

EPIC CYCLE 3: Dealing with Doubt Leaders' Guide

Beginning of Meeting:

- Welcome everyone and open in prayer
- Explain what First Priority is (a Christian group, but you do not have to be a Christian to attend)
- Start with a quick icebreaker
- Ask everyone to download the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app (scan QR code)
- Assign someone to report weekly attendance & someone to send meeting reminders to the group
- Close in prayer



Memory Verse: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” **Joshua 1:9 (NIV)**

Topic: Throughout the Bible, there are many stories of people who struggled with their faith and doubted God’s goodness. The Bible teaches that God can handle our doubts and questions, and that we should always go to Him for help when we do.

Week One: EQUIP

There are different reasons why we doubt God, including His promises and goodness. This week, we will talk about pride and how it impacts us- including how it impedes our judgement.

1. **Obadiah 1:3** reads: Your pride has fooled [deceived] you, you who live in the hollow places of the cliff [clefts of the rock]. Your home is up high [on the heights] you who say to yourself, No one can bring me down to the ground.’ And **Psalms 10:4** reads: The wicked people are too proud. They do not look for [pursue, seek] God; there is no room for God in their thoughts.

Questions:

- A. How does pride fool or deceive us and what does it mean to be brought “down to the ground”? We believe that we can do things without God’s help. We convince ourselves into believing that we don’t need Him and that we are in charge of our lives. “Being brought down to the ground” is God humbling us and making us realize we are dependent on Him.
- B. What does it mean to have “no room for God in their thoughts” and what is there instead? We become consumed with worldly matters. If we don’t keep our minds focused on the Lord we will be tempted to let our minds wander to less important things.
- C. Have you watched someone struggle with pride, and did it impact their ability to follow God (please do not mention anyone’s name)? They took the credit for the things the Lord was

providing for them. They stopped relying on the Lord and relied on their own strength which will inevitably fail them.

2. In **Exodus 5:2**, we read about Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, who had enslaved the Israelites (God's people) and refused to release them- against God's command: "But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD? Why should I obey him? Why should I let Israel go? I don't even know who this LORD is, so I refuse to let Israel go."

Questions:

- A. How would you describe Pharaoh, based on his response to Moses? **Skeptical, self-reliant, difficult, prideful**
- B. Based on what you know about history, what/who did Pharaoh and the Egyptians worship and why is this an important aspect of the story? **In Egyptian culture it was believed that the Pharaoh was the mediator between the people and their God's. This is important because they believed that they were dependent on another human, the Pharaoh, to have a relationship with their God's.**
- C. Do you see Pharaoh's attitude reflected in today's culture? If yes, explain.
Yes, our society (including us) feel like we are dependent on pastors, leaders, youth groups for a relationship with God. In reality, if we have accepted the Lord, he dwells inside of us. He sent his son to die on a cross for our sins and provide a direct line of communication between himself and us through prayer.

3.1 **Corinthians 2:14** reads: "People who do not have God's Spirit do not accept the things that come from his Spirit. They think these things are foolish. They cannot understand them, because they can only be understood with the Spirit's help. And **John 20:29** reads: "Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Questions:

- A. What is another name for "God's Spirit" and why are the things of God foolish to those who do not believe in Jesus? **Holy Spirit. The gospel seems either too hard to understand or too simple a request. God's love for us is unimaginable and there are parts of the gospel that we truly won't understand until we are in heaven. That is where faith comes into play. It is believing in something you can't see. This isn't easy for everyone.**
- B. Why does Jesus say that those who believe without seeing Him are blessed? **They are putting their faith fully in something they can't see or prove. They don't see Him with their eyes but they see Him with their hearts.**
- C. How has this week's lesson equipped you to follow Jesus? **Even when I don't see Him working I can feel him stirring in my heart. Faith may be hard but that is when I am called to turn back to what I know is true and dig into the word.**

Challenge: Please pray for your friends and family this week.

Week Two: PREPARE

Last week, we talked about how pride blocks our ability to have faith. This week, we will talk about how we often doubt God when we are struggling and how this affects us.

1. In the book of Ruth, we read about Naomi, an Israelite woman whose husbands and two sons died. She and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, decide to return back to Naomi's homeland: "Naomi and

Ruth traveled until they came to the town of Bethlehem. When the two women entered Bethlehem, all the people were very excited. They said, "Is this Naomi?" But Naomi told the people, "Don't call me Naomi; call me Marah. Use this name because God All-Powerful has made my life very sad. I had everything I wanted when I left, but now, the LORD brings me home with nothing. The LORD has made me sad, so why should you call me 'Happy? God All-Powerful has given much trouble to me.'" **Ruth 1:19-21.**

Questions:

- A. In what ways does this story reveal Naomi's doubt in God's goodness?
She felt the Lord had taken her family from her and left her with nothing. She felt abandoned by God. She was angry and couldn't see what the Lord was working on in her life and how this dark moment could be used for good.
- B. How can bitterness in difficult circumstances affect our faith in God?
It can cause us to lose faith in the plans God has set out for us. We begin to believe our plan is better than His.
- C. Has there been a time when you were struggling and it caused you to doubt God's goodness? Please describe.

