

SUBTOPIC THEME:

Faith and Doubt

LESSON OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of this lesson has two parts—first to introduce students to what Scripture has to say about faith and doubt, then secondly to open up a place for students to share the things that are on their hearts and minds about the topic and where in life they find themselves.

**Set Up Info:****Supplies Needed:**

1. No technical equipment necessary.
2. Print off Student Response Sheets and make sure to have enough copies.
3. Encourage students to bring their own Bibles ahead of time, but also bring some of your own so students can engage with the text themselves.

Instructive Prep:

In the next hour or so that you have with these students, we really want to be able to reach into their hearts and show them this is a safe place for them to share.

Remember that the inner workings of a heart are tender and students may not feel comfortable sharing right away. It can be scary to admit in a place where Christ is proclaimed that sometimes you doubt him. We all doubt sometimes, though, and your being able to share a moment of your own doubt can be a huge way to open up the floor.

We also want to be able to share with students what God's Word has to say about doubt. It can be easy to share what we have heard about the Bible, but we want to open up Scripture and share right from God's Word. It can be a very different experience when you hold the Bible and see the words that God has written just for you. Make sure to check out the passages we will be reading during this small group session ahead of time. Think about what these passages mean and what they could mean in the lives of your students, and your own.

Finally, before entering this small group session, prayerfully consider the things that could come up during this session. Sometimes we doubt because we don't

understand or don't *feel* something we think we should. But sometimes we also doubt because Christ has been portrayed to us poorly or because a student has experienced great brokenness.

The progression of these studies is four-fold: learn, feel, do and what next. The goal is for students to learn something new, connect at an appropriate emotional level and participate in doing something during the study. Finally, the "What Next" section focuses on a change in attitude, and/or behavior, which you will find in the challenge of the Life Application section. Remember that the movement is toward spiritual and emotional transformation in students' lives, so the application section based on God's truth is really the crux of the time together!

INTRO:

Have you ever experienced a season of doubt? Maybe, if you're like me, you have. Actually, if I'm honest, I have experienced a few seasons of doubt. Sometimes this happens because I haven't been spending any time with God and I let the things of this world take over. Sometimes because I worry too much, or let poor influences lead me more than my Creator. Sometimes I doubt in one area of my life while flourishing in the others. Strange right? Still other times I have faced doubt because I, like many of you, have faced circumstances I did not know the outcome of and it scared me.

We all go through seasons of doubt for different reasons. The question is, what do you do when you go through these seasons of doubt? What does the Bible have to say about seasons of doubt? Who do you turn to when doubt enters your life? The answers to these questions can make all the difference.

INTRO STORY:

Sometimes when I hear people talk about their doubts I think of my friend Vinny. Yup, that's really his name, very Italian. I had met Vinny back in high school, by accident really, but now, looking back, I think of it more as a divine appointment.

For whatever reason, that day we met, he poured out his whole heart and story to me. Everything from his Dad who dipped out of his life before he was even three to the gangs he had been a part of because his Mom was barely present trying to make a living for them. At first it kind of shook me. He never said, but I knew there were things he had done that he should be locked up for, things that probably kept him up at night; but while I was shaken at first, it wore off quickly.

I suppose this was for two reasons. First, I met him at my friend's youth group, so I was guessing something was already going on in his heart. Second, he had just shared a large part of his story with me, probably more than he had shared with most people ever; and,

in doing so, he had revealed his heart to me. He may have appeared to be a tough kid at first, but now I could see right through his tough exterior and I knew who he really was.

Time passed. I wrote letters to him when he was sent off to an alternative school half way across the country, and when he came home I checked in with him regularly. I was one of the first people he told when his girlfriend got pregnant, and I was there to meet the baby, went to the shower, offered him congratulations, and I encouraged him to be the father he never had - to be there for his son and protect him. But as the years past, nothing really changed in his life.

Quite honestly, I was confused. What I should have done was to seek out wisdom from a friend and spend more time listening to God and his direction. Sure Vinny wasn't bangin' anymore, but he also wasn't straight. It seemed like he would get mixed up with dangerous people everywhere he went! It was like he always wore a shirt that read, "I have a record and I'm not afraid to make it longer for you. Hire me." I didn't understand. There was always some get-rich-quick scheme he was working on or some reason he was getting busted that wasn't his fault. As the years past I began to wonder what had happened to that kid I had met at youth group. What was God doing? Why had he made that divine appointment for us to meet? What was my role? Had I made it all up in my head?

