

## WEEK 1 TEACHING GUIDE



### BIG IDEA

God's words are a firm foundation.

### BIBLE

Matthew 4:4, 7:24-27;  
Psalm 89:1-2

**WHAT?** *What are we talking about today?*

#### QUESTION | Riddle of the Week

- Welcome to *Please Explain*, where we're going to be spending a few weeks talking about some things that are — well, a little hard to understand. Kind of like this riddle.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to guess the answer to the riddle below.
  - **RIDDLE:** I am gentle enough to soothe your skin, light enough to fly in the sky, and strong enough to crack rocks. What am I?
  - **ANSWER:** Water!

#### ACTIVITY | Wordle in the Wild

- Remember when it seemed like the whole world was briefly obsessed with this game called Wordle? Let's see if we can bring it back.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this game, you'll need [two easels with large pads of paper](#), jumbo permanent markers, and jumbo markers or highlighters in gray, yellow, and green. Before your teaching time, use five sheets of paper on each easel to create ten blank [Wordle](#)-inspired game boards (but with five rows of four, rather than the traditional six rows of five, since the words students will be guessing will only be four letters long, instead of five letters). Split your students into two teams and explain the rules. Teams will be trying to guess the same words at the same time. For each game, they will have five chances to guess the word by writing a valid four-letter word (no curse words, please!) in the boxes. After each guess, have an adult volunteer grade their guess by coloring in each box with green marker (if a letter is in the correct place), yellow marker (if a letter is correct, but in the wrong place), and gray (if a letter does not show up in the word at all). The first team to guess each word correctly gets a point. The team with the most wins out of five games is the winner. Play with the following five words and keep the words displayed as you teach:
  - HEAR
  - WISE
  - ROCK
  - FOOL
  - SAND

- These words are the *foundation* of what we're going to talk about today.

### ACTIVITY | Giant Kerplunk!

- But before we get there, let's play another game.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this game, you'll need wire fencing, a round side table, wire, wire cutters, wooden dowels, and plastic balls. Before your program, create at least one giant Kerplunk! game ([here is a tutorial](#)). If you create one game, give a few students a chance to play upfront or provide enough sets of the game for students to play in smaller groups.*
- What a "dropping" sensation we feel when everything falls apart, right? (And are you wondering what all of these things have to do with each other yet? Hang on. I'll explain.)
- For some of you, your life feels stable at the moment. If life was a giant game of Kerplunk!, you'd definitely be winning. But sometimes, life can get unstable quickly. Things start to fall apart.
  - Maybe your parents are getting a divorce, and you feel stuck in the middle.
  - Maybe the news is making you feel unsettled and afraid.
  - Maybe you have to move schools or houses and leave your friends behind.
  - Maybe someone in your life is sick, and you don't know how to help them.
  - Maybe your parent lost their job, and you hear them worrying about money.
  - Maybe you and a friend are fighting or drifting apart, and you wish things could go back to how they were before.
  - Or maybe you feel uncertain about what's true and what to believe.
- Living in uncertainty can be exhausting. We all long for a sense of safety and security — but how can we find it when the things in our lives (or in our minds) feel so unpredictable and unstable?

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

### STORY | Talk about something silly that helped you feel safe as a child.

- When life feels chaotic or uncertain, it helps to have things that make us feel safe, stable, and grounded.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about something silly that helped you feel safe as a child. This might have been an object, like a blanket, toy, or lucky hat. Or it might be a routine, like always closing your closet door at night, eating cereal with your siblings before school, or exchanging a special phrase or greeting with a parent.*
- It's funny to laugh about some of the little things we clung to for security when we were kids. But when life gets difficult today, we still are in need of trustworthy things we can cling to.

### DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
  - **When you were a kid, did you have a security blanket or comfort toy? Tell us about it!**
  - **What are some reasons a person's life might start to feel unpredictable or unstable? Can you relate to any of those reasons?**
  - ★ **Tell us about a time or place you felt really safe. Who or what made you feel that way?**

## OBJECT LESSON | A Children's Storybook

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, hold a children's storybook – preferably one that means something to you and communicates a lesson or moral principle. Briefly explain the story and what it taught you.*
- Do you remember the excitement you once had as a kid when a grown-up would read you one of the stories you loved most? You can probably still picture some of the pages, remember some of your favorite lines, or hear the voice of your loved one or teacher reading it to you. That's because stories are powerful. They stick with us!

