

## SECTION 1 – FAITH BASICS

### 1. “How do I know there really is a God?”

by Katie Sutton

**The Situation:** Mike is friends with some of the kids in your group. He has been coming to church for several weeks now. You don't know a lot about him. Tonight, he has joined your discussion group that is talking about prayer. As the group examines different ways to communicate with God, Mike says he needs to ask you about something.

**The Question:** “How do I know there really is a God?”

**The Response:** At first glance, this seems like a straightforward, innocent question. But is Mike asking this question as a challenge to you, or is he sincerely questioning the existence of God? In either case, it's imperative that you handle the question with sensitivity and avoid simplistic answers. Kids are looking for more than “You just have to have faith” or “The Bible says it, so it's true.” They want to know how YOU know there is a God. Share your personal story of how you came to realize that there is a God. Tell Mike about specific instances in your life when you knew God was real. Then use Scripture (and the logic that supports Scripture) to validate the testimony that you have shared. Here are some verses that might be helpful:

1. Psalm 19:1-4—The sky shows evidence of God all over the world.
2. John 3:8—The existence of the wind is hard to explain, but it is real. The same is true of the work of God in a person's life.
3. Romans 1:20—Evidence of God can be found in creation.
4. Romans 2:15—Our consciences point to the existence of God.
5. 1 Peter 1:8-9—People who love and trust in God even though they cannot see God are rewarded with salvation.

Be honest with kids like Mike. It does take faith to truly know that God exists. Let children know that faith does not mean ignorantly believing in something that might not be true; it means confidently believing the evidence that something exists even though you can't see it (see Hebrews 11:1).

#### The Next Steps:

- Answer with follow-up questions without engaging in fruitless arguments. If the conversation becomes heated, defer back to your testimony. Personal experiences are hard to refute.
- Ask other kids in the group how they know that God is real. Kids trust their peers.
- Keep the conversation open by letting the group know that you are available whenever they have questions about God.
- Pray for students like Mike and his friends. Mike's question shows a spiritual curiosity and is a signal that God is working in his life.

#### Further Reading and Resources:

- *The Case For Faith for Kids* by Lee Strobel

### 2. “What is the Trinity?”

by Leneita Fix

**The Situation:** You are talking about God the Father's love to your small group. JoJo is a young man trying to understand really who God is. While you are talking he raises his hand. “I don't get it,” he says. “We talk about the Father's love, but we also talk about following Jesus. Are they the same? In fact, how can Jesus be God and God's Son all at the same time? And I don't understand the Holy Spirit at all. Are they all God?”

**The Question:** “What is the Trinity?”

**The Response:** The Trinity is “three in one.” This means that there is only one living God. Yet God exists together in perfect unity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here are some helpful passages that offer insight into this important biblical truth:

**Important items to highlight in your conversation:**

- Right from the beginning in Genesis, God uses “we” and “us” references.
- Consider talking about the Trinity as being similar to an apple, which has three basic parts: the skin, the “meat” section, and the core.
- Let’s say you peel the skin from the apple. You are now holding the skin in one hand and the rest in your other hand. It did not miraculously become two apples. Maybe you skin it and core it. Now you are holding three parts of the same apple. They each hold a different function. This is like the Trinity: We have one God, working in three ways.
- The Father is like the skin of the apple, our protector. The Father looks after us as God’s children. “And he will call out to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation’ ” (Psalm 89:26).
- The Son, Jesus, is like the “meat” of the apple. Through his shed blood we are saved. Jesus called himself the “bread of life.” He is the one that through him we have life (see John 6:43-59).
- The Holy Spirit is like the core of the apple. The core contains the seeds to grow another tree. It is through the “helper” that we can “bear fruit.” In other words, when we have a relationship with Christ, it is really the Holy Spirit living in us. (This does not make us God, however.) The Spirit helps us to show the world who he is in us. Here’s how Romans 8:9 describes things: But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all).
- Another way of thinking about the Trinity is to think of who you are. What are some of the names that describe you? The list might include Daughter, Son, Friend, Cousin, Grandchild, or Student. As an adult, you might be called Husband or Dad, Wife or Mom. This does not make you multiple people. However, your role in each of these relationships is different. That is why you have these different names. That is the same with the Trinity. We serve one God, yet in God there are three distinct ways God relates to us.

**The Next Steps:**

- Look at passages like: Matthew 3 (the baptism of Jesus), Matthew 28:18-20 (the Great Commission), and Galatians 4:6

**Further Reading and Resources:**

- *3 in 1: A Picture of God* by Joanne Marxhausen

### **3. “How can I be sure that I’m a Christian?”**

by Leneita Fix

**The Situation:** Becky boldly entered into a relationship with Jesus when she was 5 years old. Her parents assure you that although she was young, she understood the decision she was making—in fact, she has told her friends how to follow Christ. Recently, however, she has started to have some doubts about her salvation and if her connection to Christ is real. What if this relationship with Jesus isn’t true?

**The Question:** “How can I be sure that I’m a Christian?”

**The Response:** For many kids—maybe even for most—doubting is a natural part of growing up, and it can be a healthy experience because children need to make sure that their faith in Christ is theirs and not just the faith of their parents. Being certain that we’re Christians begins with the understanding that we need a relationship with God. Knowing that we are sinners (we make bad choices that we can’t fix) and that Christ is the one that conquered sin through his death and resurrection is our first step.

**Read Together:** Romans 10:9-13 and Ephesians 2:8.

1. Romans 10:9-13 maps it out for us and give us reason to remain confident in our faith. If we trust God, then we can know that God has us, watches over us, and assures us that we genuinely have become a follower of Christ.
2. Salvation is a gift that allows us to deepen our relationship with God. If we cry out and say, “I know I need you!” then that is evidence that our heart wants to belong to God.
3. We must take to heart what Romans 3:10 says: “No one is righteous—not even one.” In other words, none of us will ever be able to earn or work our way into salvation. It is all about receiving the gift that God has given us in his Son.
4. Sometimes it is as simple as having faith in who Jesus is to us. Tell children what Hebrews 11:1 says: Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. We may not be able to see Jesus, touch him, or even feel his presence at times. But when we choose to give our lives to him, we have chosen faith in who he is.

#### **The Next Steps:**

It is natural and normal for adolescents to have questions and doubts about their faith. Children will naturally go through a process of reconstructing and evaluating all they have been learning. It’s imperative that we emphasize to them how normal this is. Many kids feel guilt when they doubt.

#### **Further Reading and Resources:**

- *The Case For Faith for Kids*, by Lee Strobel

## **4. “How do I pray?”**

by Mike Kupferer

**The Situation:** Amy is a quiet freshman who always seems to be listening intently. You know she has answers for questions you ask, but she never speaks up. Then one day, while you are discussing the importance of talking to God through prayer, she raises her hand. She does not say much, but her four-word question is honest and sincere.

**The Question:** “How do I pray?”

**The Response:** The Bible gives us a lot of insight into how we should pray.

**Read Together:** Matthew 6:5-15.

1. Talk to God: Think of prayer as simply a conversation between you and God. Don’t use fancy words or try to impress God; just talk to God.
2. Praise God: It can be easy to lose perspective on life. Offering praise for who God is and what God has done helps you remember that God is more powerful than anything you face.
3. Be specific: Psalm 62:8 talks about the importance of pouring out our hearts toward God. You don’t need to hide anything; God already knows what you need (see Matthew 6:8) and what you are going through. Talk to God like a friend, share your emotions, verbalize your needs (see Philippians 4:6-7), and talk about your struggles.
4. Ask for forgiveness: Not only do you need to ask in order to be forgiven, but when you ask you’ll be reminded of your reliance on God.

### **The Next Steps:**

- Encourage the child to set aside time every day to spend in prayer. Offer to provide a prayer journal or devotional if she would like some specific ideas or structure. It might also be a good idea to have the child read some of the psalms to get a bigger picture of how different prayers can be, and how personal and specific David and the other writers of the psalms made their prayers.
- Plan on following up in a week or two, by simply asking if the child has been praying. You want to make sure she hasn't given up, but don't turn prayer into a spiritual checklist item that must be done out of obligation or guilt. Remind her that prayer is part of a growing relationship with God.

