

WEEK 1 TEACHING GUIDE

CATALYST

BIG IDEA

Faith is a catalyst for action.

BIBLE

Hebrews 11:1-22; James 1:22; 2
Corinthians 5:7

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | DIY Lava Lamps

- Welcome to our new series, *Catalyst!*
 - You might've heard about a catalyst in science class, but don't worry – we aren't going to be taking any tests on molecules or chemical reactions.
 - But since some of us might need a little help understanding what a "catalyst" is, we're going to take a cue from our teachers and start with a science experiment.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *You can adjust this activity based on your group size and budget by either making one lava lamp in front of the group or having everyone make their own using [small eight-ounce water bottles](#). Either way, first, fill your bottle(s) two-thirds full of [vegetable oil](#). Fill the rest of the way with water, a few drops of [food coloring](#), and an [Alka Seltzer tablet](#). You can have your container(s) prepped ahead of time to save time or fill it in front of the group for dramatic effect. Here's a [video](#) to see how this works.*
- As you may have learned in science class, oil and water do not mix – they stay separated. However, when we add a *catalyst* to the mix (the Alka Seltzer tablet), something fun happens! The Alka Seltzer is our catalyst – something that creates a big change.

ACTIVITY | Catalyst Relay Challenge

- A catalyst can also *speed up* a change that was already happening. For example, if I needed to transfer the water in this bucket across the room without moving the bucket, it would probably take me a long time because I'm just one person. If I wanted to speed up the process, I would need a catalyst to help make that happen.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this game, you'll be racing to transfer water from one end of the room to the other. To play, create two teams with an even amount of players for each team. For each team, place two buckets on opposite end of the room – one empty and one filled with water. Have the players stand behind the [buckets](#) filled with water and give every player their own cup. When you say "go," have your players fill their cups with water, run to the other end of the room, and dump the water into the empty bucket until all the water is transferred. The first team to do this wins!*
- In this case, our catalyst was you! When you got involved, it sped up the process of moving the water across the room by . . . well, a lot.

- So that's what a catalyst is. It's something that creates change, or speeds up a change that's already happening.
- For the next few weeks, we're going to talk about what catalysts have to do with our faith — and what "faith" even means to begin with.
 - When we're not sure what we think about God, what are the catalysts that can help us find answers or maybe even change our perspectives?
 - When we're not sure whether or not we're really growing in our faith, what are the catalysts that could restart or speed up our spiritual growth?
 - And how can we be catalysts that help other people's faith grow too?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **What's a catalyst that changed your day today (for better or worse)?**
 - **What are some examples of catalysts that could change someone's faith (for better or worse)?**
 - **How would you define "faith?"**

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

QUESTION | "What is faith?"

- We're going to be talking a lot about "faith" in this series, so before we go any further, we should probably talk about what faith actually is. **What do you think? What is faith?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
- When we use the word "faith," we could be talking about a lot of things.
 - "Faith" could mean the set of religious beliefs we follow. You might say, "My faith is Christianity."
 - "Faith" could mean our ongoing relationship with Jesus. You might say, "I want to grow in my faith."
 - And "faith" could mean our choice to trust God in a specific circumstance. You might say, "I have faith God will work this out."

SCRIPTURE | Hebrews 11:1-3

- In the Bible, there's a book called Hebrews. It's a letter to the Hebrew people that's all about "faith" — in every definition of the word.
 - Hebrews tells us clearly who Jesus is so we can better understand the "faith" Jesus-followers share.
 - For those of us who follow Jesus already, Hebrews shows us how we can keep growing in our faith.
 - And Hebrews challenges us to have "faith" in specific circumstances too!
- You could say the book of Hebrews is meant to be a catalyst for the faith of anyone who reads it — both for people today and for people long ago, when it was first written. Let's see how the author defines "faith."
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Hebrews 11:1-3.*
- According to Hebrews, "faith" isn't supposed to be a set of beliefs we say we agree with but never do anything about. Faith is active! It's a confident believing in something — even if we can't see the thing we believe in.
 - But how can you be confident in something you can't see? Is that even a smart to do? Well, we can't "see" God, of course. But that doesn't mean we can't "see" the evidence of God all around us.

- The author of Hebrews gives all of creation as an example. We weren't around when God spoke the universe into existence, but it exists! We can see it! We may not know all the details of how it was formed or have video evidence of it being made, but we see the evidence of our Creator by looking at creation.
- So when we talk about having faith, we're not talking about making wild guesses or believing in made-up stories about God for no reason. We're talking about trusting God based on the evidence around us.
- Maybe sometimes we'll wish we had more evidence that God exists or that Jesus is who he says he is — but we do have evidence. And the evidence we've been given is enough to let us know God is worth trusting.

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.*
 - ✳ **Do you ever wish you had more evidence that God exists and can be trusted? If so, what evidence do you wish you had?**
 - ✳ **What evidence do you think we already have that God exists and can be trusted?**

SCRIPTURE | Hebrews 11:4-22

- The author of Hebrews goes on to give us even more evidence that God is worthy of our trust. The evidence we're given isn't a scientific formula or mathematical proof — it's a long line of people who had faith in God and saw God come through.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Hebrews 11:4-22.*
- Maybe you're familiar with some of these names and maybe you're not, but the people who this letter was written for definitely knew who these people were!
 - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, and Joseph — all of these people confidently put their faith in God, even when they weren't sure of the future. They may not have had all the evidence they wished they could have had to trust God, but they had enough.
 - There are more people in the rest of this list we'll look at next week, but for now, I want to point out something else that's interesting about this passage.
 - Remember when we said faith isn't just about believing — it's about action? That's what this passage is really all about.
- The same thing can be said of everyone in this list: they didn't just have faith in God. They demonstrated their faith by actively following God with their lives.
 - They worshiped God.
 - They made sacrifices for God.
 - They obeyed God, even when they weren't sure it made sense.
 - They took risks when God asked them to.
 - They walked away from their old lives in order to follow God into new ones.
 - They stuck close to God for their entire lives.
- The book of Hebrews celebrates the lives and faith of these people, not because they were perfect, or believed all the right things, or could get an A+ on a Bible quiz, but because they did something about what they believed about God. They turned their faith into action.
 - They confidently put their trust in God, based on the evidence they had available to them.
 - But their trust in God wasn't passive. They didn't just trust God in their heads — they proved they trusted God with their lives.

SCRIPTURE | James 1:22

- I think we're getting a little bit closer to the real definition of "faith" now, don't you? But to make things extra clear, let's take a look at another book in the Bible called James.
 - So far, we've talked about a lot of people who existed before Jesus ever showed up on earth, but this book was recorded by none other than Jesus' own brother.
 - Not only did James grow up with Jesus, but he also followed him and learned from him while Jesus was alive. Then, after Jesus died, rose again, and left earth, James became one of the leaders of the early church who helped Jesus-followers figure out to best follow him.
- Like the author of Hebrews, James seemed to be on a mission to help Jesus' followers see that their faith wasn't just something that could live in their heads. It needed to be something that showed up in their actions.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read James 1:22.*
- James gets straight to the point, right? He says, "It's fine if you want to *hear* what God has to say. But that's not the end. To follow Jesus, you have to actually *do* what God's words say." That's what faith really looks like.
 - Faith might start in your heart or your head. It might start as a belief, or a feeling, or a decision you make. But that can't be the end of it.
 - If your beliefs about God haven't yet turned into a life actively following God, your science experiment isn't yet complete. If you want to have the kind of faith described in the book of Hebrews, action is required. Because **faith is a catalyst for action.**

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

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.*
 - ★ **Why do you think the authors of Hebrews and James put so much emphasis on turning our beliefs into actions?**
 - If we never act on what we say we believe, what do you think would happen to our faith?
 - Read 2 Corinthians 5:7. Have you ever struggled to trust God when it was difficult? If so, tell us about it.

STORY | Share about a time you took a leap of faith.

- I don't know if Abel, Enoch, Abraham, or Sarah's stories are familiar to you, but I know hearing stories of other people's faith can give us more evidence that God can be trusted. That's why the author of Hebrews told so many of them.
- I doubt I have a faith story compelling enough to end up in the book of Hebrews, but let me share just a little piece of it.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a personal story about a time in your life when you took a leap of faith by trusting God and then acting on it. As you tell the story, be sure to explain what evidence convinced you God could be trusted, what action you took to follow God, and what the outcome was. This could be a story of a risk you took while following Jesus, or it could be the story of the time you chose to follow Jesus for the first time.*

REFLECTION | Faith In Action

- So if faith is the catalyst for action, what action do you think God might be inviting you to take?

- Maybe you're new here, and you're still figuring out what you believe about Jesus.
- Maybe you've gone to church forever, but so far, your beliefs haven't really made that much of a difference in your life.
- Or maybe you're all in on following Jesus and are looking for the next step you can take in your relationship with him.
- No matter where you're at, there are a few steps you can take:
 - **COLLECT THE EVIDENCE:** Remember, you may not always have all the answers or evidence you wish you had for trusting God, but what evidence do you already have that God can be trusted? Maybe you just need to be reminded of why you trusted God in the first place, or maybe you need to uncover the evidence that will help you trust God for the first time. You might look:
 - To the pages of Scripture.
 - To your own experiences with God.
 - To the stories, writings, or teachings of other people who follow (or have followed) Jesus.
 - **HEAR WHAT GOD SAYS:** When you believe God can be trusted, following God's lead becomes a lot easier. But do you know what God is actually asking you to do? If you're not reading or hearing God's words through Scripture, you probably don't — but today's a great day to start listening!
 - **DO WHAT GOD SAYS:** Like James said, it's not enough to just hear what God says — you have to actually do something about it. So what would it look like for you to turn your faith into action this week?
 - Do you need to make a decision to follow Jesus for the first time?
 - Do you need to grow your trust by spending more time with God on your own?
 - Do you need to take God's words more seriously by loving someone who's difficult to love?
 - Do you need to do something God wants you to do, even though it's difficult or uncomfortable?
- James 1:22 is our reminder that faith requires action. So today, what action are you going to take to help you grow in your faith?
 - Write it down.
 - Then do it.
 - Then tomorrow, do it again.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder. Place one under each seat, along with a pen, and encourage students to write down their one action step for the day. Encourage students to set an alarm on their phone for 1:22 PM every day this week. Each time it goes off, encourage them to make a plan to turn their faith into action that day.*
- No matter where you are in your relationship with God today, I hope you know that growing in your faith is just one action step away. It doesn't have to be a big step — most of the time, it will probably be just a small one.
- The point is that your faith can't end with what's in your head. There's so much more God wants to do in you and through you! So this week, don't just hear what God says. Go do something about it. Because **faith is the catalyst for action.**

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's something you know God wants you to do, but you haven't done it yet? What's holding you back?**
 - **This week, what's one thing you're going to do in order to turn your beliefs into actions?**