

Do religious experiences prove God's existence?

INTRODUCTION

This session seeks to make students aware of some of the more unusual types of religious experience and to evaluate whether such experiences can be considered evidence of God.

ACTIVITY

Explain that the *Toronto Blessing* is a worldwide movement within the Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches that began in 1994 in Toronto Airport Church. The unusual activity that took place there is said to reflect the power of the Holy Spirit and God's love. The following video shows different experiences that people have when in contact with the Holy Spirit. Show students the clip on the Toronto Blessing:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v= P5B5Brz_lc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5B5Brz_lc)

Pose the following questions for students to respond to:

- *Do you think these experiences are proof of God's existence?*
- *What might we learn about the nature of God from the various experiences that people have in this video?*
- *Why is it that only some people experience God and others appear never to?*
- *Do you think that a large group of people experiencing God like this has more or less of an impact than an individual who has a religious experience?*

ACTIVITY

Now that students may have learnt about some of the more unusual forms of religious experience, ask them to think of other ways in which they know people have claimed to have experienced God.

Ask students to:

- *define the term 'miracle'*
- *give some examples of what have been called miracles.*

Introduce students to philosopher David Hume's definition of a miracle: 'Miracles are violations of the laws of nature'.

Ask whether they agree or disagree with this definition.

ACTIVITY

Show students the clip below of the magician Dynamo walking on water. The clip also has parts of the film *Bruce Almighty* that link in some way to the content. Explain that one of Jesus' miracles was walking on water: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WyoenjZAZw 'God in Disguise'.

After watching this clip explain that this is a form of magical trickery. Ask students to reflect on and respond to the following questions:

- *Could God be considered a magician?*
- *Why would some believers take issue with referring to God as a magician?*
- *Do you think Jesus actually performed miracles?*
- *Do you think miracles actually happen?*

CONCLUSION

In small groups ask students to role play a scenario between people who agree and disagree that religious experiences prove God's existence.

Ask students to think of all the arguments they can to represent the following views:

- *Those that agree religious experiences are proof of God's existence*
- *Those that disagree religious experiences are proof of God's existence.*