### **Further Reading and Resources:**

- *The Power of a Praying Kid* by Stormie Omartian
- A simple prayer journal—anything kids can use to record their prayers and God's answers to those prayers

## **5. "How can I hear from God when I pray?"**

by Leneita Fix

**The Situation:** "Prayer is about talking and listening to God. It is a conversation," you tell your small group of students. "One of the ways we get to know God is by waiting to hear what God has to say." That's when Michelle stops you: "Wait. I pray all the time, but God never responds. Things have been really hard lately. I wish God would just give me some answers!"

**The Question:** "How can I hear from God when I pray?"

**The Response:** Understanding how to hear God starts with knowing that we belong to God. We then need to remember that Jesus told us that we could indeed hear from God through prayer.

**Read Together:** John 10:1-16.

### **Here are some words of advice you can give your student:**

1. Focus your energy on building your relationship with God more than hearing God's voice. Then be willing to hear God (see Jeremiah 29:12-13).
2. Get rid of the noise, and create space for God. Sometimes we can't hear God or recognize God's leading because we are distracted. Try turning off the television, taking out the headphones, and walking away from the computer. Simply say, "God, I am here and I am listening." Find a comfortable place where you can just talk to God and then listen to what God has to say.
3. Our sin separates us from God. Every time we sin and don't seek God's forgiveness, we are creating distance between God and us. God didn't move away; we did.

### **Examples of how we hear:**

- Most often it is the Holy Spirit speaking to us. When we understand who Christ is and what he did for us, the Spirit is the one that comes to live in our heart and soul. The Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity that is our "helper" or our "comforter."
- Some ways God talks to us:
  1. A still small voice—We talk to God and there seems to be a conversation that comes through our mind. This might come in words or even pictures (read about the experience Elijah had in 1 Kings 19:11-13).
  2. Conviction—It is that sense inside of us that makes us stop before we do something wrong or causes us to want to repent (see John 16:7-8).

3. Being led by God’s Spirit—This is like an “urging” in your soul that points you to do something. For example, you might be talking to God about a friend and suddenly you really feel like you should call that person.
  4. The Bible—It’s like God is saying, “Hey these words are FOR YOU,” during the times you read and study the Bible (see Hebrews 4:12).
- How do we know it is God?
    1. When you hear God, it brings you a peace in your soul that is beyond understanding and brings a comfort when he talks (see Psalm 85:8).
    2. God’s message or direction never goes against anything written in the Bible.
    3. God is faithful and wants to talk to us (see what Moses said to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 4:35-39).
    4. Most importantly, remember that God knows and created you and your personality. God made each person uniquely and will speak to us in a variety of ways. Just be willing to listen—and to respond in obedience when God calls you to action.

**The Next Steps:**

- Spend some time allowing kids to “practice” listening to God. Perhaps spend some time in silence during a small group lesson, and then talk about what God said or revealed to everyone.
- Try having your kids read a Scripture and then talk about how it is speaking into her life.
- Encourage students to keep getting to know God and believing God will talk to them—even if it doesn’t happen quite the way they thought it would.

**Further Reading and Resources:**

- *The Power of a Praying Kid* by Stormie Omartian

**6. “Why do I need to read the Bible?”**

by Eric Groezinger

**The Situation:** Matt began attending your youth group a few months ago when a friend from school invited him. He doesn’t have any personal background in church, so he’s trying to figure out the answers to a lot of questions he has about his life. His grandma always read the Bible when he was younger and believes it will help him find the answers he’s seeking. But Matt is skeptical and isn’t quite sure why he should take the time to get familiar with Scripture.

**The Question:** “Why do I need to read the Bible?”

**The Response:**

1. The Bible is one way to hear from God. All Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16), which means it is God’s words given to us to read and study. We can know, understand, and follow God better when we read Scripture. The Bible is filled with more than just words on a page; it contains the truth of God written to help us lead lives of faith.
2. The Bible gives answers to our questions and provides us with truth that we can rely on. When you read Scripture, you discover answers to questions about life, hope, love, forgiveness, friendship, and truth. As we accept this truth and as we follow and obey Jesus, our lives become grounded and able to withstand challenges we will face (see Matthew 7:24-27). Scripture was given to teach us what is true and correct us when we’re wrong, according to 2 Timothy 3:16.
3. The Bible changes lives. Because the Bible is the very Word of God, it has the power to change lives. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the word of God is alive and powerful. When talking with students who ask this question, give

examples of how the Bible and its truths have changed your life. By studying Scripture, God will continue to bless and change our lives (see James 1:25).

4. The Bible helps prepare and accomplish what God calls us to do. God uses [Scripture] to prepare and equip his people to do every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). We become aware of how we are enabled to accomplish God's will in our lives as we read Scripture. God provides support, encouragement, and strength to complete what we were created to do.

#### **The Next Steps:**

- Share personal examples with the kids about what you have learned from studying the Bible and how it has changed your life.

#### **Further Reading and Resources:**

- GodTime Cards
- Cue Cards

## **7. "What happens after death?"**

by Eric Groezinger

**The Situation:** Stacy is a 4<sup>th</sup> grader who started attending small group after being invited by one of her close friends. When she arrived at last week's service, she was emotionally upset and disengaged from the group. She later expressed that her grandma just died after a short illness and that it was difficult for her. Not growing up in a Christian home, Stacy isn't sure what happens after death, and the fear of not seeing her grandma again makes this loss more difficult to bear.

**The Question:** "What happens after death?"

**The Response:** In this situation, always offer words of comfort, a listening ear, and a shoulder to cry on, if appropriate. Recognize that this is a painful time for the child and her family. Although it's always difficult to lose a close family member or friend, Scripture gives us some insight into what happens after we die:

1. Every person will be resurrected from the dead and will live forever. John 11:1-44 gives us the story of Lazarus, who was buried for four days before Jesus resurrected him. This passage shows us that Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead and raised Lazarus as evidence of that. Jesus' own resurrection and testimony also affirm this fact.
2. All people will face judgment, and how we respond to the message of Jesus on earth will determine where we will spend eternity. Revelation 20:11-15 reveals that only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will receive eternal life and spend eternity with God in heaven. To have one's name in the Book of Life requires a personal faith in and relationship with Jesus Christ. Those who haven't received salvation through faith in Christ will be subject to eternal separation from God in hell.
3. Those who have believed in Christ will be in the presence of the Lord after death. Paul writes in Philippians 1:23 that he longed to go and be with Christ. He also wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:8 that he and other Christians would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.
4. Christians will also receive glorified bodies after death. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control (Philippians 3:21). Although we may not be fully aware of what this looks like, we can be confident that we will receive renewed bodies (see 1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

#### **The Next Steps:**

Spend time praying with the child at the end of the conversation. Pray for insight and wisdom about what Scripture teaches about life after death. Express your availability to continue the conversation in the future, and to pray and

support the student (and family) in whatever way possible, especially if a loved one has recently died. Select a book to read together, and plan a follow-up discussion about the book.

**Further Resources and Reading:**

- *Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss* by Michaelene Mundy

## SECTION 2 - FAITH STRUGGLES

### 8. “Even though I’ve prayed about my struggle, nothing happened. Why?”

by Danette Matty

**The Situation:** Cassie is typically a fun, energetic high school cheerleader. However, in recent months her temperament and demeanor seem to have changed. A number of friendships have fallen apart, and her poor grades at school have created a great deal of tension with her parents. She feels like she has been praying about these situations for months now.