## SCRIPTURE | Matthew 7:24-27

- So where are we going with all of this? What do riddles, word puzzles, giant game of Kerplunk!, and children's stories have to do with each other?
  - If you're confused, it's okay. If you need some help connecting the dots, I get it! So let me explain.
  - When Jesus was here on earth, his followers often found themselves confused by what Jesus was saying. They needed help connecting the dots and making sense of his ideas.
  - That's partly because Jesus often taught in the form of stories, called parables. These fictional stories were designed to illustrate a big truth Jesus wanted us to remember.
  - Jesus chose to communicate these truths in story form because he knew stories have the ability to draw us in and invite us to think differently about ourselves and the world.
  - But sometimes Jesus' stories got a little confusing and left his followers wondering what in the world Jesus was trying to say.
- Over the next four weeks, we're going to be looking at four of these parables Jesus told. Just like those moments as children where we'd circle up on our teacher's reading rug, we're going to listen to some stories crafted by Jesus himself.
- As you listen to this first story, here are a few questions to think about:
  - **What do you think this parable is about?**
  - **What is confusing about this parable?**
  - **What do you think the spiritual lesson in this story could be?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 7:24-27.*
- First, Jesus talks about a person who built his house on a foundation of rock.
  - This person built their house on a rock, not necessarily because they were a genius or master house-builder. They simply understood that, one day, things could get difficult and unpredictable – and when they do, they wanted to make sure their home's foundation would withstand whatever storm it faced.
  - To make sure everyone listening knew exactly what he was trying to say, Jesus explained: this wise house-builder is like someone who not only hears Jesus' words, but puts Jesus' words into practice.
- Next, Jesus talks about a person who build his house on a foundation of sand.
  - You might try to give this person the benefit of the doubt and think, "Well, maybe they just didn't know sand was a bad place to build a house." But, no – Jesus makes it clear, this person knew better. Maybe this person was proud, or arrogant, or stubborn. Maybe they thought they didn't need anyone but themselves to help get them out of life's troubles. But when the storm came, they soon realized they were wrong.
  - Again, to make sure everyone understood, Jesus explained his story. The foolish house-builder is like someone who hears Jesus' words, but doesn't do anything about them.

- So what does all this mean? Well, it means when we build our lives on the foundation of God's words, we can face whatever difficulties life throws at us. When things feel uncertain, scary, confusing, or unstable, God's words will help us weather our storms.

## DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
  - 🔄 **What would you say are some of your "firm foundations" that support you in difficult times?**
  - **Retell me Jesus' parable as though I've never heard it before. Then explain it to me!**

## SCRIPTURE | Psalm 89:1-4

- But this wasn't the first time Jesus' listeners would have heard God is a firm and steady foundation. Centuries earlier, a musician named Ethan wrote these words in a song of worship to God.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 89:1-2.*
- Because God's love stands firm forever:
  - We can trust it.
  - We can build our lives around it.
  - We can rely on it when not much else seems reliable.
- God's words are just as solid as God's love for us. God's words are like that solid rock Jesus talked about. When you build your life around what God has said, no matter how shaky life gets, you'll never crumble. Because **God's words are a firm foundation.**

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

## OBJECT LESSON | Above It All Balance Beam

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this object lesson, borrow a balance beam from a local school or gym (or make one with a long piece of sturdy wood). Make sure the beam is low to the ground and wide enough for you to walk across it safely. As you teach, step on and off the balance beam and maybe jump on it carefully for emphasis. If you have the resources, you could also ask a trustworthy volunteer or two to assemble a simple wooden platform live while you teach. Then climb onto it as you continue to teach.*
- When life gets shaky and uncertain, God's words can do two things for us: comfort and guide.
  - God's words can comfort us as they remind us God loves us, is with us, and hasn't forgotten about us. The relationship we have with Jesus in the midst of chaos and uncertainty gives us a chance to understand God's love — the unchanging, always trustworthy love of God the psalmist talked about.
  - But remember what Jesus said? Just hearing God's words isn't going to give us safety and stability. We have to do what God says. That's why we have to remember God's words are meant to guide and direct us — not just comfort us. If we truly want to be safe and secure during life's biggest storms, we have to do something with the guidance God gives us.
- So what is your life built around? What's your foundation?
  - Is it built on others' expectations or opinions of you?
  - Is it built on your own intelligence or wisdom?
  - Is it built on wishful thinking that everything will work out in your favor?
  - Or is it built on God's trustworthiness?

