

WEEK 1

LESSON GUIDE

BEYOND BELIEF

BIG IDEA

When you doubt yourself, God can still use you.

BIBLE

Exodus 3:1–15; John 14:12.

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | Steal The Life Raft

- Welcome to the first week of our new series, *Beyond Belief*, in which we'll look at Moses' life and an epic showdown between good and evil! Tonight, we thought we would start with our own showdown of sorts. One of the things Moses was known for was escaping certain death as a baby by floating down a river in a basket. So to honor that history, we will play "Steal The Life Raft!"
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, you will need an inflated inner tube. To play, inflate an inner tube (you may want to use a [desert-themed inflatable](#)) and place it in the center of the playing area. Divide players into two teams of equal numbers and have the teams stand on opposite sides of the playing area. Have the players on each team count off. When the game leader calls out a number, the player(s) with that number must run forward, attempt to pick up the inflatable, and return to their side without being tagged. If they get tagged, they are out for that round. A player can only be tagged out if they are holding the inflatable. Before the start of the game, determine the number of rounds you will play. To up the intensity, have the teams estimate the number of times they can successfully retrieve the inflatable. The team who successfully guesses their number of retrievals wins.

ACTIVITY | Two Wins And An "Ehhh."

- Some of you didn't win, so let's take a moment to boost some egos and give you all an opportunity to celebrate things you're great at.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, divide students into groups of three. Each student must come up with three things about themselves: two things they believe they are good at (singing, dancing, spelling, coding), and one thing they are average at. Have students share their three activities and have others in the group attempt to choose which activity is the "ehhh."
- Did you find similarities to others in your group about the things you were good at and not so good at? Did some of you want to not talk about the thing that you're just kind of "ehhh" at? Those can be hard to admit.
- We all tend to hide the things we wouldn't put on our resume because we feel insecure about our inabilities and what others think about us.

DISCUSSION

- What is one thing you do that seems to come more naturally to you than it does to others? Is it easy for you to accept compliments about that skill? Why or why not?

- *Do you feel like you doubt your abilities? When does that happen most? Why?
- Have you ever felt you were unworthy or underqualified for something you were asked to do or be a part of? Why do you think you were asked to do it?

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

SCRIPTURE | Exodus 3:1–10

- At the end of the book of Genesis, we found God's people in a favorable position. Later, when a new king noticed how God's people have grown in number, he worried that if a war broke out, they would join the opposition, and he would be outnumbered. So he enslaved them, forcing them to do backbreaking work to prevent them from rising against him.
- Moses was born into this community of God's people as they were experiencing the height of this oppression. However, Moses' mom wished for him to have a better life. So, she placed him in a basket and floated him down the river, hoping someone would be able to provide him with the life he deserved. God answered her prayer and guided the basket to Pharaoh's daughter, who took him in as her own and raised him well.
- After he grew up, Moses witnessed an Egyptian man beating up one a slave. Overcome with rage and anger, Moses attacked the Egyptian, killed him, and buried the body to hide what he had done. Eventually, news of this attack reached Pharaoh, and Moses was forced to flee.
- While in hiding, Moses was weighed down with the shame of killing someone and leaving his still-enslaved friends and family back in Egypt, but then God called out to Moses . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or paraphrase Exodus 3:1–10.*
- God's people were still enslaved and experiencing severe injustice and pain. However, God had promised Moses' ancestors that they would be a people great in number who would bless the world.
 - God was deeply invested in the people of Israel and was moved by their cries. God called out to Moses through a burning bush for him to lead his people out of Pharaoh's captivity.
 - Moses was told that God had witnessed their abuse and would rescue them from their situation. So, Moses was charged with leading God's people out of slavery and into freedom — out of oppression and injustice in Egypt and into a place they could worship their God.

QUESTION | "What would you do if you were Moses?"

- God is asking Moses to lead amid a profound crisis.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Ask the following questions, which are intended to immerse students in the story. Highlight answers that bring to light the doubts Moses may have had.*
- Ask yourself these questions as if you were Moses and had his past:
 - **What do you think he thinks about himself?**
 - **What do you think he thinks about God?**
- Keep all of this in mind as we read the following passage.

SCRIPTURE | Exodus 3:11–15

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Exodus 3:11–15.*
- Moses tried to convince God he wasn't the man for the job. He told God he wasn't smart enough or persuasive enough with his words to convince Pharaoh to let God's people go. Moses was terrified to confront Pharaoh because he lacked confidence in himself.
- Moses protested, but God promised to be with Moses every step of the way.
 - God assured Moses when he doubted himself. God wasn't mad about Moses' past or insecurities.

- At the burning bush, we see Moses doubt his own skills and talents, but that didn't disqualify him from being used by God, and we see God's desire to use Moses and God's ability to work despite Moses' deficiencies.
- Being used by God does not require an entrance exam, a driver's license, a resume, or a high GPA. God asks us to simply say yes and promises to be with us through it all.
- Notice that God doesn't say, "Before I use you, I need your doubts about me to be gone." God says, "I want to use you, and I have your back no matter what."
- God doesn't scoff at our past or minimize our feelings about ourselves. God longs for us to say yes even if we're in the middle of doubt, failure, or hurt because those things don't change the fact that God wants to use us to do amazing things. And as we will see later in the story, Moses' doubts didn't stop God from accomplishing God's plans through Moses.