**The Question:** “Even though I’ve prayed about my struggle, nothing happened. Why?”

**The Response:** When a student struggles with this kind of question, gently prod to get beneath the surface to the real question: “Does God really care about me?” Usually, this reflects doubts about God’s character, so it’s important to point the student back to God’s true character. While Scripture encourages us to pray like we mean it and believe that God will answer, in his mysterious sovereignty, God allows us to wrestle. Prayers aren’t always answered in the way or at the pace we believe they should be. God could easily control the situation, right? Isaiah 30:18 tells us this: So the Lord must wait for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion. For the Lord is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for his help. Could it be that God doesn’t know how to manage our lives or that God considers our problems unimportant? Jeremiah 10:12 tells us that God made the earth by his power, and he preserves it by his wisdom. With his own understanding he stretched out the heavens. In wisdom and understanding, God made and has preserved the earth, and God made and knows how to preserve us. What if God is weak or has too much on his God-sized plate? Genesis 18:14 poses the question: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” And 1 Corinthians 1:25 says this: God’s weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

When teenagers struggle, it’s easy to turn away from God, especially without immediate answers. But which is better—not easier, but better: to turn from or to God? Help students understand that when we are surrendered to God and know God’s character, we can trust God, regardless of how disappointing, confusing, or painful the circumstances might be.

**The Next Steps**

- Memorize faith-building Scriptures with your student that point to God’s true character. Agree on a time to meet and review verses before or after small group or your main youth service.
- Have your student read James 1:2-8. In what ways will her struggle help her to become mature and complete?

**Further Reading and Resources:**

- *The Power of a Praying Kid* by Stormie Omartian

## 9. “Is it a sin to have doubts about God?”

by Troy Richards

**The Situation:** Jamal has been connected to your church since birth. His family has come to church every Sunday since before he was born, and he knows all the right answers—years of kids ministries have taught him well. But as he is getting older, he is starting to re-evaluate what he believes and to question the beliefs he has grown up with. After small group last week, he waited behind to ask you a question.

**The Question:** “Is it a sin to have doubts about God?”

**The Response:** Many times doubt can be a sign of someone who is really wrestling with his faith and trying to make it his own. Sometimes people simply accept as truth whatever they are told or taught, never researching those beliefs or claims. Doubt can ultimately bring about personal discernment and cause Jamal to solidify his beliefs. God has proven to be bigger than doubters (see Thomas, Jonah, Gideon, and other people in the Bible). God loves people in the midst of their doubts and welcomes them to ask questions and express doubts.

Regardless of whether we view doubt as a sin or not, it’s more important to conclude how God responds to us. In Matthew 14, after Peter walked on water but then began to sink, we see clearly how Jesus asked Peter about his doubts. Yet we also know that Jesus deeply invested in his relationship with Peter. Even when Peter denied knowing Jesus, it was not all lost. God never gave up on Peter (see John 21), and God will certainly not give up on us, even when we have doubts or questions.

### **The Next Steps:**

- Try not to give your child answers. Encourage him to find the answers for himself through the accounts of people in the Bible who had doubts. The answers he discovers for himself will help him own his faith and will lead to greater long-term confidence and faith.
- Include his parents in the conversation. It’s likely they’re concerned that their child is having doubts about God. Ensure that his parents understand that doubt and questioning are normal during the adolescent stage of thinking abstractly and independently. Encourage his parents to see doubts as great teachable moments for him to strengthen his faith.

### **Further Resources and Reading:**

- *The Case For Faith for Kids* by Lee Strobel
- *Big Truths For Little Kids* by Susan Hunt, Richard Hunt

## 10. “Why did God allow sin to come into the world, and why didn’t God stop it?”

by Mike Hammer

**The Situation:** Rachel always has questions! She’s deeply curious about faith and Christianity, so you often find her asking questions that deal with figuring out how it all makes sense. She wants to understand as much as possible before she is ready to fully commit to something. One day she comes to you with an important question.

**The Question:** “Why did God allow sin to come into the world, and why didn’t God stop it?”

**The Response:** God loves us so much that he allows us to make choices in our own lives. Each choice that we make—including sinful choices—has consequences, but God offers us freedom from sin.

**Read Together:** Genesis 3.

1. This passage highlights the first sin ever committed, when sin entered the world. Notice that Adam and Eve were aware of what they should and shouldn't do; they knew the consequences of disobeying yet ate the fruit anyway. God wants us to do the right thing and helps us to find out what that is.
2. My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world (1 John 2:1-2). This is a demonstration of the power of God and the love God has for us.
3. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, we learn that God will not allow any temptation in our life to be more than we can stand and that God will show us a way out. Think of a few example situations that may be tempting, and then brainstorm ways out of those situations.
4. Imagine what life would be like if we were not able to make decisions. By having this freedom, we have a say in the path that we take, and much of what we experience is based on our choices. God has given us the opportunity to choose a life of faith and does not force us to do so. We do not have to love God. We get to love God.

#### **The Next Steps:**

- Offer to talk with the child the following week to continue the conversation and examine how God demonstrates love for us in different ways. Ask if there were any tempting situations that the student faced this week and what ways out were taken (or not taken).
- For children like Rachel, consider whether they have yet chosen to follow Christ. Pray for an opportunity to talk about this next step.

#### **Further Resources and Reading:**

- *The Case For Faith for Kids* by Lee Strobel
- *Big Truths For Little Kids* by Susan Hunt, Richard Hunt
- *Amazing Questions Kids Ask About* (Tyndall Publishing)

## **12. “If God is so loving, why is there so much suffering in our world?”**

by Liz Simmonds

**The Situation:** Nick has a huge heart for people and serving. On last summer's mission trip, you joyfully watched him passionately serve and minister to the poor in the inner city. God has clearly been developing a heart in him for the poor and suffering. After today's community service event, he says he needs to talk with you for a few minutes.

**The Question:** “If God is so loving, why is there so much suffering in our world?”

#### **The Response:**

1. When responding to this kind of question, it's important to step back and look at the big picture of the world we live in and understand why suffering exists. Adam and Eve had it all. They chose to disobey and now here we are: Humanity deals with the consequences of living in a fallen world. Bad things do happen to good people. The undeniable fact is that suffering is a part of life. But there is a difference between God allowing bad things to happen and God causing them.
  - My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees (Psalm 119:71).
  - “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).
2. Peter writes that we should rejoice in our suffering for we are made partners with Christ in it and will see his glory revealed to the world (see 1 Peter 4:12-19). Paul discovered that God's power is made perfect through human weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-10). How contrary to worldly thought—power through weakness!

3. Scripture offers hope and direction for when suffering comes (not if it comes). Nowhere in Scripture does God reveal why. When Job questioned God about his circumstances, thinking that he knew better, God launched into a litany of questions for Job. God wanted to know if Job filled the heavenly storehouses with snow or set the stars in the sky or made the creatures. God's complex creation is vastly more gigantic than our tiny, human brains can comprehend. Our best effort in scrutinizing Scripture reveals hope and encouragement for responding to the pain that comes with life on earth. The best news: no suffering in heaven!
4. God wants us to respond to the suffering we see in our world. The Bible is full of commands and examples of how God calls us to minister to the poor and hurting. That could be someone in our school or a kid living in Africa. Consider who God is calling you to minister to.

#### **The Next Steps:**

- Don't expect that a student like Nick will quickly and readily accept that God allows suffering in the world. It likely will take time for him to understand the connection between sin and suffering in the world.
- Encourage Nick to read the book of Job, and follow up with conversations about it.
- Create opportunities for your students to serve those who are suffering in your community, and offer summer mission trip experiences.

#### **Further Resources and Reading:**

- *The Case For Faith for Kids* by Lee Strobel
- *Big Truths For Little Kids* by Susan Hunt, Richard Hunt
- *Amazing Questions Kids Ask About* (Tyndall Publishing)

## **11. "Why does God allow people we love to die?"**

by Darren Sutton

**The Situation:** A young girl in your small group, Sherry has been talking to you for the last year about her aunt's battle with cancer. Today, a teary-eyed Sherry approaches you with a difficult, emotional question.

**The Question:** "Why does God allow people we love to die?"

**The Response:** This is not a quick-and-easy question to answer. Unfortunately, we can't say absolutely why things like this happen. Read Isaiah 40:13 and Isaiah 55 together—two passages that remind us that we can't know the mind of God or offer God advice. At the same time, we can trust God's goodness to have a plan for our lives and the lives of the ones we love.

