

SUB TOPIC THEME:

Doubting God

LESSON OBJECTIVE:

It is common for people to doubt God. This can range from out and out denial of the existence of God to doubt that he is capable to intervene or cares enough about us to intervene. Doubt is not something that scares God or prevents him from loving us. In fact, many of the heroes and heroines of Scripture have had experiences in doubting God. Faith, by necessity, must have a level of doubt. Without doubt, there is no need to have faith. As we allow God to work in our lives, we can see that he can even use doubt to make us stronger and more intimate followers of his Son, Jesus Christ. This lesson will help to understand doubt and to give us faith that can overcome doubt or help us to help others face and overcome doubt.

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

1. Copies of the Student Response sheet (printed below)
2. Bibles so you can look up the Scripture story (or copy the ones below)
3. A passion to see students transformed in their understanding of God's love and presence in their lives!

Instructive Prep:

Sometimes we pray and nothing happens. Or perhaps we see bad things happen when we follow God's commands. Maybe we see how evil seems to prosper or how bad decisions lead to what seems like a positive outcome. Most teens will have some experience in this area of life and have most likely asked these questions – at least to themselves.

Help students grasp the reality that Jesus understands our doubt. Throughout the unfolding of his great ministry and story, his disciples experienced doubt at every turn. They doubted he would be able to take care of the daily needs of others; they doubted he would be able to expel a demon; they doubted he would deliver them from a violent storm; they doubted he knew what he was talking about when he said he would be crucified on a cross. Even after he rose from the dead, there was doubt. Peter doubted that the tomb was empty—he had to go see for himself.

Thomas doubted that others had seen the risen Christ. He had to place his own hands in Jesus' side. Throughout it all, God was patient and full of love. God did not ridicule or mock, he taught. God did not condemn doubt, he loved. God did not abandon those who doubted, he walked alongside. This is a perfect area to connect students with real-life counterparts in doubt – the disciples!

The progression of these studies is four-fold: *learn, feel, do and what next*. We want students to learn something new, connect at an emotional level to some degree, and participate in doing something during the study (like making a hand gesture as a tool/reminder). Finally, the *what next* focuses on a change in attitude and/or behavior, which you will find in the challenge of the Life Application section. Remember, the movement is toward spiritual and emotional transformation in kids' lives, so the application section based on God's truth is really the crux of the time together! Have fun and lead well.

INTRO:

What do you do if it seems like God doesn't care? Of worse, if it seems like the skeptics might be right after all and there is no God? What do you do when your life becomes so overwhelmed that God is distant and his promises seem like something that don't apply to you? What happens when you are confronted with "proofs" that seem to show that there is no way that God can exist? What is your reaction when others that you care about argue that the story of God and Jesus Christ is no more than a fairy tale myth created in the minds of humankind? Or what is your response when someone, a relative or friend perhaps, who has always been a pillar of faith, claims they no longer believe in God? These are difficult questions. Yet, they are real. Is doubt a deal-breaker? Does doubt put us outside of the grace and forgiveness of God? Perhaps, just maybe, doubt can actually strengthen our faith. Maybe it is in the midst of despair caused by doubt, that God becomes the most real.

INTRO STORY:

Gideon is a man that God used to set free the people of Israel from foreign oppression. He was considered to be a prophet of God. Even though God spoke to him, he doubted that God cared. He started by stating that God had forgotten his people because of all of the bad stuff that was happening. Then, when God sent Gideon on a mission to help the people of God, Gideon demanded proof from God. He doubted God so much that he asked God for three miracles to prove himself. Not once, but three times Gideon demanded proof from God because of his doubt. As you read, notice how time after time, God proves himself, but Gideon is not convinced.

Judges 6

Once again the people of Israel sinned against the LORD, so he let the people of Midian rule them for seven years. The Midianites were stronger than Israel, and the people of Israel hid from them in caves and other safe places in the hills. Whenever the Israelites would plant their crops, the Midianites would come with the Amalekites and the desert tribes and attack them. They would camp on the land and destroy the crops as far south as the area around Gaza. They would take all the sheep, cattle, and donkeys, and leave nothing for the Israelites to live on. They would come with their livestock and tents, as thick as locusts. They and their camels were too many to count. They came and devastated the land, and Israel was helpless against them.

Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help against the Midianites, and he sent them a prophet who brought them this message from the LORD, the God of Israel: “I brought you out of slavery in Egypt. I rescued you from the Egyptians and from the people who fought you here in this land. I drove them out as you advanced, and I gave you their land. I told you that I am the LORD your God and that you should not worship the gods of the Amorites, whose land you are now living in. But you have not listened to me.”

Then the LORD's angel came to the village of Ophrah and sat under the oak tree that belonged to Joash, a man of the clan of Abiezer. His son Gideon was threshing some wheat secretly in a wine press, so that the Midianites would not see him. The LORD's angel appeared to him there and said, “The LORD is with you, brave and mighty man!” Gideon said to him, “If I may ask, sir, why has all this happened to us if the LORD is with us? What happened to all the wonderful things that our fathers told us the LORD used to do—how he brought them out of Egypt? The LORD has abandoned us and left us to the mercy of the Midianites.”

Then the LORD ordered him, “Go with all your great strength and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I myself am sending you.”

Gideon replied, “But Lord, how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family.”

The LORD answered, “You can do it because I will help you. You will crush the Midianites as easily as if they were only one man.”

Gideon replied, “If you are pleased with me, give me some proof that you are really the LORD. Please do not leave until I bring you an offering of food.”

He said, “I will stay until you come back.”

So Gideon went into his house and cooked a young goat and used a bushel of flour to make bread without any yeast. He put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, brought them to the LORD's angel under the oak tree, and gave them to him. The angel told him, "Put the meat and the bread on this rock, and pour the broth over them." Gideon did so. Then the LORD's angel reached out and touched the meat and the bread with the end of the stick he was holding. Fire came out of the rock and burned up the meat and the bread. Then the angel disappeared.

Gideon then realized that it was the LORD's angel he had seen, and he said in terror, "Sovereign LORD! I have seen your angel face-to-face!"

But the LORD told him, "Peace. Don't be afraid. You will not die." Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and named it "The LORD is Peace." (It is still standing at Ophrah, which belongs to the clan of Abiezer.)

That night the LORD told Gideon, "Take your father's bull and another bull seven years old, tear down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the symbol of the goddess Asherah, which is beside it. Build a well-constructed altar to the LORD your God on top of this mound. Then take the second bull and burn it whole as an offering, using for firewood the symbol of Asherah you have cut down." So Gideon took ten of his servants and did what the LORD had told him. He was too afraid of his family and the people in town to do it by day, so he did it at night.

When the people in town got up early the next morning, they found that the altar to Baal and the symbol of Asherah had been cut down, and that the second bull had been burned on the altar that had been built there. They asked each other, "Who did this?" They investigated and found out that Gideon son of Joash had done it. Then they said to Joash, "Bring your son out here, so that we can kill him! He tore down the altar to Baal and cut down the symbol of Asherah beside it."

But Joash said to all those who confronted him, "Are you arguing for Baal? Are you defending him? Anyone who argues for him will be killed before morning. If Baal is a god, let him defend himself. It is his altar that was torn down." From then on Gideon was known as Jerubbaal, because Joash said, "Let Baal defend himself; it is his altar that was torn down."

Then all the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the desert tribes assembled, crossed the Jordan River, and camped in Jezreel Valley. The spirit of the LORD took control of Gideon, and he blew a trumpet to call the men of the clan of Abiezer to follow him. He sent messengers throughout the territory of both parts of Manasseh to call them to follow him. He sent messengers to the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they also came to join him.

Then Gideon said to God, “You say that you have decided to use me to rescue Israel. Well, I am putting some wool on the ground where we thresh the wheat. If in the morning there is dew only on the wool but not on the ground, then I will know that you are going to use me to rescue Israel.” That is exactly what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the wool and wrung enough dew out of it to fill a bowl with water. Then Gideon said to God, “Don't be angry with me; let me speak just once more. Please let me make one more test with the wool. This time let the wool be dry, and the ground be wet.” That night God did that very thing. The next morning the wool was dry, but the ground was wet with dew.

Intro Questions:

1. Why do you think Gideon doubted God so much in this passage?
2. Despite all of the signs, why did Gideon continue to ask for proof?

