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***WEEK 4
TEACHING GUIDE***

BIBLE

Matthew 13:31-32; Psalm 86:11-13;

1 Corinthians 3:7-9

BIG IDEA

God’s kingdom is always growing.

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

QUESTION **| Riddle of the Week**

* Welcome to our final week of *Please Explain,* where we're talking about some things that are a little hard to understand. Ready for our final riddle of this series?
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to guess the answer to the riddle below.*
	+ **RIDDLE:** I am very large but look very small. When night falls, I am cherished by all. What am I?
	+ **ANSWER:** A star!

QUESTION **| "Who are some of the biggest stars alive today?"**

* A "star" isn't necessarily one of those bright shining balls of gas in outer space. Sometimes it's a person — like, a really famous one. **Who are some of the biggest stars alive today?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*

IMAGE **| Someone's Sudden Stardom**

* Some of the stars we mentioned had a pretty slow and steady rise to fame. But for others, their stardom happened seemingly overnight.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Show a few images of people who achieved sudden stardom and briefly share their stories. Choose people your students would connect with, but here are a few examples:*
	+ [*Daisy Ridley*](https://growcurriculum.org/DaisyRidleyImages) *and* [*John Boyega*](https://growcurriculum.org/JohnBoyegaImages)*, who became famous through their roles in Star Wars.*
	+ [*Patrick Mahomes*](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5e/Chiefs_190_%2851615696893%29_%28cropped%29.jpg)*, quarterback of the Kansas City Chiefs, who rose to fame after winning a Super Bowl.*
	+ *Your students' current favorite TikTok creator who blew up after one viral video.*
* There are probably a lot of reasons why these stars collect such big following so quickly. Maybe it's because because their talent really is amazing! But there might be other reasons too, like . . .
	+ People not wanting to miss out on the excitement.
	+ People wanting to be into what their friends are into.
	+ People wanting to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

ACTIVITY **| Jump Rope Growth**

* These stars saw their fandoms grow from something small to something really big, really quickly. Kind of like this . . .
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Get one* [*16-foot-long jump rope*](https://growcurriculum.org/growstudents-pleaseexplain-amazon/) *(or two, if you'd like to turn this into a competition). To begin, have two adult volunteers spin the rope, with a student jumping. Then add a second student. Then a third, and a fourth, until you can't add anymore. For the second round, speed things up by doubling the players each time: one, then two, then four, then eight.*
* See how quickly a group of people can grow? Sometimes the growth is slow and steady. Other times, a group can grow exponentially.

QUESTION **| Have you ever loved something so much you wanted others to experience it?**

* **Have you loved something so much you wanted others to experience it too? What was it?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
* Whether it's a favorite musician, movie, hobby, or viral video, it makes sense that we want to share the things we love with others. And when we hear about something someone else loves, it makes sense that we want to learn more about it too.
* There's something inside all of us that wants to be part of something bigger than ourselves — something that's meaningful and something that's still growing.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

STORY **| Talk about a time you were part of something bigger than yourself.**

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or a student to tell a story) about a time you were part of something bigger than yourself. This could be something fun, like a sports team, music group, or adventure, or it could be something meaningful, like a ministry, project, or mission-driven organization. Either way, share why it was so compelling to you and what you accomplished together that you couldn't have achieved alone.*
* Sometimes when we talk about following Jesus, we make it sound like something we do all on our own.
	+ In some ways, that's true. Much of our faith journeys are personal and individual. We're the only ones who can choose to follow Jesus, decide to spend time with God on our own, and take responsibility for our own faith.
	+ But when Jesus talked about following God, he often talked about it differently. He talked about something bigger than any of us on our own. He talked about something that was always growing.