1. All of us will die someday. God's heart for our loved ones is that they would spend eternity in heaven. Even though the pain of loss is terrible, we can be assured of God's faithfulness to search after each one of us until our last breath.
2. Children may lose loved ones who did not choose to receive God's gift of salvation through Jesus. In this situation, it is better to provide comfort first and move to the painful reality later. In the long term, it is not helpful to give a child a false hope of assurance of heaven, if we don't know for sure.
3. We live in a fallen world that contains disease and illnesses. Because of sin's impact, we should expect to be affected, but we can also trust that God will provide comfort, hope, and purpose even in our painful times.
4. God can handle your questions, your frustrations, your anger, and your hurt—and God will love you through all of that. God stands ready to offer wisdom during difficult, confusing times (see James 1:5).
5. If you are faithful to seek God, in good times and in bad times, God is faithful to be found (see Matthew 7:7-8).

6. Offer this kind of encouragement to your student: “God loves you deeply and knows you’re hurting. God wants to be your comforter, and in some ways, God will allow you to use the hard, hurting parts of your life to help others who may be hurting. That probably isn’t going to happen today, but God will give you opportunities to comfort others, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:4.”

**The Next Steps:**

Some things to consider after some time has passed:

- Remind your child that sometimes the hard parts of our lives are meant to help others (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-7).
- As a leader, it’s important for you to recognize the complex nature of grief. Be ready to refer, support, and understand.

**Further Reading and Resources:**

- *Sad Isn’t Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss* by Michaelene Mundy

## 12. “How could a loving God send anyone to hell?”

by Mike Hammer

**The Situation:** Carlos is an intelligent child who has been part of your kids ministry for a while but hasn’t fully jumped in—he still has questions about the whole “Christian thing.” He likes to think things through and leans toward the intellectual side of life and understanding.

**The Question:** “How could a loving God send anyone to hell?”

**The Response:** God wants us to believe and trust in him. Ultimately we decide which path we will take, and every choice has consequences.

1. Instead of forcing us to obey, God allows us to make choices for our lives, and despite how much God wants our love, we get to choose whether or not to love God and obey God’s will for our lives. That’s how big God’s love for us is!
2. Adam and Eve committed the first sin. Originally, everything was paradise and all was good, but they chose to disobey God (see Genesis 3). Because of their choice, sin entered the world, and now we are born into sin.
3. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). It’s a gift open to everyone, despite what we have done—no matter how much or how bad.
4. Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living (Romans 6:16). God has given us the choice to live how we want to live. We choose to obey God or we choose to lead lives of sin. Each choice has both short-term and long-term consequences. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace (Romans 8:6).
5. God created us. God gives us freedom to choose. God gave his Son for us. God provides his Word for us. God continues to give us the opportunity to receive the gift of salvation through Jesus until the moment we die. For those choosing to accept God’s gift of forgiveness and new life, there are great rewards. Those choosing not to receive that gift have said no to God. The consequence of that is hell—separation from the presence of God for eternity.

**The Next Steps:**

- This topic is a very heavy one. Plan a follow-up conversation and expect ongoing dialogue with your child. Encourage him to write down any questions he may have so that you can continue talking. It may be good to bring another leader or pastor and the parents into the conversation, too. Commit to prayer for this situation, as it will influence the student’s perspective of God.

### Further Resources and Reading:

- *The Case For Faith for Kids* by Lee Strobel
- *Big Truths For Little Kids* by Susan Hunt, Richard Hunt
- *Amazing Questions Kids Ask About* (Tyndall Publishing)

## 13. “I hate my life and myself. How can God love me?”

by Leneita Fix

**The Situation:** It seemed like “once upon a time” that Sadie was a vibrant and engaged child. Then she fell in with the wrong crowd. Quickly, you watched her spiral out of control. The list of poor choices just seemed to get longer and longer until finally one day Sadie hit rock bottom. Asking if you could meet, Sadie confessed that she wanted to change the way she was living. However, her sin was so heavy and her life was such a mess—would God still want her?

**The Question:** “I hate my life and myself. How can God love me?”

**The Response:** Thankfully, God’s faithful, endless, unconditional love for us does not depend on our feelings or how we view ourselves. On our own, we are not good enough for his love and never will be (see Romans 3:10). But God loves deeply! This is hard to understand because earthly love always feels like it has expectations. So when we are in a tough place spiritually, we think, “If I can just get it right, then God will love me.” But that’s not how it works. God sent Jesus as the solution for our sin problem, because God loved us in our helplessness. God’s love is not based on our performance; it’s a pure, perfect love that surpasses human love.

**Read Together:** Romans 8:31-39.

1. There is great power in this truth from Romans 8:31—If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Ask your student this question: When you think of the reality that nothing can separate you from God love, what does this make you think? How does it make you feel?
2. Sometimes we can get stuck in our own self-hatred. When we choose the hope Christ’s love offers, we gain new insight. Hope deferred makes the heartsick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life (Proverbs 13:12).
3. There are times when we just can’t understand. Encourage your student to pray that she would gain a perspective on how deep God’s love is for her. Remind her that she doesn’t have to be afraid to tell God how she feels.
4. We all feel this way sometimes. We all feel unworthy of God’s love at times. We all have days when we hate ourselves and hate life. Help your student see that she is not alone.

### The Next Steps:

- Pray for and with the child each time you meet. She needs to hear the truth about God’s love—consistently and constantly.
- Plan follow-up discussions. This will not be a one-time conversation with the child. Most likely this will be the first of many about this topic. Being able to see God’s love for us often is a process.
- What are the deeper reasons behind the self-hate? Is there something going on at home? Is this just “kid angst,” or is there more to this?
- Does this kid need to be referred to a professional Christian counselor? Don’t be afraid to admit that the questions in this conversation may run deeper than what you can handle.
- Keep the parents informed and engaged. If a child is struggling at this level, the parents definitely need to be brought into the conversation.

## 15. “Why are so many Christians mean and judgmental?”

by Liz Simmonds

**The Situation:** Jordan has grown up in a Christian home and attends a small church where her dad serves as an elder. She also occasionally visits your youth group. Jordan was unaware of conflicts at her church until recently, when people started to judge and attack her dad for some of his leadership decisions. She comes to you with her concern.

**The Question:** “Why are so many Christians mean and judgmental?”

**The Response:** Read Luke 6:37-42 with your student.

1. Even though Jesus calls us not to judge or to be mean, people still sometimes choose to be cruel. In some instances, the meanness is intentional; other times it is accidental. We’re a fallen people who live in the midst of toxic conditions. Pursuit of a Jesus-centered life can be riddled with misdirection that results in words and actions contrary to our calling as Christians. Greed and pride are often at the root of the misdirection.
2. Some Christians spend a lot of time trying to make themselves look or feel better. They may speak words or act in ways that are condemning to others in an effort to appear superior.
3. Sometimes people will more closely scrutinize the words and actions of Christians, compared to non-Christians. This reality doesn’t mean Christians have an excuse to be mean or cruel, of course, but it does offer a broader perspective.
4. At times, followers of Jesus just think they are right, which leads to condemnation of those who believe differently. Ephesians 4:15 calls us to speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. It’s OK to have opinions and feelings about something, but we need to share it gently with others. Without gentleness, we can come across as mean or judgmental.
5. In many ways, the church is a “hospital for sick people, and we are all diseased by sin.” We shouldn’t expect people to be perfect, and we need to know that sometimes people will be mean. However, Jesus does call us to a higher standard, and with his help we should make every effort to love one another.
6. Sadly, some Christians have succumbed to our culture’s way of treating people. Even when Scripture calls for us to be in the world but not of it, some Christians have allowed the ways of the world to permeate their thoughts, words, and actions.

