

WEEK 3 LESSON GUIDE

BEYOND
BELIEF

BIG IDEA

When you doubt, God still offers guidance.

BIBLE

Exodus 14:5–14,26–31; John 16:7.

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | The Pyramid

- Welcome to another week of *Beyond Belief*. We are talking about what it looks like to follow Jesus and have doubts. For the last couple of weeks, we've been looking at the story of Moses leading God's people out of slavery. There were more than a few moments that caused Moses to question God's plan.
- Today's story will be no different. In this passage, we see God guide the people of Israel on a challenging trip through the desert. And like the people in this story, we may also find ourselves on a journey to an unfamiliar place where our connection to God feels limited. Let's prepare for that moment with another game.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, you'll need candy as a prize and a [poster board](#) with a pyramid drawn on it, divided into six sections, [like this](#). To play, select four individuals who will be paired into two teams. Each team will have one minute to work through six categories of questions, each written on the board, covered under a piece of paper. One team member will describe items within that category without saying the category (example: "things that get lost" — coins, remotes, AirPods, etc.) and the other member will try to guess the category. After they have guessed correctly, reveal the next category on the board. The team who guesses the most categories wins. If both teams guess all six categories, do a speed round, and the first team to guess the answer wins.
 - Suggested categories about feeling lost: places you could get lost, people you call when you're lost, movies about finding treasure, things you use to find stuff, things that help you navigate, phrases I say when I am lost, things used in an emergency, things that are frequently lost, things you'd find in the desert, plants on a desert island, or things you take on vacation.
 - Change up the prize this week: The team that answers the most trivia or scores the most points gets to part the "candy sea," throwing the candy at everyone or getting candy thrown at them.

DISCUSSION

- Have you ever gotten lost before? How did you find your way again?
- *Where do you typically seek advice when you have questions about what to do when you feel lost?
- How often do you ask for advice from your friends about a difficult decision? What kind of answers do you find helpful? Unhelpful?

QUESTION | "What is it like when God seems distant?"

- Often when we feel lost, well-meaning church people might try to encourage us by saying something like, "Pray about it!" But what do we do if we feel lost from God?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Ask the following questions to students about times they may have felt disconnected or distant from God and allow students to respond.*
 - How do you feel when you are lost on your journey with God?
 - When you are feeling low or down, what is your connection with God like — low or high?
 - What do you do when God seems quiet or when you have wandered away from him?
- What do we do when we're feeling lost in our relationship with God, or we can't tell where God is leading us? Let's look at a story from Moses' life, which can help guide us.

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

IMAGE | The Exodus Map

- God was on a mission to rescue the people of Israel. God wanted to end their suffering and make good on his promise to make them a set-apart people.
- God recruited Moses, despite his doubts and questions, to lead the charge in setting the Israelites free.
- After witnessing ten horrible plagues, God finally created a way for God's people to escape Egypt. Only once they were out, they found themselves wandering through the desert. God continued to care for them, leading them by a smoke cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Imagine being guided by clouds and fire. Would that make you feel better or worse about where God is leading you?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, show an image on the screen of the route that God's people walked, [like this one](#).*
- Although God was leading them, God's people seemed to think they were being taken the long way through. In reality, although this path was more difficult, God led them this way to protect them from the possibility of an attack from the other nations.
- I can imagine many of the people Moses was leading had tough questions like "Where is God taking us?" or "Why is God taking us this way?"
- God was kind and guided them away from conflict and slavery and into a new life, but the difficulty of the journey clouded that kindness for some people. They often felt lost and wondered if God had a plan for them.

SCRIPTURE | Exodus 14:5–9

- Although the people of Israel were finally free, the lingering fear of the Egyptians chasing them down was always present. God's people knew Pharaoh's armies could chase them down and force them back into slavery. So, you can imagine the tension they must have felt as they traveled, between being grateful to be free and the fear of the unknown.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Exodus 14:5–9.*
- Eventually, their fear became a reality: Pharaoh changed his mind. He realized he had just released thousands of workers, which would significantly impact Egyptian society and economy, and he felt he made a huge mistake in letting them go. In a matter of days, Pharaoh's army was within earshot of the Israelites.
- What would they do? Where would they go? They were stuck between an army and the Red Sea. Who would guide them forward?

SCRIPTURE | Exodus 14:10–14

- Weary and anxious, God's people finally saw Pharaoh's army approaching and quickly became frustrated with Moses. They felt he and God had led them astray.
- **INSTRUCTION:** *Read Exodus 14:10–14.*
- The Israelites were terrified and cried out to God. Even though they had seen God do incredible things in Egypt, their circumstances overrode their memory and left them feeling trapped. They felt tricked. But Moses reassured them, "Don't be afraid. Be still. God will fight for us."
- I get a little annoyed with the Israelites when I read this story. They just saw God intervene to release them from Egypt. Why couldn't they trust that God would take care of them again? But then I remember that I act like that more often than I would like to admit, and I feel relieved to be able to read about people like me in Scripture.
- We've already talked about how strange this path to freedom was. It wasn't the expected or traditional path to take. It was long and didn't make sense to the Israelites. Understandably, the Israelites were full of doubt and frustration, but God still offered guidance and a path forward.

SCRIPTURE | Exodus 14:26–31

- Amidst their doubts and concerns, God rescued the people of Israel.
- **INSTRUCTION:** *Read Exodus 14:26–31.*
- Moses told the people to keep moving and that God had a plan. God had been guiding them thus far with the smoke and fire, and Moses knew God was going to continue making way for them. When they reached the Red Sea, with the Egyptians at their back, God instructed Moses to part the waters.
- Moses struck his staff on the ground at the sea's edge and watched God perform a miracle before his very eyes. The sea opened up and split in two, and God's people were able to walk right through it on dry ground. And just as the Egyptian army was about to close in on them, God collapsed the sea on the Egyptians.
- God was protecting the people of Israel all along because God had promised to set them apart. However, it was done in a way that may give us pause. We celebrate the freedom given to God's people, but it was accomplished in a way that took many lives.
 - It's okay if you read that and feel uneasy. It's okay if this stirs up many questions. We've already talked about how God anticipates questions and invites us to ask them — to own them and seek wisdom.
 - We know that God loves all people, even these Egyptians, so how do we take this in and understand what's happening here? Why did it happen like this? There are so many questions that arise, and, in truth, we may never fully answer them.
 - Perhaps this passage is an invitation to understand God's heart for justice. God sides with the oppressed and brings consequences to those who exploit the vulnerable. We might never fully understand why this story happened this way, but we can trust that God is acting to bring freedom to the oppressed and is leading the people of Israel to a new life.
- When we feel lost and confused, this story reminds us of the promise that God always goes before us. There is nothing that surprises or catches God off guard. God is intentional in providing for us even when we doubt or have questions about where we are going.

DISCUSSION

- Have you ever felt confused about where God is leading you? Did you talk to God about it? What did God say?
- *What does the way God rescued the people of Israel at the Red Sea say about God's character?
- *What questions do you have about God rescuing the people of Israel out of Egypt?

SCRIPTURE | John 16:7

- God's guidance continues this way in the life of Jesus. Jesus knew he wasn't going to guide his followers in person forever. So, just before he died, he did something similar to what we saw God do with the people of Israel. Jesus promised a guide: the Holy Spirit.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read *John 16:7*.
- The Holy Spirit would fill the gap that Jesus' departure would leave and serve as a guide for all his followers for all time. The Spirit guides us, similar to what the pillar of smoke and fire did for God's people in Exodus.
- When we feel lost or without direction, we can trust the Holy Spirit to lead us. We can turn to Scripture and prayer to help us connect with God and listen to ways the Spirit might lead us through some of our difficulties. We can talk it out with people we trust, hoping to gain a new perspective and restore our hope and trust in God.
- No matter what you've been through, God is leading you, even if that's hard to see. God is with you, guiding you through your doubts and troubles. **When you doubt, God still offers guidance.**

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

IMAGE | Getting Un-Lost

- A critical competency in survival training is becoming proficient in land navigation. Think of a compass. The goal is to give people the confidence to get out of any situation. Even if they become lost, they can know how to find a clear path out.
- The instructor teaches four basic steps:
 - *Know where you are.* When you are lost, it's essential to identify your location.
 - *Plan the route.* Take time to investigate where you want to go and start mapping out the direction you need to go.
 - *Stay on the route.* Figure out your distance to your location and stay on the path.
 - *Recognize the end.* Follow the path, and you will see your end goal.
- This process can be helpful for us too. When we feel lost, it can help us see how God is offering guidance.
 - **ADMIT YOU FEEL LOST:** Clarify and be honest about where you are. What is happening around you and causing you the most confusion? Once you are honest, you can start doing something about it.
 - **LOOK FOR LANDMARKS:** Trust that God hasn't abandoned you by reminding yourself about some things God has done in your life recently. These markers can help you remain tethered to God's guidance.
 - **ASK FOR HELP:** Asking for help requires vulnerability and transparency, and that can feel hard for some of us — it's common to want to struggle alone. But God has promised wisdom to those who ask for it. Asking God for wisdom and guidance is the first step in making a plan of action in an emergency. When you ask for God's help, it can come in various ways. It may look like a conversation with a friend or trusted adult, a passage from Scripture, or a moment of insight during prayer or worship. Remain open to how the Holy Spirit is moving.
 - **LISTEN TO YOUR GUIDE:** It may take some time, but once you sense the direction that God is guiding you toward, stick with it. Remember, God has gifted us with the Holy Spirit to serve as a guide within our hearts, pulling us toward the goodness God wants for us. Trust that God will use the Holy Spirit to guide you to continue on the route God has set before you.

DISCUSSION

- Why might God choose to give us the Holy Spirit to guide us? What would it look like to ask for the Spirit's guidance in your life?
- *How does the idea that God still offers guidance when you have doubts challenge how you follow Jesus?

DISCUSSION

- What stops you from asking questions? What is one thing you can do to change this habit?
- Read Psalm 25:5–9. What is one part of this passage that helps you see that God offers guidance even when you doubt? What is one step you will take toward allowing God to guide you amidst your doubts?

RESPONSE | Guiding Through Deserts

- Right now, I'm going to have you do something that will hopefully help you remember the way that God is leading *all* of us. None of us fully know where God is leading us. We cannot see every scenario we will experience, but like the people of Israel, we can learn to trust that God is guiding us in every moment.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you will need a [large map](#) of the Sinai Peninsula. You could also print one using an image [like this](#). Make sure this is something that can be written on. Provide sharpies for the students and give them space to approach the map and, in an appropriate size, write "God is guiding me through." If they feel comfortable, have them sign their name. Note: if you used the room design for this series, we built a map into the room design.*
- I hope we are starting to see how God guides all of us together, even when we have questions about the journey. As we saw today, **when you doubt, God still offers guidance.**