- What do you hold onto when life gets complicated?
  - Do you hold onto people or things that make you feel better in the short term, but don't actually have the power to help or protect you in the long term?
  - Or do you hold onto Jesus, who will never let you down?

## DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
  - **Why would someone turn to God's words in times of trouble?**
  - **Read Matthew 4:4. Just like eating, sleeping, or checking our phones, what are some ways we could make God's words a more regular part of our days?**

## STORY | Talk about a time God's words gave you stability.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time God's words gave you stability during a time of crisis. Try to identify a time when God's words both comforted you and guided you. Share how God's words gave you peace, but also share how you acted on what God had said.*
- Jesus invites us to make his words the foundation of our lives. Here's how:
  - **NOTICE GOD'S WORDS.** When life feels unstable, pause and look to what God says in Scripture – especially the words God says through Jesus. Jesus gives us words to build a life on. What we do with them can strengthen our faith and help others grow.
  - **REMEMBER GOD'S WORDS.** Write down some of the words you find in Scripture and put them somewhere you can see them every day. You might want to remember words like . . .
    - I am with you.
    - Be courageous.
    - I will love you no matter what.
    - I will never leave or forsake you.
    - Love God and love others.
  - **ACT ON GOD'S WORDS.** Remember, we can't just hear what God has said. We have to put those words into practice. This can be difficult, but it's so much easier in a community of people who are committed to following Jesus just like you are. This week, find someone you know who follows Jesus and ask how God's words shape their lives.

## DISCUSSION

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  - ✪ **Have God's words ever brought you comfort during an uncertain time? If so, tell us about it. If not, tell us about a time you needed God's words to comfort you.**
  - ✪ **Talk about a time you let God's words guide or direct you. How do you think following God's words kept you safe from harm?**
  - This week, what's one way you're going to build more of your life on the foundation of God's words?

## REFLECTION | I Will Build My Life

- God's words are a firm foundation, ready and available for anyone to build their lives on. But we have to choose it. It won't just happen by accident.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give students pink, purple, and black index cards to match the series graphic, along with black and white permanent markers. Invite them to write down one of God's promises or instructions that they want to build their life around. These might be passages they already know, but if they need help finding a passage, encourage them to circle up with other students and volunteers and search Scripture together (maybe using the Bible app or a Google search) for something relevant to their life right now. When they've finished writing, invite them to tape the index card to your balance beam or wooden structure. While students reflect, play the song "Build My Life" (Housefires), but make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. For more information, [read this! Here's a link](#) to preview the song for your personal use.
- With Jesus, the difficult things in our lives don't go away. He never promised us that. But he did promise to give us a solid and unchanging foundation we can build our lives upon. **God's words are a firm foundation.**



# WEEK 1

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



Some things are hard to understand – like chemistry, verb conjugations, the blockchain, or why your friend is mad at you. When we face a problem, situation, or idea we're struggling to understand, it always helps to know someone we trust can explain it to us. When Jesus was here on earth, he spent a lot of time helping his followers understand some pretty hard-to-understand ideas about God. One of the ways Jesus often made complicated ideas simpler was by explaining them through stories and metaphors, which we call parables. In this four-week series from the Gospels, we'll explore four of the parables Jesus told his followers to explain four important truths about God. These parables help us see that **God's words are a firm foundation, in God's kingdom, everyone belongs, God's words invite a response**, and that **God's kingdom is always growing**.

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### QUESTIONS

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- What are some reasons a person's life might start to feel unpredictable or unstable? Can you relate to any of those reasons?
- Tell us about a time or place you felt really safe. Who or what made you feel that way?
- What would you say are some of your "firm foundations" that support you in difficult times?
- Retell me Jesus' parable as though I've never heard it before. Then explain it to me!
- Why would someone turn to God's words in times of trouble?
- Read Matthew 4:4. Just like eating, sleeping, or checking our phones, what are some ways we could make God's words a more regular part of our days?
- Have God's words ever brought you comfort during an uncertain time? If so, tell us about it. If not, tell us about a time you needed God's words to comfort you.
- Talk about a time you let God's words guide or direct you. How do you think following God's words kept you safe from harm?
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Share your habit stacks with each other! See if anyone has identified a habit stack that would be helpful to someone else in the group.

# WEEK 1

## DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers



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