**The Next Steps:**

- Remind this child that not all Christians act this way. We should pray that God would correct people’s wrongdoing and that God would give us a heart to love them despite their actions.
- Encourage healthy community within your small group, and teach students how to deal with conflict and how to address people who are being mean and judgmental

## 16. “What do you do when your teacher makes you feel stupid for being a Christian?”

by Troy Richards

**The Situation:** John loves his science class; he really enjoys learning about biology and chemistry. But lately his lessons have taken a turn, as the class talks about evolution. As a Christian, John believes God created the world, and he felt compelled to bring this up during a recent class discussion, but the teacher disagreed. The teacher belittled John for his faith and explained that it was a science class, not a religion class. John left school that day a little rejected; he’s been thinking about it all weekend when he finds you Sunday morning.

**The Question:** “What do you do when your teacher makes you feel stupid for being a Christian?”

**The Response:** Unfortunately we don't all believe the same things in this world, and even more unfortunate is the fact some people cannot "agree to disagree"—they need to make those who think differently smaller to build themselves up.

**Read Together:** 1 Peter 3:13-17.

**Some thoughts to consider sharing with your student:**

1. Sometimes we will suffer for our faith, including emotionally. Don't be afraid.
2. Know what you believe and be ready to explain why you believe it.
3. Be gentle and respectful when voicing your beliefs.
4. Keep at it; be willing to suffer for what you know is good and right. Keep on researching and discovering the truth. You will meet more people like your teacher and perhaps similar college professors. See this time as a season of growth and preparation for good conversations now and in the future!

**The Next Steps:**

John will have to face his teacher again, but help him have the self-worth and confidence to not be embarrassed for standing up for his faith. Talk with him about what he believes, and ask some hard questions so he can determine what he believes and why he believes it. Spend time together examining evidence that supports the accuracy and validity of Scripture. Also help your student see that anger is not the answer and that belittling someone to prove your point does not work. Help him to be the type of gentle and respectful person the Apostle Peter wrote about in 1 Peter 3. And support John, letting him know that even when teachers make him feel small, God holds him in strong arms of love.

**Further Resources and Reading:**

- *The Case For Faith for Kids* by Lee Strobel
- *Big Truths For Little Kids* by Susan Hunt, Richard Hunt

## SECTION 3 - DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELISM

### 16. "What's the difference between believing in Jesus and following Jesus?"

by Leneita Fix

**The Situation:** Travis has some bad habits—bad habits that could have life-altering consequences. During a weekend retreat four months ago, Travis made the decision to follow Christ. But those same bad habits haven't changed. One night you decide to pull him aside. "Travis, do you want to live for Christ?" His answer is an unequivocal "YES!" But then he admits he doesn't really know what that means. You tell him there is a difference between just believing in Jesus and really following him.

**The Question:** "What's the difference between believing in Jesus and following Jesus?"

**The Response:** Believing in Jesus is about acknowledging who he is and what he has done for us; following Jesus is about giving him our whole selves completely. God wants us to receive forgiveness and salvation but also wants us to discover a life of transformation.

**Read Together:** John 15:1-17; Romans 10:9; and James 2:19-20.

1. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9). This is the first step we take when accepting God's free gift of salvation through Jesus. But our journey of faith does not end here; this is just the beginning.

2. You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless? (James 2:19-20). The Bible tells us that even Satan and his demons believe who Jesus is. God really wants more for us and from us than just belief. God doesn't want us to just know about him; God wants us to invest in a relationship with him and to obey his commands.
3. We must understand, however, that following Christ is not about going through the motions or following religious rituals. John 15 paints an incredible picture of what it means to be deeply connected to God and how our lives are intended to produce much fruit. As followers of Jesus Christ, we ought to expect and pursue a deepening relationship that will result in actions that will bring fruit in our lives.

#### **The Next Steps:**

- Work with students to show them how to develop spiritual habits that ultimately will help them deepen their faith and strengthen their relationship with Christ.
- Bring accountability into the lives of the students. Keep pointing them back to the reality that following Christ is rooted in our attitude and the positioning of our hearts toward him—and we show our love for Jesus by living a life that honors him and points others to him.

#### **Further Reading and Resources:**

- *The Case For Faith for Kids* by Lee Strobel

## **17. “I want to deepen my faith. What parts of the Bible should I read, what things do I need to start doing, and what other resources would help me?”**

by Mike Kupferer

**The Situation:** Isabella has been going to your church for several years but has only recently begun to get involved with the youth ministry. Over the last few months, you've noticed that she seems to be paying more attention during your gatherings and has even started bringing her own Bible. One afternoon, Isabella texts you and asks if you have time to chat. When you get together, you spend a few minutes in small talk, and then she tells you what is really on her mind.

**The Question:** “I want to deepen my faith. What parts of the Bible should I read, what things do I need to start doing, and what other resources would help me?”

**The Response:** Read Philippians 1:9-11 with your student.

#### **Some thoughts to share with your student:**

1. All Scripture is useful (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17), but the Gospel of John offers a great glimpse into Jesus' life. Reading about Jesus will impact you significantly.
2. Read the Bible regularly—ideally, every day. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word of God is living and active. This means that no matter how many times you read a passage, you can learn something new. God speaks to us through the Bible, so you need to examine it regularly (see Acts 17:11).
3. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul tells us to pray continually. Talking to God is a big part of growing in your faith and learning more about being a follower of Christ.
4. Memorize Scripture. Psalm 119:9-11 reveals that knowing and memorizing Scripture helps us live according to God's Word. You might not always have a Bible nearby, so the Holy Spirit uses your knowledge of Scripture to guide and correct you.
5. Consider ways to serve others. Jesus gave us the best example of selfless living (see Philippians 2:6-8). Serving other people helps us remain humble and helps us be more like Christ.

**The Next Steps:**

See if your student is willing to meet regularly to read and study Scripture. Suggest that you read through James (a blueprint for Christian living) and study its five chapters together. The best thing you can do, beyond praying regularly, is to provide resources and plenty of encouragement as your student begins the adventure of building and practicing these spiritual disciplines.

**Further Reading and Resources:**

- GodTime Cards
- Cue Cards
- Any kids devotional book

**18. “Why should I share my faith?”**

by Mike Hammer

**The Situation:** Jada is a nice girl who is faithfully following God. Usually she does not have any trouble talking with other people, but recently, as you’ve been teaching a series on evangelism, she has struggled to understand the importance of telling other people about what it means to be a Christian. She comes to you with a question.

**The Question:** “Why should I share my faith?”

**The Response:** Read Matthew 28:19-20 with your student.

1. This passage is known as the Great Commission. These were the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, and they reveal an important purpose for all followers of Christ. The disciples’ lives had been completely changed because of Jesus—who he is and what he had done. Now he called them to share their faith with others, because Jesus came so that everyone may hear, know, and believe in him. Jesus calls us to share our faith, too.
2. Encourage the child to talk about/write her testimony and consider why it’s important to share her faith. Our stories are powerful and can be strong examples of the impact Jesus can have. When we write out our stories and see the impact Jesus has made in our lives, it helps us to have greater clarity and greater awareness of the need to share our faith with others. It also makes it more real for the people we share our faith with—it’s not something out of a book, but it is what we have experienced. Encourage your student to think of two or three people she could share her faith with.
3. Talk about friends and family and what it would mean for them to spend eternity separated from God. It’s hard to consider that reality, but that’s what will happen to anyone who doesn’t receive the gift of salvation through Jesus. It’s so important to make sharing our faith personal. It gives us greater urgency when we consider the names and faces of people we love.
4. We need to pray about sharing our faith with others. Acts 4:29 talks about praying for boldness in sharing the Word of God. We can ask God for the strength, courage, and boldness to share our faith.

**The Next Steps:**

- Follow up with your child and ask about the individuals on her list of people to share her faith with. Encourage her to write out her personal testimony, if she hasn’t already done it, and follow up to see how she could share that with a friend or family member.
- In the coming weeks, follow up to see if she has shared her faith with any of the people on her list—or with other people God has brought into her life. Encourage her and walk through some simple conversations and role-plays to help her become more comfortable in talking with people about spiritual topics.