DISCUSSION

- What questions do you have about the people of Israel being enslaved in Egypt?
- *If you put yourself in Moses' place, what do you think he thinks about himself? What do you imagine he is thinking about God?
- *What do you think God's decision to make Moses a leader tells you about who God is?

SCRIPTURE | John 14:12

- Just like Moses, two of Jesus' followers, Phillip and Thomas, had doubts too. They had a hard time believing they could continue to live out and do the things Jesus was teaching and doing, especially after he left them.
- They were trying to learn to trust that God would still use and lead them even when they doubted or were uncertain about the future. Look at how Jesus encouraged them as they expressed their concerns to him.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read *John 14:12*.
- In their doubt, Jesus called them to believe in and follow him. The same is true of us. Jesus calls us to be an example for others and to stay strong in our faith. Just like God promised Moses, we can trust Jesus' presence will always be with us.
- Trusting in the presence of Jesus in our lives is a powerful way to push past your mistakes, failures, sins, and doubts. He invites us to see that **when you doubt yourself, God can still use you.**

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

VIDEO | A Clip of Historian, Dave Stotts

- Moses had a common trait of great leaders — the ability to overcome obstacles. When we think of other great leaders who constantly had to push through adversity, it can be easy to forget that the big feats we know them for today were only possible because of countless smaller decisions they made along the way. Take Martin Luther King, Jr., for example.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (2:10–3:33) of historian Dave Stotts talking about the childhood beginnings of Martin Luther King's vision for racial justice.
- Despite all the roadblocks and obstacles Martin Luther King, Jr., faced, he knew that God desired all people to be free, and he felt it was his calling to join in the work God was doing to accomplish this. He had to overcome people's negativity, bias, and hate, but he chose not to succumb to his doubt amid hardship. Instead, he pressed on, trusting that God was with him and was empowering him to accomplish the mission God had called him to. **When you doubt yourself, God can still use you.**

DISCUSSION

- How do you feel about God wanting to do great things in your life, in addition to what God did in Jesus' life?
- Read Mark 9:20–24. What holds you back from trusting that God wants to use you even when you doubt yourself? What is one thing we can do to help support you in overcoming unbelief this week?

OBJECT LESSON | Record Player

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this object lesson, you'll need a record player and blank record sleeves or a square poster board. Before your program, have a record player set up on a table with a selection of record sleeves (or square pieces of poster board) with various labels: "Trust," "Self-Doubt," "Anger," "Escape," "Follower," "Love," "Self-Confidence," "Belief," and any other you may think of. Display the records so that students can see the labels while you are teaching. Ensure each sleeve has a record in it. As you talk about changing the record, exchange one record for another. When you're teaching, say:
 - The record player was invented in 1887 and was designed to produce sound by a needle making contact with the grooves of a spinning circular piece of vinyl. It allowed people to create an atmosphere of music that helped them express their feelings. Any time we turn on music, we're creating a soundtrack for that moment. And when we want to change the environment, we change the song.
 - This is similar to how our beliefs (both about ourselves and God) work. Many of us have a "song" that plays when we screw up or fail. But what the story of Moses shows us is that when circumstances get tough and we're feeling useless, God's presence invites us to *change the soundtrack* and remember God still wants to use us.
 - Here are a few questions to ask God when you doubt yourself or doubt if God can use you.
 - **WHAT RECORD IS PLAYING IN MY LIFE?** Is it the record of self-doubt or the record of self-confidence? Identify why you doubt God can use you, and talk to God about it.
 - **WHAT RECORD SHOULD I PUT ON?** God wants us to listen to the record that helps us see ourselves the way God sees us. That's what God did for Moses, Phillip, and Thomas. They listened to what God said about them despite their insecurity, and God used them. God wants to use you, too. Ask God what record is playing in your life and how it needs to change to better reflect how God sees you.

DISCUSSION

- *If you were going to encourage someone who doubted God could use them, what would you tell them? Does any advice you would give your friend seem applicable to you?
- The next time you have self-doubt, who is one person you can ask to remind you God can still use you?

REFLECTION | Where Is God Burning?

- God is with you and wants to use you no matter where you are in your faith. Maybe you're good with people or at math. Maybe you're highly organized. Maybe you're empathetic and funny. Maybe you're good at encouraging others. Whatever gifts, talents, and abilities God has given you, let's spend some time looking at how God may want to use you.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, you'll need [fire tokens](#), [circle sticky notes](#), a pen, and butcher paper. Before your program, reach out to some people in your church or look for a handful of tangible ways you can empower students to serve in your church or local community. On a large sheet of butcher paper, draw a circle representing your community and write the needs and service opportunities. Each student will receive a fire token, a sticky note, and a pen. On their sticky note, have them write their name and gifts, talents, or abilities

that God can use to make a difference. Have them put the sticky note and fire token next to the need they are going to meet as a commitment to be used by God this week.

- Look at how we are connected and can continue encouraging each other as God equips and leads us to do his work. **When you doubt yourself, God can still use you.**