Vinny would ask me questions about God sometimes and I would do my best to answer them, but I was getting tired. When he asked me to bring him a Bible the third or fourth time he got locked up I thought things were changing; I got excited! But he was back on the streets with the same goals as soon as he got out.

I would ask him about his son, his girlfriend who was pregnant again, congratulate him on another baby. But honestly, at this point, I stopped praying for him. When he got locked up again, I was gone for the summer so I talked with him on the phone when I could. He called me almost every day, not much to do locked up, but I was short with him. I was trying to work and quite honestly tired of hearing the same old thing. When I came home and I hadn't heard from him in a couple months I began to wonder what was going on.

That was when God surprised me. All this time I thought God had taken the back seat, but maybe it wasn't that, maybe I just hadn't had eyes to see how he was working. You see, over the summer Vinny had told me that another inmate had let him borrow his Bible. He had told me he had decided this was the last time he was getting locked up and he had told me he would get a real job. I guess I didn't think much of it because he had always told me these things. The difference was now he meant it.

When he got out, conversations with him on the phone changed. Now he asks me questions about God. He has a real job now. He has been saving up and bought a car. His attitude on the phone is totally different. He has something he didn't have before - hope. I

recently asked him what has changed, and he told me that God spoke to him. I was shocked!

He told me that last time he got locked up a bunch of the lifers sat him down and were straight with him. Quite honestly, scared him a little bit. He didn't want to end up like them so he started giving things over to God.

That's crazy isn't it! I love how God speaks to each of us! I had forgotten that God could use *anyone* to share his truth. All this time I had been waiting for God to use *me* to hit Vinny with truth, when really, God had that set up all along. My role was just to be there for him.

I was sharing with my Mom the changes I was seeing in Vinny and how I had always thought I would be the one to convince him of God's truth...she just looked at me and said, "But that's not the part God wanted you to play in his faith journey." She told me my role had always been just to be there for him. My Mom saw what I missed, the way God wanted to use me. I had been so wrong to try to do things on my own, but my Mom was able to share truth with me and helped me to understand.

Vinny's still working hard to get his life in line, but it keeps moving forward a little every day. He told me he was being moved up to management at his job and he was working hard and saving as much as he possibly can. He is a long way from where he started and I'm proud to know him. To God be the Glory.

Intro Questions:

1. Have you ever had a friend you lost hope in? Have you ever been that friend who lost faith?
2. Have you ever had a moment like the author where God spoke truth into your life when you thought it was someone else who needed his truth? (See Student Response Sheet)

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Give each of your students some time to reflect on the following questions. After a few minutes, go over them and see what your students have to share. You may be surprised by what you hear and remember, don't be afraid to share yourself; it may be just what your students need to open up themselves.

1. When is a time in your life you felt doubt begin to crowd in? Was it after something hard or bad happened? What caused you to doubt?

2. How did you work through your doubt? Are you still working through it now? If you are, what are you trying to do to work through it? Have you talked to a friend? (See Student Response Sheet)
3. Give it to God. What are some ways you can try giving it to God? (See Student Response Sheet)
4. Oftentimes the best thing we can do when we face doubt is to keep moving forward. Have you sat in silence with God? When we make time for him, he speaks to us and gives us the direction we need to keep moving ahead. Have you honestly made time for that during this time of doubt? How can you? When? (See Student Response Sheet)
5. Write your own questions:

CENTRAL BIBLE PASSAGES:

When we look at the account of Job we find a man who is truly tested. Job himself is very blessed, more so than most people. He has lots of livestock, many children, a wife, wealth and servants to care for things. Then one day everything changes and four different servants come to him to share with him terrible news finally leading to the death of his children. It is in this moment we see the true strength of his character. Read these first two passages, see the heartache the fills Job. What does he do? Maybe you have faced circumstances that have shaken you to the core, too. Maybe you feel like you, too, have lost all the most important things to you. Have you lost a Mom or Dad serving? It's not easy. Had to say goodbye to a close friend when you or they moved? What are you suppose to do? It may be the start of the doubt you feel toward God right now...

The whole book of Job is 42 chapters long. Job and his friends spend a lot of time talking with each other and talking with God. It is a great read, but for today's purposes we will read the beginning and then skip to the end to see how Job's story finishes. There is a lot to learn from him, lots of opportunities for him to doubt God, but he never does. See what you can pull out from his story and think about the challenges he faced. They may be different from yours, but the pain still feels the same.

Job 1-2

Satan Tests Job

There was a man named Job, living in the land of Uz, who worshiped God and was faithful to him. He was a good man, careful not to do anything evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, one thousand head of cattle, and five hundred donkeys. He also had a large number of servants and was the richest man in the East.