## 19. “How can I share my faith?”

by Mike Hammer

**The Situation:** Jeremy is a kind student who has a heart for others, yet he can come across as a little introverted. He wants to see people come to faith in Jesus but isn't quite sure what to do or how to do anything that would help.

**The Question:** “How can I share my faith?”

**The Response:** Read Romans 1:16 and Philippians 1:20 with your student.

### Some thoughts to share with your student:

1. Pray for your friends. This is the most important step of the process. Ask God to give you a heart for them and for God to soften their hearts, too.
2. Do not be afraid to talk about your faith. One of the biggest concerns people have in sharing their faith is wondering what others will think of them. In Philippians 1:20, the Apostle Paul wrote this: For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. This should be our hope as well.
3. Ask questions. Ask what people believe, why they believe it, what they think happens after we die, how the universe began, and other important topics. Then ask permission to share what you believe. This is a great way to talk about your faith in a respectful way.
4. Share your story of how God has worked in your life. Your story (or testimony) is a powerful way to share what you believe by telling how your faith has impacted your life. People may want to dismiss what is written in the Bible, but it is much harder for them to ignore how God has changed your life.
5. Be an example of Christ! How you treat people, the things you value, what has priority in your life, what you say you believe—it all needs to match the way that you live. When words and lives line up, it is extremely powerful. Sharing your faith is a combination of words and actions, not just one or the other.
6. Invite someone to church. Explain that they do not have to be a Christian to be there and that it's a great way to hear a little bit more about what you believe. This can also present a great opportunity before, during, or after the service for conversation about what happened and what was discussed.

### The Next Steps:

- Read through Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23 together. Help your child simply articulate how we all sin and need a Savior, and how we can receive God's free gift of forgiveness through Jesus, who died for our sins.
- Follow up with the child in a week or two and ask if he has shared his faith since you last talked. Evaluate and improve how your student can share his faith.
- Share your faith, too! What we teach kids must be lived out by us. What we learn personally can be great wisdom for our kids.

## SECTION 4 - LIFE CHOICES

## 20. “How do I make God the center of my life when I'm so busy?”

by Tony Clyde

**The Situation:** Ethan is a junior who used to actively participate in your youth ministry programs. However, lately he hasn't been around. You've tried to reach him by leaving voicemails and sending messages on Facebook®, but he never responds. One day you happen to see him at a local fast-food restaurant. During your conversation, Ethan lets you know

he wants to come to church and youth group, but he has been working a lot. He admits that because of his busyness, he just doesn't know how to remain focused spiritually.

**The Question:** "How do I make God the center of my life when I'm so busy?"

**The Response:** We all get busy. Busyness doesn't separate us from the presence of God, and Jesus promises to always be with us (see Matthew 28:20). There is nowhere we can go and nothing we can do that will keep God from being with us.

**Read Together:** Psalm 139:1-18.

1. The good news is that God knows everything about us. God knows our deepest thoughts. God knows our daily routines. God knows our busy schedules and knows what we need the most. God wants to help us in small and big things of life, including our schedules and priorities.
2. Encourage your child to invite God into his schedule and planning. A lot of children say yes to every sport, event, and activity. Often their schedules become so busy that they say no to the most important people and to God himself. Before saying yes to something, we should start by asking God to help plan our time and schedule. God will give us the wisdom and insight we need to keep our priorities focused. James 1:5 tells us this: If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.
3. We can include God in every part of our day. Regardless of how busy we may become, God is still with us. When children are at school, God is with them. When they are at home, God is with them. Kids can welcome God's presence into everything they do.
4. Above all else, encourage your child to seek God first. So often, students put sports, work, and other activities in front of their relationship with God. They often do these other things to find significance and purpose. God promises that purpose and significance will come when we seek him first. "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Matthew 6:33).

**The Next Steps:**

- Encourage a child like Ethan to prioritize his schedule. You may want to help him schedule a time each day to have some quiet time. Help him understand how scheduling 10 minutes of quiet time can help him recognize God's presence.

## **23. "I have a friend who is making all the wrong choices. How do I help my friend stop—and start making better choices?"**

by Leneita Fix

**The Situation:** Trudy and Brit have been best friends for as long as they can remember. As kids it was easy; they rode bikes and played for hours. They even decided to follow Christ during the same week of VBS. Recently, Trudy found out that Brit is making some unwise choices. Trudy loves Brit, and it hurts to know that she is destroying her life this way.

**The Question:** "I have a friend who is making all the wrong choices. How do I help my friend stop—and start making better choices?"

**The Response:** It's tough to watch a friend make unwise choices. We want to step out and talk about it, but what if our friend doesn't want to listen? What if this destroys our friendship? Our friend likely knows that these aren't good choices. We have a responsibility, as a friend and as a follower of Christ, to let this person know that God loves her and wants to rescue her. We are never "too far gone" for Jesus to find us.

**Read Together:** Luke 15:11-31.

**Here are some words of advice you can give your student:**

1. Start with telling your friend how much you love her and why you are worried. The “stuff” she is doing is just a symptom of something deeper going on in her heart. Don’t jump into the issues too quickly, as your friend might be inclined to become defensive.
2. Let your friend know that no one is perfect. We all struggle with making the right choices every day.
3. Jesus loves us too much to let us stay where we are. In the parable of the lost son in Luke 15, the young man chose to live life his own way. Yet there came a moment when that life left him empty and alone. Have you thought about how Jesus can fix our hearts and give us peace and hope even when everything is going wrong?
4. Whether your friend has never chosen to follow Christ, or has wandered from a life of faith, the steps are the same. Your friend needs to know that God has been waiting for her to acknowledge her need for God. Then God does all the work. God is the one who meets us where we are and gives us the wisdom and strength to lead better lives.

**The Next Steps:**

- If the friend agrees that change is needed, encourage your child to offer support and become an accountability partner.
- Encourage your student to pray! There is a chance that the friend won’t want to change or listen to the concerns. The friend may even stop talking to your child, but the student should never give up praying for her friend.

**Further Reading and Resources:**

- *Tails from the Pantry: 5 Cheesy Stories about Friendship, Bravery, Bullying, & More* by Patsy Clairmont

**23. “Does God really care what I watch, what video games I play, and what I check out online?”**

by Eric Groezinger

**The Situation:** Robert is a very media-savvy kid in your small group. He enjoys the latest movies and music, is an avid TV watcher, and is a self-proclaimed video game champion. Robert recently became a Christian and is learning how God wants complete control of his life—including how he consumes media and entertainment.

**The Question:** “Does God really care what I watch, what video games I play, and what I check out online?”

**The Response:** It may be hard to understand why it’s important to think about media from a Christian perspective, but kids today consume more media than ever before. It’s important to consider the impact of the media we pay attention to.

1. Our goal as Christians is to glorify God and to seek God in all things—including the media we consume! So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Psalm 27:4 expresses a similar desire that every Christian should have, too: to meditate on God and God’s truths, to seek God, and to honor God. Choosing and engaging with media ought to reflect this priority and desire so that our entire lives give glory to God.
2. Although Scripture doesn’t specifically tell us what type of media to interact with, it does give principles for evaluating the media content and determining how we should respond to it. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). We need to use biblical principles to determine if media content has value and worth for us as Christ-followers. Is it honoring to God? Does it reflect a biblical worldview? Does it draw us closer to God? Answering these questions will help us know if it is content we should accept or reject.

3. We must recognize that what we allow into our lives has the ability to affect and impact others and ourselves. Media content that causes us to have ungodly attitudes or actions can distract us from our relationship with Christ and lead us to sin. Ungodly attitudes and actions also impact relationships we have with others. We are responsible for our attitudes and actions and must be willing to protect our hearts, whatever the cost. Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life (Proverbs 4:23).

**The Next Steps:**

- Challenge the child to begin to think about media with a more critical mind to uncover the messages and themes they contain.
- Offer to help the child identify how Scripture addresses certain themes and to evaluate if it is a message he should continue to allow into his head and heart or one he should reject.
- Together, explore other media content that more closely aligns with God’s desires and strengthens the child’s relationship with Christ and others.

## **SECTION 5 - FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

### **24. “What should I do about a friend who has intentionally hurt me and gossiped about me to others?”**

by Phil Bell

**The Situation:** Ashley is a bubbly small group kid who is always smiling and joking. She is on the welcome team and is incredible at making others feel comfortable. But recently, the smiles, the jokes, and the welcomes have subsided into a serious and solemn look. Ashley is struggling with a trusted friend who has gossiped about her and has said some extremely hurtful things. One day, she shows up to your small group early with this issue on her mind.

**The Question:** “What should I do about a friend who has intentionally hurt me and gossiped about me to others?”

**The Response:** The good news is that the Bible does not leave us hanging on what to do when we face hurt and conflict like this.

**Read Together:** Matthew 18:15-17.

**Here are some words of advice you can give your student:**

1. Talk to your friend about your hurt. As hard as it might seem, the first thing you must do is talk to her about it. Some people respond well, and some will get very defensive when we point out ways they have wronged us. That’s why it’s important to talk to her with gentleness and respect.
2. Pray about talking to your friend. James 1:5 tells us to ask God for wisdom in all things, so ask God to give you wisdom when talking to her.
3. Listen to your friend. As much as we have been hurt, it’s important to ask her to tell her side of the story first. Sometimes there is a misunderstanding or a reason behind certain actions, so listen first.
4. Give your friend a chance to apologize. Allow opportunities for her to say she’s sorry. Don’t be too consumed with telling her how she has wronged you.
5. Forgive your friend. Colossians 3:13 offers this instruction and insight: Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

**The Next Steps:**

- Follow up with the student to see what she’s learned and to encourage her for taking a biblical stance in dealing with conflict.

**25. “How do I forgive someone biblically?”**

by Mike Kupferer

**The Situation:** Greg and Eric have been friends since third grade. They normally do everything together, so when you noticed Greg and Eric hanging out with different people at small group lately, you began to get curious. You talk to Greg to find out if anything’s wrong. During your conversation, you find out Greg is mad because Eric apparently spread a lie about him. Eric felt bad about it and asked for forgiveness, but Greg was struggling with what to do.

**The Question:** “How do I forgive someone biblically?”

**The Response:** Biblical forgiveness is not always easy, but it is possible and needs to be part of our lives.

**Read Together:** Colossians 3:13.

**Here are some words of advice you can give your student:**

1. Remember that no one is perfect. You cannot pretend you are any better than someone else. Matthew 7:3-5, though talking about judging others, reminds us that no matter what someone else has done, we must not forget our own faults.
2. Think how you want to be forgiven. It can be easier to ask for forgiveness than to offer it. Turn the situation around and consider how you would want your friend to handle the situation.
3. Pray about it. God knows a lot about forgiving those who cause hurt. Romans 5:8 tells us that Christ died for us while we were still imperfect, and in Luke 23:34 we see Jesus seeking God’s forgiveness for those who crucified him.
4. Once is not enough. As hard as it is to forgive someone one time, Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:21-22 that we need to be in the habit of forgiving; it’s not just a one-time action, and we shouldn’t keep a record of someone’s wrongs against us. Even if this person has hurt you in the past, you don’t have the right to not forgive.
5. Don’t avoid it. If you have been hurt, it can be easy to ignore the person and avoid forgiving them. But we read in Matthew 6:14-15 and Luke 6:37 that our unwillingness to forgive others is a serious thing. Holding a grudge isn’t healthy or helpful.
6. Don’t hold it against them. Forgiving someone for a wrong they commit means that you do not treat them negatively or revisit past offenses.

**The Next Steps:**

- Tell the child you will be praying for him as he works on forgiving and will be available if he needs to talk more or wants to ask more questions.
- When both kids are connected to your kid’s ministry, follow up with each of them to see how things are going. Often the awkwardness of conflict resolution can translate into ongoing conflict. Help them both to see that it takes time to earn back trust.

**26. “I have a friend who may hurt herself or someone else. What do I do?”**

by Leneita Fix

**The Situation:** During small group time, one of your girls says she has a friend that is threatening to hurt herself. She is scared and worried about her friend.

**The Question:** “I have a friend who may hurt herself or someone else. What do I do?”

**The Response:** When a kid is talking about hurting herself or others, the root cause is often hopelessness. The pain in life becomes louder than anything else. This leads the child to despair—the feeling that it can’t and won’t get better. Let this kid know that you care about her, and then point her to Jesus. He is the one who offers hope when life seems empty. We also need to make sure that the student gets the help she needs.

**Read Together:** Psalm 34:17-19.

**Here are some words of advice you can give your student:**

1. Let your friend know there is hope. No, you cannot promise that all of the circumstances that are crushing her will change. However, God wants to help and is there to love your friend. Take time to pray with your friend.
2. Encourage your friend to talk with a trusted adult who can help. First and foremost, your friend needs to tell her parents how she is feeling. If she is afraid her parents will be unsupportive, offer to go with her to talk to them.
3. Let your friend know that you are there for her. You will keep being her friend and loving her. Let her know that she can get help for this. There are phone lines she can call when she is feeling like this—and she can call you anytime, too.
4. Something like this is bigger than most people can handle alone, and your friend needed to ask for help and advice. Tell your friend you are glad that she did.

**The Next Steps:**

- If the child talks about a detailed plan that her friend has for suicide or for hurting other people, then it is an immediate emergency. Get involved immediately; talk to your senior pastor (or your ministry director, if you’re a volunteer) about the legally mandated steps. Do not sit back and remain an observer from a distance.
- If the student says something like, “I need to tell you a secret,” make sure you let her know that you are unable to keep a secret if someone is in danger. If the information you are getting is vague, it is always better to be overly cautious and follow up immediately.
- Follow up within 24 hours to ensure that the parents of the friend know what is going on.

## **27. “I feel like nobody likes me. What’s wrong with me?”**

by Tony Clyde

**The Situation:** Zac is a freshman in your kid’s ministry. He isn’t very active but does attend one of your programmed activities each week. It doesn’t seem like he fits in with the rest of the group, and he typically doesn’t interact with most of the other students. And now you’ve noticed that Zac seems to have become even more reserved in his participation. One day you ask him how he is doing. He offers a sobering response.

**The Question:** “I feel like nobody likes me. What’s wrong with me?”

**The Response:** Sometimes it can seem like nobody likes us. We all want to fit in and feel accepted—and these feelings are even more intense during adolescence. It’s difficult for students when it appears like everyone else fits in, but they’re left on the outside. It might be easy to think there is something wrong. But God has a different message. “For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs” (Zephaniah 3:17). God loves us beyond what we could ever imagine. When God thinks of us, God smiles with delight.

**Read together:** Ephesians 1:3-5.

**Here are some words of advice you can give your student:**

1. God loves you and chose you. It might feel like everyone is rejecting you. It might feel like you are alone, but many kids feel this way from time to time. More importantly, before the world was even created, God chose you for something great.
2. God has adopted you into the family. You are a part of the family of God. Through faith in Jesus, you have been given every spiritual blessing God has to offer. You are a child of God, and you have other spiritual brothers and sisters who are trying to learn how to live as a family. Sometimes family members don't get along or realize that the others are hurting. That's why Scripture gives us this reminder: Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others (Colossians 3:13).
3. Relax and try to be yourself. The most important thing you can do is live out your God-given personality and character. Don't try too hard, but don't give up either. You will become a magnet for people when you embrace your uniqueness.

**The Next Steps:**

- Take time to point out this child's strengths and positive attributes, and point him toward the potential God has for him. Most children overanalyze who they are and often miss the wonderful characteristics God has given them.
- Ask specific kids and leaders to look out for this student in the coming weeks and ensure he gets cared for and connected.

