand passes before your face. I will walk past the group several times over the course of 60 seconds.”

“If you are watching this experiment, I ask that you remain silent and do not audibly react in any way. Instead, pay attention to who notices and who does not. If you can, imagine what they must be feeling trying to attune themselves to this subtle movement.”

0:11 – The test subjects put on their blindfolds. The facilitator takes the first pass in front of the group.

0:15-0:30 – Test subjects remove their blindfolds. The group debriefs, beginning with the test subjects. NOTE: As much as possible, try not to disclose the “truth” behind which faces had a hand waved in front of them and which did not. The accuracy of this “sense” that we are discussing is not what is up for discussion. (Nor can it be scientifically tested.)

- First the Test Subjects:
 - What was that experience like for you?
 - Which of you said “yes”? What was that like for you?
 - Which of you said nothing? What was that like for you?
 - What did you feel?
- Then the audience:
 - What was that experience like for you?
 - What did you see?
 - What did you feel?

This conversation inevitably twists and turns in a number of directions, but always returns to talking about the things we feel in life that we cannot explain, and their mystery is what makes them remarkable and frustrating all at once.

0:30-0:45 – If the group is large enough, you can invite up a new group of test subjects to see how perspectives change.

Closing Questions:

- How would you describe that sense that we experimented on?
- What purpose do you think it serves?
- Is it something that can be learned? Cultivated?

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

It would be easy to use this “experiment” in the context of a larger unit, or a series of study sessions or conversations about God, belief and faith, doubt, etc. It should be used to help people get out of their rational minds and into the realm of experience, as well as experiential memory, to summon a different response.

This program relies, in part, upon those experiencing not knowing what happens and what kinds of conversations can take place. Be mindful not to overuse this technique. Use it sparingly, preferably in small groups.

If you decide to use it for a large group of people – a unit at camp, or your entire staff – know that you will have to put this experiment on the shelf for a while, or find some way to get the group to agree to be quiet about the experience, in order for it to remain effective.