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Hold your hands up to the people next to you and find the one with the smallest hands. Go from smallest to biggest. If it's close, use the index finger as the tie-breaker!

1. Why do you think God continued to use Gideon despite Gideon's doubt? (use student response sheet)
2. How do you feel about Gideon being considered a prophet of God even though he doubted God so much? (use student response sheet)
3. What situation in your life do you currently not trust God to help you with? What sign would it take for you to be convinced that he cares about you and will help you? (use student response sheet)
4. Ask a friend to share how they would help you overcome your doubt. Brainstorm some different ways that you could encourage each other to trust God even when it seems to you like God doesn't care.
5. How would you go about giving counsel to Gideon after each of his tests? Would you have gotten upset with Gideon if he had not listened to your counsel and continued to test God? Why/why not?

CENTRAL BIBLE PASSAGES

Despite the fact that the disciples had walked with Jesus for three years, they continued to doubt him. They doubted he knew what he was doing. They doubted that he was really the Messiah. They doubted that he was raised from the dead after his crucifixion. If those who knew him best doubted him, from who he is to his knowledge to his power, how much more common would it be for us to doubt. Look at these two passages from the Gospels that show how those closest to Jesus Christ doubted.

Mark 4:35-41

On the evening of that same day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they left the crowd; the disciples got into the boat in which Jesus was already sitting, and they took him with them. Other boats were there too. Suddenly a strong wind blew up, and the waves began to spill over into the boat, so that it was about to fill with water. Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow. The disciples woke him up and said, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are about to die?”

Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, “Be quiet!” and he said to the waves, “Be still!” The wind died down, and there was a great calm. Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Why are you frightened? Do you still have no faith?”

But they were terribly afraid and began to say to one another, “Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

Matthew 14:22-36

Then Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people away. After sending the people away, he went up a hill by himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone; and by this time the boat was far out in the lake, tossed about by the waves, because the wind was blowing against it.

Between three and six o'clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. When they saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they said, and screamed with fear.

Jesus spoke to them at once. “Courage!” he said. “It is I. Don’t be afraid!”

Then Peter spoke up. “Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you.”

“Come!” answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. “Save me, Lord!” he cried.

At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, “What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?”

They both got into the boat, and the wind died down. Then the disciples in the boat worshiped Jesus. “Truly you are the Son of God!” they exclaimed.

They crossed the lake and came to land at Gennesaret, where the people recognized Jesus. So they sent for the sick people in all the surrounding country and brought them to Jesus. They begged him to let the sick at least touch the edge of his cloak; and all who touched it were made well.

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. List some of the times in your life that you have doubted God. What are your top three doubts that you have about him? (use student response sheet)
2. If you had serious doubts about the existence of God, who would you go to for answers and/or encouragement? Why would you go to this person? (use student response sheet)
3. Are you willing to ask God to help expose your doubts? Pray for the doubts that others in your group might have. Ask God’s Holy Spirit to use those doubts in order to grow their faith in new ways.
4. Of all the people in Scripture you have read about, whose doubt do you identify with the most? Why do you think that is? Why do you think God used these people instead of finding others that might have not had as much doubt?
5. Pick one area of your life where you tend to doubt God, either as a group or for each individual, and come up with a plan for how you will begin to address these doubts in your life this week. Help each other and hold one another accountable during the week. Make sure to check back in next week and pick another one to focus on next!

STUDENT RESPONSES:

1. **WHY DO YOU THINK GOD CONTINUED TO USE GIDEON DESPITE GIDEON’S DOUBT?**

2. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT GIDEON BEING CONSIDERED A PROPHET OF GOD EVEN THOUGH HE DOUBTED GOD SO MUCH?

3. WHAT SITUATION IN YOUR LIFE DO YOU CURRENTLY NOT TRUST GOD TO HELP YOU WITH? WHAT SIGN WOULD IT TAKE FOR YOU TO BE CONVINCED THAT HE CARES ABOUT YOU AND WILL HELP YOU?

4. LIST SOME OF THE TIMES IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU HAVE DOUBTED GOD. WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE DOUBTS THAT YOU HAVE ABOUT HIM?