Job's sons used to take turns giving a feast, to which all the others would come, and they always invited their three sisters to join them. The morning after each feast, Job would get up early and offer sacrifices for each of his children in order to purify them. He always did this because he thought that one of them might have sinned by insulting God unintentionally.

When the day came for the heavenly beings to appear before the LORD, Satan was there among them. The LORD asked him, "What have you been doing?"

Satan answered, "I have been walking here and there, roaming around the earth."

"Did you notice my servant Job?" the LORD asked. "There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is. He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil."

Satan replied, "Would Job worship you if he got nothing out of it? You have always protected him and his family and everything he owns. You bless everything he does, and you have given him enough cattle to fill the whole country. But now suppose you take away everything he has—he will curse you to your face!"

"All right," the LORD said to Satan, "everything he has is in your power, but you must not hurt Job himself." So Satan left.

Job's Children and Wealth Are Destroyed

One day when Job's children were having a feast at the home of their oldest brother, a messenger came running to Job. "We were plowing the fields with the oxen," he said, "and the donkeys were in a nearby pasture. Suddenly the Sabeans attacked and stole them all. They killed every one of your servants except me. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Lightning struck the sheep and the shepherds and killed them all. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Three bands of Chaldean raiders attacked us, took away the camels, and killed all your servants except

me. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, “Your children were having a feast at the home of your oldest son, when a storm swept in from the desert. It blew the house down and killed them all. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Then Job got up and tore his clothes in grief. He shaved his head and threw himself face downward on the ground. He said, “I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing. The LORD gave, and now he has taken away. May his name be praised!”

In spite of everything that had happened, Job did not sin by blaming God.

Satan Tests Job Again

When the day came for the heavenly beings to appear before the LORD again, Satan was there among them. The LORD asked him, “Where have you been?”

Satan answered, “I have been walking here and there, roaming around the earth.”

“Did you notice my servant Job?” the LORD asked. “There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is. He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil. You persuaded me to let you attack him for no reason at all, but Job is still as faithful as ever.”

Satan replied, “A person will give up everything in order to stay alive. But now suppose you hurt his body—he will curse you to your face!”

So the LORD said to Satan, “All right, he is in your power, but you are not to kill him.”

Then Satan left the LORD's presence and made sores break out all over Job's body. Job went and sat by the garbage dump and took a piece of broken pottery to scrape his sores. His wife said to him, “You are still as faithful as ever, aren't you? Why don't you curse God and die?”

Job answered, “You are talking nonsense! When God sends us something good, we welcome it. How can we complain when he sends us trouble?” Even in all this suffering Job said nothing against God.

Job's Friends Come

Three of Job's friends were Eliphaz, from the city of Teman, Bildad, from the land of Shuah, and Zophar, from the land of Naamah. When they heard how much Job had been

suffering, they decided to go and comfort him. While they were still a long way off they saw Job, but did not recognize him. When they did, they began to weep and wail, tearing their clothes in grief and throwing dust into the air and on their heads. Then they sat there on the ground with him for seven days and nights without saying a word, because they saw how much he was suffering.

Job 42:10-17

Then, after Job had prayed for his three friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had had before. All Job's brothers and sisters and former friends came to visit him and feasted with him in his house. They expressed their sympathy and comforted him for all the troubles the LORD had brought on him. Each of them gave him some money and a gold ring.

The LORD blessed the last part of Job's life even more than he had blessed the first. Job owned fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, two thousand head of cattle, and one thousand donkeys. He was the father of seven sons and three daughters. He called the oldest daughter Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the youngest Keren Happuch. There were no other women in the whole world as beautiful as Job's daughters. Their father gave them a share of the inheritance along with their brothers.

Job lived a hundred and forty years after this, long enough to see his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. And then he died at a very great age.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever been in a place where you felt full of doubt? While Job's friends tried to be there for him, in the end they weren't much help. What do you do when your friends can't be there the way you need them to be? Maybe for you taking action this week means leaving your comfort zone and asking for help from someone different, a youth group leader, mentor or maybe a pastor.
2. Ask God to show up for you today. Find an hour of time where you can get away. Go outside into God's creation and be in silence there. See what God has to share with you. Write down your experience.
3. What will you change? It can be easy to sit on the sidelines and criticize, "Well God isn't showing up," but are you pursuing him? It's a two way street, just like any other relationship that you have. Find new ways to be with God this week. Write down what you will do and when. Have a friend hold you accountable. (See Student Response Sheet)

4. Write your own challenge:

6. WRITE DOWN GROUP MEMBERS PRAYER REQUESTS: