

SUB TOPIC THEME:

I'm Just a Skeptical
Person

LESSON OBJECTIVE:

To bring the truth about skepticism into the light so that students can understand that it is different from healthy doubt. By showing how it infects and deforms our hearts to the point that we no longer experience the joy of the Lord, we hope

to free these students from one of the most influential elements of their present culture. In order to encourage them to live with authenticity and courage for the Lord, it is important to show how cynicism keeps us from fully experiencing the love and joy of the Lord and also from participating in his purpose here on earth.

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

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

Instructive Prep:

Skepticism is the bread and butter of today's youth. While all adolescents go through periods of doubt and questioning, the cynicism that is sweeping the world today goes beyond healthy development. Many young people today respect and aspire to be like those who hold disdain for nearly everything and everyone. To be able to degrade and dissolve the identity of someone or something is seen as a highly desired skill.

As you prepare for this lesson and during it, cover your students with prayers for open eyes, humble hearts, and ears willing to hear God's truth. Trust in his grace and restorative power and be the living example of someone living boldly for the faith!

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:

Chances are you may think skepticism is a good thing. You look at the world and see corruption and brokenness and maybe straight out evil. Everyone lies. Things rarely go well. Investing in things and committing to ideas is more than likely a waste of your time. Everything is fallible. That's skepticism – or a piece of it. It's a very powerful and very distorting state of being that happens when doubt pervades your heart, mind, and body. It's different from wisdom and discernment because it allows no room for faith. In the face of skepticism, obedience and devotion to God is called "foolish" and that is a very dangerous word to be using when you are talking about the Creator of the Universe.

INTRO STORY:

As you read through this story together, look for all the times and ways that Jesus is doubted. People everywhere, even people he has already "proven" himself to, are full of skepticism. Also, pay attention to Jesus' response, especially when it changes from person to person.

John 5:1-18, 30-44

After this, Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious festival. Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches; in Hebrew it is called Bethzatha. A large crowd of sick people were lying on the porches—the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. A man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that the man had been sick for such a long time; so he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

The sick man answered, "Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first." Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk." Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking.

The day this happened was a Sabbath, so the Jewish authorities told the man who had been healed, "This is a Sabbath, and it is against our Law for you to carry your mat."

He answered, "The man who made me well told me to pick up my mat and walk."

They asked him, “Who is the man who told you to do this?”

But the man who had been healed did not know who Jesus was, for there was a crowd in that place, and Jesus had slipped away.

Afterward, Jesus found him in the Temple and said, “Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

Then the man left and told the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus who had healed him. So they began to persecute Jesus, because he had done this healing on a Sabbath. Jesus answered them, “My Father is always working, and I too must work.” This saying made the Jewish authorities all the more determined to kill him; not only had he broken the Sabbath law, but he had said that God was his own Father and in this way had made himself equal with God.

...

“I can do nothing on my own authority; I judge only as God tells me, so my judgment is right, because I am not trying to do what I want, but only what he who sent me wants.

“If I testify on my own behalf, what I say is not to be accepted as real proof. But there is someone else who testifies on my behalf, and I know that what he says about me is true. John is the one to whom you sent your messengers, and he spoke on behalf of the truth. It is not that I must have a human witness; I say this only in order that you may be saved. John was like a lamp, burning and shining, and you were willing for a while to enjoy his light. But I have a witness on my behalf which is even greater than the witness that John gave: what I do, that is, the deeds my Father gave me to do, these speak on my behalf and show that the Father has sent me. And the Father, who sent me, also testifies on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his face, and you do not keep his message in your hearts, for you do not believe in the one whom he sent. You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me! Yet you are not willing to come to me in order to have life.

“I am not looking for human praise. But I know what kind of people you are, and I know that you have no love for God in your hearts. I have come with my Father's authority, but you have not received me; when, however, someone comes with his own authority, you will receive him. You like to receive praise from one another, but you do not try to win praise from the one who alone is God; how, then, can you believe me?”

Intro Questions:

1. What expressions of skepticism did you see in the story?
2. Did you notice any differences in Jesus' reactions to people?

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Cut the straws different lengths and have each teen pick. Then proceed from shortest to longest.

1. What are some ways doubt has twisted your perspective into one of skepticism?
(use Student response sheet)
2. What are some ways we can tell the difference between wise discernment and doubting skepticism?
3. Each of you write your own question about cynicism in today's world and take turns asking and answering them together as a group:

CENTRAL BIBLE PASSAGES

These two passages from Scripture are addressing some arguments and problems the early Christian church was having. In Romans it's talking about being a vegetarian! And in Peter the writer is addressing false teachers within the church. This one can actually become very close to what you might be dealing with if you are influencing those around you with cynicism and discouraging their faith. Be careful! What God thinks about those people is pretty harsh! Both arguments reveal attributes that we are to either admire or disdain, and they also give guidance on how to interact with each other. See how what is discussed here can apply to living a life filled with pervasive skeptical doubt that brings an attitude and state of mind that God does not desire for us.

2 Peter 2:17-22

These people are like dried-up springs, like clouds blown along by a storm; God has reserved a place for them in the deepest darkness. They make proud and stupid statements, and use immoral bodily lusts to trap those who are just beginning to escape from among people who live in error. They promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of destructive habits—for we are slaves of anything that has conquered us. If people have escaped from the corrupting forces of the world through their knowledge of

our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then are again caught and conquered by them, such people are in worse condition at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been much better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than to know it and then turn away from the sacred command that was given them. What happened to them shows that the proverbs are true: “A dog goes back to what it has vomited” and “A pig that has been washed goes back to roll in the mud.”

Romans 14:1-4

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but do not argue with them about their personal opinions. Some people's faith allows them to eat anything, but the person who is weak in the faith eats only vegetables. The person who will eat anything is not to despise the one who doesn't; while the one who eats only vegetables is not to pass judgment on the one who will eat anything; for God has accepted that person. Who are you to judge the servants of someone else? It is their own Master who will decide whether they succeed or fail. And they will succeed, because the Lord is able to make them succeed.

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. List together the sinful actions and/or bad choices that 2 Peter and Romans describe. Circle the ones you think apply to you and, if you feel comfortable, share them with the group. (use Student response sheet)
2. Use these verses and others you know to discuss how we are supposed to combat these sinful actions and strive to live with Jesus as our Lord.
3. Pick one area of your life where you tend to sin, either as a group or for each individual, and come up with a plan for how you will begin to address its presence 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!

3. LIST TOGETHER THE SINFUL ACTIONS AND/OR BAD CHOICES THAT 2 PETER AND ROMANS DESCRIBE. CIRCLE THE ONES YOU THINK APPLY TO YOU AND, IF YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE, SHARE THEM WITH THE GROUP.

4. WRITE DOWN GROUP MEMBERS' PRAYER REQUESTS: