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***WEEK 1
TEACHING GUIDE***

BIBLE

John 14:1-14; Isaiah 41:9-10;

Hebrews 4:15-16

BIG IDEA

When you doubt God is real,

look to Jesus.

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

VIDEO **| A Clip from "We Win" (from *Space Jam: A New Legacy*)**

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from the music video for* [*"We Win" by Lil Baby & Kirk Franklin*](https://growcurriculum.org/LilBaby%26KirkFranklinWeWinSpaceJamANewLegacyOfficialVideo) *from the movie Space Jam: A New Legacy.*
* Welcome to our new series, *Reasonable Doubt,* where we'll be exploring some potentially dark and scary questions. But as we do, we'll discover even our doubts and questions are something we can celebrate as wins.

ACTIVITY **| Intergalactic Dodgeball**

* Welcome to outer space! This is your intergalactic dodgeball league and it's time for you to duck, dive, and dodge your way out of uncertainty.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Use a room that can be completely dark to set up an intergalactic dodgeball universe. Buy or borrow* [*black lights*](https://growcurriculum.org/growstudents-reasonabledoubt-amazon/) *that can be used around the perimeter or above the playing area. Buy or borrow* [*neon soft foam dodgeballs*](https://growcurriculum.org/growstudents-reasonabledoubt-amazon/)*. Make a playing area with* [*neon blacklight reactive tape*](https://growcurriculum.org/growstudents-reasonabledoubt-amazon/)*. Use whatever dodgeball rules you want and have fun! We suggest playing a* [*dramatic song*](https://growcurriculum.org/ELOTimePrologueHDVinylRecording) *like "Time: Prologue" (ELO) or another like it to introduce your teams or team captains.*

VIDEO **|** **Apollo 11 Moonwalk**

* Raise your hand if you've seen footage of the Apollo 11 moonwalk, when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on moon for the very first time.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play a short clip from a video* [*like this one*](https://growcurriculum.org/Apollo11Moonwalk20July1969RestoredFootage) *(0:25-1:33) of the Apollo 11 moonwalk*
* The Apollo 11 moonwalk happened in 1969, more than 50 years ago. Some of the adults in your life were alive then.
* Even with these facts, it's difficult to imagine isn't it? None of us have ever been to space to be able to say without a shadow of doubt that we've seen the footprints ourselves. We can only trust others who have been there and witnessed it.

DISCUSSION

* + **What's something that's true but so weird or incredible almost can't believe it?**
	+ **Do you think it's wrong to have doubts or questions about God? Why or why not?**

VIDEO **| A Clip of a Shooting Star**

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, silently play a short clip (0:53-1:53)* [*like this one*](https://growcurriculum.org/THENIGHTSOFSHOOTINGSTARS4KMeteorShowerTimelapse) *of a time lapse of shooting stars.*
* Have you ever witnessed a shooting star? Where do they think they come from? They come from meteors — tiny flecks of space dust, all piled up, that fly through space and light up when they enter our atmosphere. The light we see is the space dust making its way through the sky.
* Where do you think doubt comes from?
	+ It's probably not born in a ball of space dust, but it could be a collection of thoughts you've had that gained speed over time. By the time you notice you're doubting, it may have actually been happening for a while.
	+ Or maybe your doubt began to form because something happened to you or you noticed something happening around you. Questions built up over time until — poof! You've got doubt.

POLL **| Have you ever doubted?**

* Everyone doubts things. We doubt:
	+ Ourselves.
	+ People around us.
	+ Stuff we used to believe.
	+ Stuff others want us to believe.
	+ Ideas.
	+ The safety of things.
	+ Or even if God is real.
* **Have you ever doubted anything before? Have you ever doubted something about God or your faith before?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:***Invite students to respond by raising their hands if the answer is "yes."*
* Doubting God may feel scary or even wrong, but over the next few weeks we're going to work through the idea that doubt can actually be a pretty reasonable thing to do. Believe it or not, doubt can help us grow closer to God.

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

STORY **| Talk about a time you started to doubt something you used to believe.**

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you started to doubt or ask questions about something you used to believe. Maybe you thought ATM machines were simply free money machines, until you learned how banking works. Or your favorite teacher, coach, or friend did something out of character and you started to wonder how much you could trust them. Or you believed something about God or the Bible that you eventually realized was wrong. Whatever it was, talk about how the doubt began and what kinds of questions surfaced when it did.*
* **When you were a kid, you were a great question-asker. We all were. No one has to give a kid permission to be curious. But there's usually a shift when we start to grow up and begin to wonder if our questions are okay. We might even worry what other people might think if we asked our questions openly.**
	+ Maybe you don't voice your questions because you don't want to seem critical.
	+ Maybe you stay quiet because you don't want to seem confused.
	+ When it comes to faith or belief in God, perhaps someone told you to "just believe it, don't ask questions," so you don't want to seem disobedient.
* But what if questions, instead of being the enemy of our faith, are actually the way to an even deeper faith?

DISCUSSION

* + **What are some things you've heard about God that some people might find hard to believe?**
	+ **\* Do you think any of those doubts we mentioned are reasonable? Why or why not?**

SCRIPTURE **| Isaiah 41:9-10**

* What's caused you to doubt recently?
	+ It could be that chat sitting unanswered is giving you worries.
	+ Or the thing you learned in science that makes you wonder if science and belief in God can coexist.
	+ It could be the loss of someone you loved that makes it difficult to stay hopeful.
* If there's something the prophets in the Bible were familiar with, it was doubt. They were often asked to deliver messages from God to people who doubted God or God's promises.
* Like a parent telling a kid the same thing over and over, the prophets of the Bible got involved when people struggled to trust or follow God. Sometimes, those people . . .
	+ Become rebellious while waiting on God.
	+ Had conflict with other nations.
	+ Became guilty of harming or oppressing others.
	+ Began to lose faith in the promise of the coming Messiah.
* When things weren't going their way, many people turned their backs on and struggled to believe God. It was in the middle of one of these waves of doubt that Isaiah chose to speak these words.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Isaiah 41:9-10.*
* Isaiah says God knows the people of Israel are fearful, but God isn't offended by their fear. Instead, God says, "I am with you. Don't be afraid."
	+ Remember, Isaiah said these things about 700 year before Jesus was born. That means even after this passage of Scripture was written, God's people had a lot of waiting to do before God would deliver on the promise of a Savior.
	+ But eventually, that promise was fulfilled through Jesus. The doubts people had about whether or not God could be trusted were finally dispelled when Jesus arrived and revealed himself.

DISCUSSION

* + **\* Why do you think it was important for God to show up on Earth as a human?**
	+ **When Jesus arrived on Earth, what did he show us about what God is like?**

SCRIPTURE **| John 14:1-14**

* But when Jesus was here on earth, things weren't perfect. His disciples had reasons to doubt and question what God was doing. Their doubt must have been obvious to Jesus because it was once the subject of their dinner conversation.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize John 14:1-14.*
* Right after the meal, Jesus said, "Don't let your fears worry you," even though there was real reason to be troubled. Jesus had just . . .
	+ Said one of them was a traitor.
	+ Predicted one of them would deny ever knowing him.
	+ Let them know he'd be leaving them and they couldn't go with him.
* After three years of traveling, witnessing miracles, and hearing Jesus' teachings together, the disciples believed Jesus was the one who had come to save them. They believed he would overthrow the Roman Empire and become the rightful king — but now everything they had imagined was being taken away. It was probably confusing, disappointing, and surprising.
* Knowing this, Jesus tells his followers they have a place in God's presence along with him. It's a place with many rooms, where a spot is being prepared just for them.
	+ If that sounds strange or at all confusing to you, you're not alone. The disciple Thomas had some questions too.
	+ Thomas was willing to ask the questions that probably all of the disciples were thinking: "Wait, so where is this place? How do we get there? We'd love to go be with God, but you haven't even told us the way!"
	+ To which Jesus simply said, "I am the way." If the disciples wanted to get to God — to finally be in God's presence and know without a doubt God was real and could be trusted — then they needed to look to Jesus and follow him.
* Like Thomas, it’s okay to admit we don't know everything. If Jesus' own disciples still doubted God could be trusted sometimes, I think it is okay for us to admit we're sometimes confused too. Jesus wasn't offended by the disciples' questions, and he isn't offended by ours either.
* When our doubts and questions leave us feeling confused or lost, Jesus didn’t just say he’d "show" us the way. He said he *is* the way. Because we can trust Jesus to lead us to God, **when you doubt God is real, look to Jesus.**

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

DISCUSSION

* + **\* How do you think our doubts and questions about God could lead us to a deeper faith?**
	+ **What are some reasons a person might be hesitant to share their doubts and questions out loud? Which of those reasons do you most relate to?**

QUESTION **| How does doubt make you feel?**

* Doubt can make you feel like an alien life-form, fresh from outer space. When you start asking questions about God, it might seem like everyone is staring, judging, and talking about you.
* But now that we know Jesus invites us to lose our fear around our doubt and questions, we may be able to have the confidence to ask them, trusting we're always safe with Jesus.
* You don't have to share your doubts and questions out loud yet. But if you've ever experienced doubt about God, **how did your doubt make you feel?**
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Invite students to share in groups of two or three. Then give a few students a chance to respond to the whole group.*
* It can feel embarrassing to have questions. We might feel . . .
	+ Insecure.
	+ Suspicious about things followers of Jesus might say.
	+ Confused about science and the story of creation.
	+ Uneasy about conversations about heaven and hell.
	+ Disoriented when we witness hurt, grief, brokenness or injustice in the world.
* But while those feelings aren't necessarily facts, they're an indication that these questions matter to us very much and we need a safe environment where we can explore them.

IMAGE **| The Hubble Telescope**

* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, show an image of the Hubble telescope* [*like this one*](https://growcurriculum.org/HubbleSpaceTelescopeSupportSystemsModule) *on screen, as well as images taken by the Hubble telescope,* [*like this one*](https://growcurriculum.org/StarFormingRegionS106)*. These images are free for you to use under the Creative Commons license.*
* The Hubble telescope is a solar-powered telescope sending pictures and data from outer space to earth.
	+ It was launched on April 24, 1990 on board the space shuttle Discovery and was launched into orbit one day later.
	+ It's a high-tech miracle that has been serviced five times, on missions from 1993 to 2009. The thing that makes it work are the mirrors that capture the images and data sent to Earth.
	+ Can you imagine having such an amazing form of communication and data but never looking to it or processing any of the information? Every year we learn new things about ourselves and creation, but only because we keep looking to the telescope for clues and help.
* Jesus isn't a telescope. But when we doubt, Jesus is a little bit like the Hubble's mirrors, showing us images of what's true.
	+ Like the depths of space, there are so many things we don't understand and might even frighten us — like the question, "Is God even real?"
	+ When the world spent centuries waiting to see if God's promise of a Savior could be trusted, Jesus showed up as the image of God, in real life.
	+ And even today, when we have questions, Jesus invites us to look to him as the image of what God is like.
* Jesus shows us that not only is God real, but God loves us, heals us, helps us, forgives us, and is so patient with us.

DISCUSSION

* + **\* What do you think it would take for us to make our group a safer place to talk about our doubts and questions?**
	+ **Read Hebrews 4:15-16. Because of Jesus, what's one question or doubt you could confidently take to God this week?**

REFLECTION **| Gravity Prayers**

* Gravity is the force that holds our bodies to the center of the earth. Without it, we'd fly off the planet and into outer space.
	+ We need gravity, just like we need the ability to ask questions and think deeply about our faith. Our desire to understand what's true allows us to know God better. Without it, we'd never grow.
	+ But sometimes our questions feel like black holes — spaces where gravity is so strong nothing can escape it. Sometimes, like those black holes, our questions and doubts get so dark and heavy they threaten to crush our faith completely.
* For God, though, gravity is nothing. God is real, present, and listening, even in the darkest places of doubt and uncertainty.
* **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, you'll need a large printed image of the night sky or a backdrop with the series graphic, as described in the room design section of this series. For this prayer time, you'll need* [*3" round black dot stickers*](https://growcurriculum.org/growstudents-reasonabledoubt-amazon/) *and white or metallic permanent markers or gel pens. Invite students to write their questions and doubts (or questions or doubts they've heard from others) in the form of prayers on the "black holes" and either keep them or add them to backdrop.*
* Just like Jesus created a space for his disciples where doubt, questions, and belief could all exist together, he's done the same for us.
* Your questions aren't something to be ashamed of. They're probably pretty reasonable. So when you feel confused or disoriented because of your questions and doubts, don't give up. Even **when you doubt God is real, look to Jesus.** He'll show you what's true.