**Further Reading and Resources:**

- *Just the Way You Are* by Max Lucado
- *Because I Love You* by Max Lucado
- *You Are Special* by Max Lucado
- *Tails from the Pantry: 5 Cheesy Stories about Friendship, Bravery, Bullying, & More* by Patsy Clairmont

**27. "How can I honor my parents when I don't feel like they love me or when they don't have the same faith as me?"**

by Leneita Fix

**The Situation:** Larry was an unchurched kid from an unchurched home—until a friend from school invited him to an outreach event where Larry made the decision to follow Christ. At first, his parents viewed church as something positive that gave him something to do. Then they thought he was becoming a "religious fanatic." At first Larry genuinely tried to respect his parents. However, now he is feeling like he may need to rebel against their order not to come to church anymore.

**The Question:** "How can I honor my parents when I don't feel like they love me or when they don't have the same faith as me?"

**The Response:** Read Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:1-4 with your child.

1. Honoring is a way of showing respect. As we strive to live in a relationship with God, we want to live the way God asks us to live. Remembering that our parents are put in a place of authority in our lives is a way of showing Christ love.
2. Honoring our parents is a command that is not based on whether we feel their love or if they are following God. We are told that it is the right thing to do.
3. Respecting our parents means that we listen to and live under the rules they place on their house. It means that we show them the love of Christ, even when it is difficult, by following their boundaries. It does not mean that we are obligated to follow through on anything that will harm us or harm others, or that causes us to sin.

4. We must remember that God desires a relationship with our parents, too. We need to keep praying that they would receive the gift of forgiveness through faith in Christ. Doing what they ask in an obedient and respectful manner may be one of the first ways they see Christ working in our lives.
5. As we seek to honor our earthly parents, we must remember that God is our Father. If we don't feel loved, God wants to fill us up with his love (see Romans 8:14-17).

**The Next Steps:**

- Help the child think through practical ways to honor his parents. If he doesn't like the requests but they are possible (such as skipping church), teach him how to follow through. Can he read his Bible or watch a sermon online?
- Build relationships with the parents so that there are more opportunities to feel "safe" when their teenager shares Christ with them. Talk with them about positive changes they see in their child.
- Pray with the student about his heart to honor his parents. Remind him that God wants his family to be whole (see Luke 1:17).

Note: In situations like these, we may want to step in and "save" the student from the family. Make sure that you are helping the child lead a Jesus-centered life. At the same time, stand with the child and affirm that God does love the parents enough to change their hearts.

## **28. "My parents don't trust me. How can I make my parents trust me more?"**

by Katie Sutton

**The Situation:** Dory is a 5<sup>th</sup> grader who has been in your student ministry for several years. She is smart, outspoken, and sensitive toward other people. Recently, she has been struggling with her parents and has spent quite a bit of time grounded from her phone and friends. Today, before church starts, Dory is complaining because her parents have told her that she cannot go to a special event at school. You ask if she is grounded again, and she says, "No, but things aren't going so well."

**The Question:** "My parents don't trust me. How can I make my parents trust me more?"

**The Response:** Dory's parents could have any number of reasons for not letting her go to the dance, but Dory's perception is that they don't trust her. This may or may not be true. Be careful to avoid assumptions about the relationship between Dory and her parents when answering this kind of question. It's best to avoid reinforcing Dory's belief that her parents don't trust her and to stick to suggesting ways that she can show her parents that she is trustworthy.

1. Let her know that rebuilding trust is a process. Dory needs to understand that it may take a long time for her parents to recognize that she is making an effort to change their view of her.
2. Let her know that gaining trust is about action. Dory will have to act trustworthily without the expectation that her parents are going to give her anything in return. Let her know that she can't get frustrated and give up if they don't reward her for her efforts right away. After she has practiced a trustworthy lifestyle for a while, she can begin to ask for small areas of trust from her parents.
3. Once she has proven herself trustworthy in the small things, it will be easier for her parents to trust her in the big things. "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities" (Luke 16:10).

**The Next Steps:**

- Offer to meet with Dory to help her develop an action plan on how to increase trust between her and her parents.

- Follow up with Dory to see how things are going between her and her parents. Encourage her to continue to make strides in rebuilding trust.

## 29. “My parents are getting divorced. Why do I feel like it’s all my fault?”

by Mike Hammer

**The Situation:** Andre is a friendly kid who likes to be around other people. He’s slightly on the shy side but enjoys good conversation and having fun. He has come to think of you as a person who has answers and can be trusted. Recently, Andre’s parents told him they were getting a divorce. They didn’t share all the details or their reasons; they told him it just wasn’t working out like they’d hoped it would. Andre, with his heart broken, has begun to fill in the blanks and believes their divorce is his fault.

**The Question:** “My parents are getting divorced. Why do I feel like it’s all my fault?”

**The Response:** God understand how badly we feel when our parents—or any relatives or friends—go through divorce. But we cannot blame ourselves for the decisions our parents made. In the midst of this painful event, we must remember that God has promised to be with us through everything.

**Read Together:** Mark 10:6-9.

**Here are some words of advice you can give your student:**

1. When two people are married, they have joined in a covenant with each other and with God saying they are fully committed to their relationship. Anytime this covenant is ended, it is a result of a decision made by one or both people who are part of it.
2. Do not put blame on yourself. When you do that, you are carrying a weight that is not yours to carry. As much as you love your parents, blaming yourself will not make the situation better. Allow yourself to be free from fault; you did not cause or choose for this to happen. It was out of your control.
3. Philippians 4:6-7 says that we ought to pray about everything and that God will provide a peace beyond what we can understand. Take some time to pray for faith to trust God in the middle of this difficulty. Stop to pray often. Allow God to bring comfort.
4. Ephesians 6:1-3 reminds us that we should obey our parents and that our lives will be better for it. Be intentional to always honor your parents, especially in this time. They value your love and care, just as you desire theirs.
5. Talk to your parents about how you are feeling. It may be difficult, but it will be extremely helpful for them to hear what you are thinking and feeling and how this is affecting you.

**The Next Steps:**

- Make it a priority to follow up with the student, as he is experiencing a very difficult time in his life. Consider sending daily encouragements to remind him that he is loved and valued and significant. If possible, have a conversation with one or both parents. Encourage them to talk with their child, affirm their love, and remove any feelings of fault from the child. Most importantly, continue to point the student to God to find security and hope in the midst of this painful season.

**Further Reading and Resources:**

- *What Children Need to Know When Parents Get Divorced* by William Coleman
- *It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear* by Vicki Lansky

## 31: I'm being bullied at school. What should I do?

By Deanna Wilson

**The Situation:** Suzy is a sweet, timid girl but fairly interactive with your small group. You've noticed she has been becoming more and more withdrawn over the last few weeks at church. So when you try to find out what is going on by talking to her, you find out that she's being harassed at school and having to give up her lunch money everyday. She tells you that she is afraid and doesn't know what to do.

**The Question:** I'm being bullied at school. What should I do?

**The Response:** Well, that is definitely a tough thing to deal with, but it can stop if you get the right people involved. Don't worry, we can work together to figure this out.

1. Don't worry about your safety. God is with you all the time.  
*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1*
2. You really should tell your parents what is going on so they can also help you. I can be with you when you tell them if that will help.
3. Realize that people that bully others are usually hurting in some way. Either they feel bad about themselves, are going through a difficult time, or are being bullied themselves. Pray for them.  
*But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44*

### Read Together:

Matthew 10:31, 2 Timothy 1:7, Joshua 1:9, Psalm 56:3, Psalm 27:1, Psalm 32:7, Psalm 121:1

### Next Steps:

- At some point, you will need to forgive them for this. I know it's hard, and it may be an on-going process, but you will be better in the end if you do.  
*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:14-15*

### Further Reading and Resources:

- Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center  
<http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/activities/toolkits/>
- Good Character.com  
<http://www.goodcharacter.com/GROARK/Bullying.html>
- CBN.com  
[http://www.cbn.com/family/parenting/Coughlin\\_Bully2.aspx](http://www.cbn.com/family/parenting/Coughlin_Bully2.aspx)
- Kids Health  
<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/bullies.html>
- Education.com  
<http://www.education.com/reference/article/facts-about-cyberbullying/>
- National Crime Prevention Center  
<http://www.ncpc.org/topics/bullying>

