



WHAT YOUR GROUP WILL NEED

- A quiet spot
- Something to watch a video clip on from YouTube on
- A Bible
- A coin
- A pen and some paper

LEADER NOTES

This session has been adapted from the *Isolated Church: Uncertainty* reflection so you can use it with your group online. Feel free to pick and choose parts of it, if you are short on time.



Make sure you send round the video link to your group beforehand or have it ready in your video chat to watch at the appropriate point in the session.

Hint: There are a few prayers and quotes included in these notes. As you'll most likely be using this session on a video chat service, text or message certain people in the group with the prayers or quotes at the start or throughout the session and ask them to read them out at the right time - it'll help break up your meeting and involve others too!

INTRO

Introduce the session with these notes: All of us are facing a unique, new and strange time. With schools and colleges closed, coffee shops and businesses shut and churches not meeting, life is almost on hold. It's a really uncertain time. We don't know how long this will last or who will be affected. But, for the next 30 minutes, we want to help you face up to this uncertainty and accept it, knowing that God is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). We want to learn from people who have been in this situation before, from people who know what it is to be confined, imprisoned, and restricted. There are many Christians all over the world who are persecuted for their faith, whilst being in lock down is new for us, for them it's normal.

PRAY

Encourage the group to be still and pause. Ask them to slow down their breathing and focus on God. Ask Him to speak to you all whilst you go through this session!

Father God. You are good. You are unchanging. Please speak to us as we read these stories. Help us put aside distractions and focus on You. Teach us something new. Let us know You are with us. Amen.

WARM UP: ACTIVITY

Get each person to find a coin. Ask them the following questions and get them to toss the coins as you ask them. If their coins land on heads, the answer is yes, tails, no.

- Will you video call someone today?
- Will you cook for the people you live with today?
- Will you tidy your room or help clean the house?

Chat through the responses and explain: What were your answers? Will you do them today (your choice, no pressure!). Not knowing what will happen - facing uncertainty - can leave us feeling really vulnerable. At the moment, things are really uncertain - we're not in control of big decisions being made about our lives - but that doesn't mean we should panic. We can choose to be rooted in Jesus, and trust that He has a plan for us and our world, even in the midst of darkness.

VIDEO

If you haven't already - send round the link to the video for people to watch. In the video Naomi reflects on Zafar's* story. Being from Central Asia, in choosing Jesus, he was choosing an uncertain future.

Ask the group...

- **What do you feel uncertain or worried about at the moment?**
- Zafar chose to follow Jesus, even though he knew it meant not knowing how his family would react. **What is it about saying yes to Jesus that makes the uncertainty worth it?**

STORY: BROTHER ANDREW - SAY YES

Read out this story, pausing to ask your group the questions. If you didn't know, Open Doors works around the world to stand alongside and support Christians who face persecution - Christians like Zafar. Brother Andrew, the guy who started Open Doors over 60 years ago, did so almost accidentally. He knew Christians at that time were facing restrictions and pressure. In the Soviet Union, Bibles were becoming

hard to come by and churches were being forced to close. Some Christian leaders were under pressure from the police. Here's how Brother Andrew started things...

"I never wanted to start a ministry. I simply went on one trip to Poland in 1955... Shortly after that I had the opportunity to go to Czechoslovakia. I found the church in both countries, discovered their need, and started bringing Bibles. There was no plan, no vision, certainly no thought about leading a worldwide organisation. God revealed a need I could meet and I did what I could."

Ask:

- Do you feel like God has ever revealed a need to you? Can you think of someone, or something that needed help?

Brother Andrew's life story is amazing (want to know more, get a copy of his book, *God's Smuggler!*), but it was just one key moment that changed his life forever – it was a moment when he chose to say 'Yes' to God. He was working in a factory, but had felt God call him to a life of mission. He felt very uncertain about what this would mean for his future and how he would afford to study, live and pay bills (if you're a student, you'll know the feeling). If he said 'Yes' to God, a lot was going to change. Everything was about to be thrown into the air – sound familiar?