2. The following verses describe King David calling out to God for help: "Save me, O God! The water is up to my neck; ²I am sinking in deep mud, and there is no solid ground; I am out in deep water, and the waves are about to drown me. ³I am worn out from calling for help, and my throat is aching. I have strained my eyes; looking for your help." And **Joshua 1:9** reads: "Remember that I commanded you to be strong and brave [courageous; resolute]. Don't be afraid or discouraged, because the LORD your God will be with you everywhere you go [or in all you do]."

Questions:

- A. How do these verses describe David and does it seem like he's about to give up (tip-he is not drowning in water)? The verses describe David as overwhelmed, afraid and discouraged. He is worn out and to the point of giving up because of these feelings.
- B. How do we often respond when we are "worn out from calling on God for help" and how can this cause doubt? We give up and find an easier way to make sense of the situation we find ourselves in. When we don't hear from Him we assume He isn't listening. He responds to our prayers with either a yes, no or a wait. Sometimes no and wait feel the same. He has set out our plans for us and we are just called to trust Him.
- C. How does **Joshua 1:9** PREPARE us for the difficult times to come? We know the difficult times will come. It is just a matter of when. This verse reminds us to prepare and equip ourselves to trust in the Lord's provision because he is there even in the hardest times fighting with, and for, us.

3. Spend the remainder of the meeting preparing for next week's INVITE meeting. This includes asking students to volunteer for the following responsibilities (be sure to get students' contact info so you can prepare and remind them):

- Share his or her faith story [how Jesus has affected their life]
- Be greeters at the door
- Report attendance and decisions on the First Priority of Tampa Bay phone app
- Read the salvation prayer and invitation (see below)

- Hand out the Response Cards [found on the FP website under the “Student” tab]
- Be on the follow-up team (see below)
- Open and close the meeting in prayer

Challenge: Invite at least two friends to next week’s INVITE meeting.

Week Three: INVITE

This is the week when a student shares a faith story and another reads the invitation and prayer. Please follow the following steps at the beginning of the meeting:

- Welcome everyone and open in prayer
- Explain the concept of First Priority
- A student shares their faith story
- A student reads the gospel and invitation
- Hand out and collect the Student Response Cards (found on the FP website)
- Report attendance & decisions, send meeting reminders to the group
- Close in prayer

Invitation/Prayer (ask students to close their eyes and bow their heads):

And now we will pray. This is not a magical prayer. It is simply an opportunity to respond to the good news that Jesus died on the cross as payment for our sins and three days later rose from the dead, proving that God accepted Jesus’ death as payment.

(Please ask students to bow their heads and close their eyes)

If this message is speaking to you today, and you want to trust in Jesus as your savior then pray this simple prayer to yourself: Dear Lord, I admit that I have been sinful, which means that I seek my own selfish desires and this has separated me from you. But I believe that through faith in Jesus, I can be forgiven and reconnected to God. So today, I pray that you will come into my life and help me to trust in you. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Follow-up Plan:

Once you have shared the gospel and invitation, collect the Student Response Cards (can be downloaded from the First Priority website) and then follow these steps:

1. Student leaders commit to praying for and contacting any student who has decided to follow Christ and/or has questions.
2. When contacting these students, student leaders will want to:
 - Answer any questions
 - Offer to pray for them
 - Invite them to the next week’s CONNECT Week meeting
 - Invite them to your church
3. Return all Student Response cards to a student leader or teacher sponsor (Response cards or information on the cards must never be given to an outside adult or organization/ church)

Challenge: Invite two friends to next week’s CONNECT meeting.

Week Four: CONNECT

For the last few weeks, we have talked about why we often doubt God. As we close this cycle, we will examine ignorance and how it affects our faith.

1. One of the most common reasons for doubting God is due to not knowing God's Word [the Bible]. In **Hosea 4:6**, God says that His people are "destroyed because they have no knowledge [of Him]. And **Romans 15:4** reads: For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Questions:

- A. Why does not having "knowledge" of God cause destruction [to us personally and to our world]?
We can lead others away from God due to our intentional or unintentional misunderstanding or ignorance of what the Bible says is true. We can spread untrue claims.
- B. How and why do the stories in the Bible still apply to us today? The message of God has never changed. The context of the Bible has changed but the insight into the human condition remains true today. We use their stories and apply it to present day.

2. **Psalm 33:4** and **Proverbs 30:5b** we read: The words of the LORD are true and all his works are dependable...and He guards those [They are a shield to those] who come to him for safety [refuge].

Question:

- A. How does knowing God's promises [in the Bible] shield us from harm? Give examples
When this life gets overwhelming or causes you to doubt, you can rest assured on the promises of Jesus and feel confident that He has never broken a promise.

3. **Psalm 119:105** reads: "Your word is like a lamp that guides my steps, a light that shows the path I should take. And **John 17:17** reads: Make them ready for your service [Sanctify them; Consecrate them; setting them apart for service] through your truth; your teaching [word] is truth.

Questions:

- A. How is the Bible like a lamp to guide us and why does this matter? It is a light in the darkness and serves to guide our steps. Without a light, we don't know where it is safe to step next.
- B. Why would we want to be set apart for God's service and why do we need God's Word to do this? We want to stand out and allow others to ask why we are different so that we can point them to Jesus. We need to be set apart by standing on His word. We want to set ourselves on a hill that others can use a guide to follow.
- C. For the remainder of the meeting, please share information about your churches and youth groups, and invite your friends to attend [if they do not have a home church].

Challenge: Invite 2 new people to attend next week's EQUIP meeting.