

WEEK 1
LESSON GUIDE

IN THE SHADOWS

BIG IDEA

When you doubt God can be trusted, remember what God's already done.

BIBLE

2 Kings 5:1–14; Psalm 143:1–6;
Hebrews 13:8

ABOUT THIS WEEK

If you've ever doubted something you once trusted, it can feel like a shadow has covered a part of your life. This week, we'll hear about the time Naaman needed to trust God would heal him, even though it didn't look the way he expected. God didn't leave him in the dark, though, and his faith in God is a reminder that **when you doubt God can be trusted, remember what God has already done.**

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | Reverse Spotlight Charades

- We are starting a new series called In the Shadows! Have you ever noticed how even the tiniest flashlight can still be seen, no matter how dark it may be? Let me show you what I mean. Let's get into teams.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this activity, you need a flashlight and a list of words to act out. To stay on theme, use words connected to light or darkness. Using the blank slide provided in your series materials, load each word onto its slide into your presentation software. Split the group into two or three teams. One at a time, invite a player from each team. Have the player close their eyes and flash the word on the screen for everyone to see. Before they begin, turn off the lights and give them a flashlight. When the game leader says go. Their team has 30 seconds to act out their word while the volunteers hold a flash. If the volunteers guess correctly, they earn a point. Choose words that work for the culture of your group. Here are a few ideas to get your imagination going: flashlight, shadow, sunshine, lamp, night, or moon.
- Darkness can make things confusing. Just like that game, the dark can play tricks on you. It makes it difficult to see what's going on, causing us to question things that would be easy to guess if we were in the light.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - **Were you afraid of the dark as a kid? If not, what was something you were afraid of?**
 - **Who are some of the people you trust most in your life?**
 - ★ **What have people you trust most done to earn and keep that trust?**

OBJECT LESSON | Show the Receipts (Part One)

- Think about someone you've learned to trust because of who they are and what they've done for you. Maybe it's a friend or a family member—perhaps even a leader in your youth group.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this object lesson, gather receipts from recent purchases that have meaning to you. Maybe they're from coffee or lunch with a friend or a gift you purchased for someone you care about. Show the receipts and explain what each represents to you.
- When we look at relationships like this, we consider what they say and how they treat us. We're not always aware of it, but we notice who shows up for us and how often they do. Then, over time, we trust them to be in our lives, helping us grow and move forward.
 - For people we trust, we often remember the moments they showed up for us as a "receipt," or proof, of how they cared for us.
 - Each of these physical receipts is a reminder of something important to me. They help me see when I've shown up for others or when they've shown up for me. But it isn't always like that.
- Sometimes, we don't see the receipts we want to see. Maybe the people we care about don't follow through or flake on us. When that happens, we might feel left alone in the dark. Or, worse, we may feel like we can't trust anyone ... even God. Those feelings can make us feel lost and fill us with questions that might initially scare us. Thankfully, we don't have to stay in the shadows very long. God gives us some amazing ideas for what to do when we feel alone in the dark.

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

SCRIPTURE | 2 Kings 5:1–10

- There's a story in the Old Testament about a guy named Naaman, an ancient general. He was an incredible, confident leader. But there was something he was ashamed of. Let's read about it...
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read 2 Kings 5:1–10.
- Naaman had a condition called leprosy, which meant he was barred from parts of the community. It was a condition that would have kept him away from the center of culture and towards the edge in the shadows.
- At this time, a prophet and messenger of God, Elisha, was in the area. And some in Naaman's inner circle thought Elisha could cure him of his skin disease.
- He wasn't given all the attention he thought he deserved. So when Naaman's expectations about how his healing was supposed to go weren't met, he started to doubt Elisha's ability to heal him.

SCRIPTURE | 2 Kings 5:11–14

- Let's see if this doubt stops Naaman from doing what Elisha said.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read 2 Kings 5:11–14.
- In the shadows, Naaman struggled with trusting that God would provide help. In all of the places he thought help would arrive, it didn't. Naaman didn't know God could be trusted, and everything God had done or promised in the past would spill over as true in the future.
- Healing did come for Naaman. It just wasn't how he imagined. When Naaman finally followed Elisha's orders and went to the Jordan River, he was healed. Everything happened as promised, and he had the receipts to remember forever.
 - Our doubt often looks like Naaman's response to Elisha. When we step into the difficult or unknown, we think, "Why is this happening to me *right now*, God?! I don't need this!"
 - These things can make us feel like God has left us in the dark, and we doubt whether things will turn out okay. We can question if God is present with us in the middle of all those things, even if we have evidence of what God has done in the past. When our story begins to play out, and things don't look like we think they should, we tend to get Big Naaman Energy.
- Have you ever had that? Where you cry out, "Hey God! This doesn't look or feel right to me. Please fix it!" Questions and doubts create discomfort in our lives. This is when we have a choice to make. We can doubt

God's in the shadows and forget everything God has done. Or, we can trust God and believe that God is still at work in the shadows.

- Naaman can now point to a moment in his life where he has seen God show up for him and can be trusted. The next time doubt raises its head, Naaman can look at this moment when he was in the darkness, and God filled it with light.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **What does it take for you to trust someone once they have lost your trust?**
 - ✪ **Why do you think Naaman struggled so much with the healing not happening the way he expected? How do the expectations we have mess with the reality we experience?**
 - **Has there ever been a time in your own life where you could relate to Naaman's experience?**

OBJECT LESSON | Show the Receipts (Part Two)

- Remember how we talked about receipts earlier? When we keep the receipts, we remind ourselves how the people around us have supported us. But what do we do when experiencing something brand new like Naaman?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this object lesson, you need your receipts from earlier, along with a binder with some sheet protectors. As you share, stuff some of your receipts into your binder as if you were saving them for a later time or someone else.*
- Throughout your life, you'll have all types of experiences that are new to you. But just because you don't have an experience doesn't mean you must keep your feelings to yourself or hide in the shadows.
- See, receipts aren't just for you. They're for the people around you, too. If you're working through a dark time in your life that you've never experienced, that's a great time to reach out to someone in your community. Ask someone who's been following Jesus longer than you. Invite someone you know to step into your shadows and help bring you back towards light.
- These receipts aren't magic pills that make the doubt disappear, but they help us sustain ourselves in these difficult, doubt-filled moments.

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 143:1–6

- One of the ancient kings of God's people, David, wrote songs and poems to God when he was at his highest and feeling his lowest—when his trust was high and when his doubts were overwhelming. A lot of these are saved for us in the book of Psalms.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 143:1–6.*
- In the first part of this Psalm, David cried out to God for help and mercy. He told God how weak and numb his spirit was and that he felt the enemy was chasing after him. He's discouraged. I think we can all relate to that. But something changes in him. David recalled the times when God showed up for him and rescued him in his darkest times. He stretched his hands out to God because his faith in God was all he had left.
 - We often stay in the darkness of our doubt for a long time before we remember what God did for us in the past. Part of that is because we might struggle to see how God has shown up. But maybe God showed up through a caring friend or a well-timed text.
 - Perhaps a song we heard had just the right message for us. We won't always experience God showing up for us in significant, physical ways like Naaman did. Sometimes, it's the smaller moments that can bring light back to the shadows.
- When we feel heavy with our emotions and struggles, that's okay. We can lament like David and allow

feelings of grief in. Lament is that feeling where we know things are like they should be. It's a heavy sadness when we share how hard things have been.

- In Psalms like the one we just read, lament is necessary. It's part of the path toward praise. It is the first step to remember God's love for us. Even though the feeling is heavy, we can trust God to keep leading us through because we've already seen what God has done.
- Through stories like Naaman, poems, and psalms, we have a rich collection of reminders that God is good and God is for us—even when the path looks different than we might expect. **When you doubt God can be trusted, remember what God's already done.**

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

MUSIC | "Life Has A Way" (Anthony Hamilton)

- Life has a way of humbling us. Our doubts and questions remind us we don't know it all. Like Naaman, we may think we have God's plans for our lives figured out, but God's plans are so much bigger, more wonderful, and more mysterious than we could ever imagine. **When you doubt God can be trusted, remember what God's already done.** One way that helps is by listening to music.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach the next section, play the song "Life Has a Way" by Anthony Hamilton, or since this isn't a Christian artist, choose music with similar themes from an artist you like. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#) Here's [a link](#) to preview the song for your personal use.*
- Listening to songs like this helps remind me that God uses every moment in our lives to help us grow our relationships. Here are a few more ways, besides music, that can help us remember to trust God in seasons of doubt.
 - **DON'T FEAR THE SHADOWS.** Fear of doubt and questions can make these things seem so much more powerful than they are. No matter how many doubts you've had, some people in the Bible and our community have felt similar things. You're not the only person to have these thoughts. Write down a few of your doubts this week, even if it feels scary.
 - **REMEMBER THE LIGHT.** God has saved the receipts for you. Throughout the Bible and your life, God has shown up. Look back through your story to see the moments when God helped you. It could be through timely advice or someone who sat and listened to you. This week, read the Psalms and see where God showed up in big and small ways.
 - **SHARE YOUR SHADOW.** Don't hide away. Naaman needed to step out of the shadows to share his experience and be healed. David chose to write down his feelings in poetry and songs. This week, share your struggles with others. You don't need to hide your struggles away from the people who love you, and you don't need to hide them from God, either. Share how doubt is showing up in your story with God and a trusted friend this week.
- Our doubts are a way to grow our faith and connection with God. You don't need to be afraid. This week, let's give ourselves the space we need to process and invite other people into our lives to share a bit of their light with us, too.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ★ **Do you feel like you can be as honest with God as David was? Why or why not?**
 - ★ **Who can you reach out to when you need help remembering what God has done in your life?**

RESPONSE | Our Doubt Board

- It takes courage to name the doubts and questions you're experiencing. But sometimes, when we call out our doubts, it takes their power away—especially when we do this in a community.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this reflection, you need butcher paper and multiple pens of a single color. If you used the backdrop from the environment guide, we built space into painted areas of that backdrop for this module. If not, create a board out of butcher paper or poster board in one part of your meeting area. Set out some pens or markers all of the same color for teenagers to write any doubts or questions they may be working through this week. If you feel like anonymity will help people more, provide some foldable sheets of paper for them to write their doubts on and then attach them to the board. You'll use this board each week of your teaching, so be sure to change your pen and marker colors.*
- The words you wrote may start a conversation in your small group or with a friend who has walked through something similar. Or someone else's comments on this board may remind you that you're not alone in your feelings. We can't promise all of these doubts will go away by the end of this series, but we can promise that God will be with you as you walk through the shadows.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups.*
 - **Read Hebrews 13:8. Why do you think it's important amid our doubts to trust that God never changes? This week, what would it look like to talk to God when you have doubts?**
 - **Today, when you doubt God can be trusted, what is one step you can take to remember what God has already done?**

REFLECTION | Light The Way

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this response, you need [battery-powered tea light candles](#), masking tape, and markers. Instruct your group to write on a tape affirmation of God they can remember when they experience moments of doubt or questions, such as "God is with me" or "I trust God is leading me." Then, they will tape this to one of the tea light candles. If using the Doubt Board module, have teenagers place their candles under the board. Otherwise, have students take their candles home and put them where they can view them daily. If they are unsure about God or are new to following Jesus and are unsure what to write, Have them re-read Psalm 146 and have them write something from that Psalm that resonates with them.*
- Sharing our doubts or questions is one thing, but it's not all we need. When we start to doubt whether or not we can trust God, we need to look back on what God has already done in our lives, the lives of our friends, and in the stories from the Bible. Hopefully, this little phrase and candle can help **when you doubt God can be trusted, remember what God's already done.**