DISCUSSION

* + **Whether you're a fan of a sports team, musician, show, or game, how can being part of a passionate fan base make you feel like a part of something bigger than yourself?**
	+ **\* What are some other ways people might try to be part of something bigger than themselves?**
	+ **\* Do you think everyone is created with a desire to be part of something bigger than themselves? Why or why not?**

OBJECT LESSON **| A Mustard Seed**

* If you've been with us the last few weeks, you know when Jesus was here on earth, he often taught in the form of stories, called parables.
	+ These fictional stories were designed to illustrate a big truth Jesus wanted us to remember. He chose to communicate these truths in story form because he knew stories and images often stick in our minds better than words alone.
	+ But sometimes Jesus' stories got a little confusing and left his followers wondering what in the world Jesus was trying to say.
	+ As we wrap up this series this week, we're going to look at one more story Jesus told and wonder about what he was trying to explain.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, hold a* [*mustard seed*](https://growcurriculum.org/growstudents-pleaseexplain-amazon/)*. If you'd like, pass around a jar of mustard seeds and invite each student to take one.*
* **Does anyone here know a lot about mustard seeds?**
	+ Maybe you know a thing or two (or maybe you've just eaten mustard a lot), but it's understandable if you're not exactly a mustard seed expert.
	+ You and I might not be particularly familiar with mustard seeds today, but the people who would have heard this parable the first time Jesus told it would have been pretty familiar. That's because Jesus liked to use images in his stories his listeners would have easily been able to identify and relate to.

SCRIPTURE **| Matthew 13:31-32**

* As you listen to this story, here are a few questions to think about:
	+ **What do you think this parable is about?**
	+ **What is confusing about this parable?**
	+ **What do you think the spiritual lesson in this story could be?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 13:31-32. As you break down this parable, invite a few students to respond to each of the questions below. As students respond, assure them all of their guesses and observations about this parable are welcome!*
* In this parable, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is compared to a mustard seed — a tiny seed that has the potential to grow into a much larger plant. But what is "the kingdom of heaven?" And what does Jesus want us to understand about it? Let's break it down.
	+ Usually when we hear the word "heaven," we think about another world or a place we go when we die. **Do you think that's what Jesus is talking about here? Or could he be talking about something else?**
	+ If Jesus isn't talking about what happens when we die, what do you think he is talking about? **What do you think Jesus meant by "the kingdom of heaven?"**
* When you see the Bible talk about "the kingdom of heaven," we're talking about God's will becoming a reality here on earth. If God is the ruler of "the kingdom of heaven," then anything that happens according to God's will is part of God's kingdom! In the words of Jesus, we're bringing "the kingdom of heaven" to earth when . . .
	+ We love God with our hearts, souls, and minds.
	+ We love others like we love ourselves.
	+ And we help others do the same.
* So now that we know what "the kingdom of heaven" is, let's find out why it's like a mustard tree.
	+ A mustard tree is actually considered an invasive species. If left unattended, this plant will grow out of control and continue expanding, as long as it finds good soil in which to grow. With that in mind, **what do you think Jesus might be trying to say about "the kingdom of heaven"?**
	+ A mustard tree isn't a particularly rare or expensive plant. It's not hard to find or difficult to get your hands on! **What do you think that might tell us about what God's kingdom is like?**
	+ Jesus said the mustard tree could grow large enough to let birds rest in its branches. **What do you think that might tell us about what God's kingdom is like?**
* One thing I love about Jesus' parables is how they encourage us to think, question, and wonder about what Jesus was saying. And, like we've said before in this series, that's a big part of why Jesus taught this way! He wanted us to use our minds to try to decipher what he was trying to say.
* There are so many things we could say about what this metaphor of a mustard seed could mean, but here are a few things I see:
	+ Like a mustard tree (which grows easily and in so many places), the kingdom of heaven isn't difficult to find or access. God's love is available to anyone who's looking for it.
	+ Like the birds in Jesus' parable discovered, God's kingdom provides a place for us to find rest, safety, and comfort. With Jesus, we always have a safe place to land.
	+ Like this "invasive species," God's kingdom doesn't require expert gardeners in order to get it to grow. God's kingdom is going to keep growing even when you or I mess up, fall short, or aren't the best representatives of Jesus we could be.
	+ Like that tiny little mustard seed, in God's kingdom, small insignificant things often grow into things that are hugely important — and nothing can stop what God is doing.
* And when you join in on what God is up in the world, by sharing the good news of Jesus with your words and actions, you get to be part of that growth.

DISCUSSION

* + **Retell me Jesus' parable as though I've never heard it before. Then explain it to me!**
	+ **\* How would you explain "the kingdom of heaven"? What questions do you still have about what that means?**

SCRIPTURE **| Psalm 86:11-13**

* But before God uses us to help the kingdom of heaven grow here on earth, God wants to make the kingdom of heaven grow in our hearts too. It isn't just here on earth where God's will can be done — it's in our own lives too.
* If you want to see the kingdom grow in your life, you might try praying something like this . . .
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 86:11-13.*
* You can see God's kingdom grow as you . . .
	+ Learn to follow God's ways.
	+ Learn to trust God.
	+ Learn to focus on God.
	+ Choose to worship God with your life.
	+ Let Jesus' love transform you and give you a new life.
* This is how a seed becomes a tree. When Jesus transforms people like you and me, his work doesn't end with us. As we learn to follow him and tell others about the new life we've found in him, we become part of something so much bigger than us. **God's kingdom is always growing,** and we get to be a part of it.

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

REFLECTION **| Kingdom Invitation (Part 1)**

* God's kingdom is going to grow whether you or I participate in it or not. But don't you want to be a part of something so much bigger than you? Don't you want to see what happens when heaven comes to earth?
* It starts by letting God's kingdom grow in our own lives. Remember, "the kingdom of heaven" is wherever God's will is done! So how could your life fall more in line with what God wants for you? Does it look like . . .
	+ Getting to know Jesus for the very first time?
	+ Spending more time with God on your own?
	+ Following God's ways instead of your own?
	+ Trusting God more?
	+ Worshiping God with your life?
	+ Letting Jesus transform you in an area where you're feeling stuck?
* **God's kingdom grows in us** when we learn to love God more and look more like Jesus.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 4 folder. Place one under each seat, along with a pen. Invite students to write in the first box how they want to see the kingdom grow in their own lives.*

REFLECTION **| Kingdom Invitation (Part 2)**

* As God's kingdom grows within us, we're invited to join Jesus in his work to see God's kingdom grow all around us too.
* If "the kingdom of heaven" is wherever God's will is done, how could you be a part of making this world look more like the way God wants it to look? Could it mean . . .
	+ Reaching out to someone who needs a friend?
	+ Meeting a need no one else has met?
	+ Loving someone like Jesus loves them?
	+ Standing up for someone no one else is standing up for?
	+ Sharing your story of faith with someone who's never heard it before?
	+ Setting an example that inspires others to know Jesus better?
* Like that tiny mustard seed teaches us, tiny actions and choices can help the kingdom of heaven grow. When we show the world what Jesus is like through our love, mercy, and compassion (instead of hate, violence, or fear), we're inviting others to experience the goodness of God! **God's kingdom grows in the world** when people are loved like Jesus — and when new people choose to love Jesus in return.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *In the second box, invite students to imagine a new metaphor to describe how God's kingdom can grow here on earth. Then challenge them to write at least one way they be a part of helping God's kingdom grow this week.*

DISCUSSION

* + **Is there an area of your life where you're hesitant to let God's "will be done"? If so, what's stopping you from letting God help you grow in that area?**
	+ **What are some small ways you've seen other people help God's kingdom grow here on Earth? Which of those things do you feel inspired to do too?**
	+ **Read 1 Corinthians 3:7-9. How is this a helpful reminder when we're trying to grow in our faith? How is it a helpful reminder when we're trying to help God's kingdom grow?**
	+ **This week, how do you want to see God's kingdom grow in your life or in the world? And what are you going to do to help make that happen?**

MUSIC **| "Kingdom Come" (Common Hymnal)**

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play the song “Kingdom Come” (Common Hymnal).*
* Just like God made that mustard seed grow, God has the ability to make our lives' impact grow beyond anything we can imagine. But that kind of impact doesn't happen by accident. It happens when we let our lives be changed by Jesus' love and then invite others to do the same.
* In both our lives and in the world around us, **God's kingdom is always growing** — and isn't it amazing that Jesus invites us to be a part of it?