Things may be feeling uncertain right now. But one of the first things we can do, like Zafar and Brother Andrew, is say 'Yes' to God. But it's not always that easy. Brother Andrew was wrestling with himself. He prayed:

'What is it, Lord? What am I holding back? What am I using as an excuse for not serving You in whatever You want me to do?'

In response, God showed Brother Andrew that he was hesitating. Instead of just saying 'Yes', Brother Andrew would always say 'Yes, but' to God. 'But' – one, tiny, but significant word. Recognise that in yourself? Maybe with you it's 'Yes, but after COVID-19 is over.' Or, 'Yes, but when I've got my A-Levels or degree'. Or, 'Yes, but when I'm older'. In the end, Brother Andrew chose to change his 'Yes, but' into a life of obedience and trust in God:

"Whenever, wherever, however you want me, I'll go... I'll begin this very minute. Lord as I stand up from this place, and as I take my first step forward, will you consider this a step towards complete obedience to you? I'll call it the step of yes".

Ask:

- Are there areas in your life where you are saying "Yes, but"?

Could you say 'Yes' to God's plan for you, today? That same 'Yes' led Brother Andrew on a path of uncertainty, but also adventure. That 'Yes' bought Zafar an unknown future, but it also showed him the love of the Father that he had longed for.

 **BIBLE: GENESIS 37-50**

Ask:

- Who knows the story of Joseph in the Bible? Can anyone summarise it? What are the key elements?

Teach: The story of Joseph is amazing in many ways. His life was full of uncertainty, from being kicked out by his family (like Zafar) to facing time

in prison, to then being put in charge of the whole of Egypt. But, no matter how dark things got and how uncertain things appeared, Joseph kept saying 'Yes' to God.

There's a lot to learn in his story. Let's start by reading Genesis chapter 37 together (**have the group read out a few verses each**).

Ask:

- What was Joseph's attitude like? He had dreams about his future. Do you think he was pretty sure of where his life was heading?
- How do you think he felt being taken from his family? His future was unravelling in-front of him. Do you know what that feels like?
- Everything was being stripped from Joseph, his coat, his dreams, his home and even his relationships with family. All the things he found security in were disappearing. Think about the end of the story - if Joseph hadn't lost all those things, would he still have trusted in God and come to be in charge of all Egypt? Maybe not.
- Are there things in our lives that God might need to strip away so we become more secure and reliant on Him? Think about school grades, sports competitions, our social circles, or future plans - with these things being taken from us during the lock-down - can we choose to rely and trust more on God?

Ask the group to read the rest of Joseph's story over the next week.

 **ACTIVITY**

Teach: When you say 'Yes' to God, like Brother Andrew, Zafar and (eventually) Joseph too, you are saying that you trust Him. In this storm of uncertainty, change and worry, trusting in the unchanging, always loving God is a vital anchor for us.

- Can you think of any other people in the Bible who said 'Yes' to God? (If you're stuck, look up Isaiah 6:1-8 for one. Can you find others? Think about Jesus calling the first disciples, Abraham or Zacchaeus and look them up)

Get the group to grab some paper and write down on one side the things that are making them feel uncertain (they don't have to share these). Then ask them to turn the paper over and write 'Yes' along with the verses they found of people saying 'Yes' to God in the Bible.

Explain and act: Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 encourages us to write Scripture on door-posts to help remind us of God's promises. Get your group to stick their pieces of paper to the door frames of their rooms so when they go out into another day of uncertainty, they are reminded to trust and say 'Yes' to God.

 **PRAY**

As you close the session ask the group for any prayer requests. If they don't want to share, that's fine, just encourage them to bring their worries and unknowns before God. Have a few minutes silence, then finish by reading out this prayer.

Father God, thank You for our brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world. Thank you for Zafar and many others like him who are willing to take a step of 'Yes' - a step of faith towards you - despite the uncertain journey it may take them on. We thank You that You have a plan for us. Help us to trust. Help us keep our hearts and minds on You. Let our 'Yes' really mean "Yes". Amen.