

WEEK 2
LESSON GUIDE

IN THE SHADOWS

BIG IDEA

When Jesus' followers disappoint you, be what you don't see.

BIBLE

Jeremiah 7:1–7; Psalm 25:1–3; Psalm 42:11

ABOUT THIS WEEK

It would be so great if we could snap our fingers and shine a light from them anytime we were lost in the darkness. This week, we'll look at one of the messages Jeremiah needed to share with his community when they weren't living up to God's expectations. Jeremiah chose to step up and become a light to his community because **when Jesus' followers disappoint you, be what you don't see.**

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | Shadow Assassins

- Welcome back to another week of In the Shadows! We're so excited you're here as we discuss doubts and questions. To get us started, let's play a game!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *To play, break up your group into groups of about ten people and have everyone stand in a large circle facing each other. Select one person to play the role of detective. Send the detective out of the room momentarily and select one assassin from the remaining players. Once the detective returns, have them stand in the circle's center to look for the assassin. If the assassin makes eye contact with a player and winks, that player must safely fall to the floor. The detective has three guesses to name the assassin. If they win, give them a prize. Repeat as many times as you want with different assassins and detectives.*
- In a game like that, things aren't always what they seem. It might look like an assassin is in a specific part of the room, but you wouldn't know until you got closer. To be a detective, you must pay attention to all the details, but sometimes your instincts could lead you wrong.
- A wrong guess can feel pretty disappointing—especially if you feel confident. Disappointment is one of my least favorite feelings, but we can't always know when something will be disappointing.

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.*
 - **Would you consider yourself a competitive person? What's a game you hate to lose?**
 - ★ **What are some words you would use to describe what disappointment feels like?**
 - **How do you handle disappointment? How do you try to recover from it?**

VIDEO | A Clip from "The Fellowship of the Ring"

- In *The Lord of the Rings*, the heroes leave a safe place to continue their journey to defeat evil. Before they do,

they each receive a gift that will help them in the future. One of the gifts goes to the unlikely hero of the story, Frodo. His gift is different than the ones everyone else received.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, play a [short clip](#) (0:01–1:03) like this one from *Lord of the Rings*, where a character receives a gift for dark times. We always suggest viewing the clip beforehand to make sure you think it's a video that will be a good fit for your context! For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
 - Frodo was given the gift of light when he needed it most. Galadriel, who gave the gifts, was wise enough to know he would get into situations that were hard to see through. In those moments, she knew he needed a guiding light to help him continue.
 - Frodo's journey would put him in situations where people would disappoint him, betray him, and try to take advantage of him. These people weren't just strangers doing this, but people close to him. He needed a gift like this to light the way forward in moments of darkness.
- Maybe you know what that's like. Perhaps you've been in a situation lately where you've just felt disappointed in yourself or a friend. Or maybe you feel betrayed by people who say they follow Jesus.
- They are supposed to be reliable and follow through like Jesus did! But when they don't, that can make things scary and maybe even cause us to question our beliefs. When this happens, we don't need to hide away when we feel disappointed or betrayed. Instead, we can look for ways to take steps back towards the light.

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

SCRIPTURE | Jeremiah 7:1–7

- If you're ever looking for a great example of what it looks like to walk in the light, you *need* to follow Jeremiah's story. Jeremiah wasn't an experienced communicator, didn't have a background in leadership, and wasn't from an influential family.
- Jeremiah was just a regular guy who got his start as a teenager. God invited him to tell God's people the truth, but he still didn't feel very qualified. He thought he was too young and inexperienced. He wanted to hide in the shadows. But, eventually, he trusts God and delivers the message.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read *Jeremiah 7:1–7*.
- If you were Jeremiah delivering a message like this, it might feel pretty heavy. Jeremiah was calling his community back to God's standards. They were supposed to represent God's heart for people on earth, but they weren't living up to that expectation.
- Instead, they exploited vulnerable people, hurt each other, and worshiped idols and false gods. They ignored the guidelines God put in place for them and wanted to do whatever worked for them. God looked at this community of people, asking, "What happened? You were supposed to care for everyone around you!"
 - Jeremiah understood God's disappointment. He knew what was expected of God's people, saw what was happening in his community, and how the leaders treated everyone. Who would finally step up and fix things?
 - And that's when God calls him. But after God calls Jeremiah, he retreats to the shadow. Surely *he* couldn't do that. He couldn't be the messenger. But God believed in Jeremiah and invited him to leave the shadows to show his community what living out God's words could look like. Jeremiah became a living, walking example of what faith in God looks like for the whole community.
- What God does here is a pattern we all can learn. When God saw what was happening, God didn't give up, like I would have done. Instead of continual disappointment, God breathed new life into the community. It was a wake-up call for them to confess and be the people God desired them to be.
- We can't stop people from disappointing us. People make mistakes—we make mistakes all the time. But

instead of giving up on a relationship, we can try something different. We can become the thing we don't see in our relationships.

STORY | Someone Who Turned Their Disappointment Into Action

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Share a story about when someone you know noticed a need but felt let down by the actions of religious individuals. Perhaps they observed that people experiencing homelessness struggled to get nutritious food, leading them to initiate a community garden. Or maybe they were disheartened by how Christians around them engaged in gossip and hurtful conversations. How did this disappointment shape their expectations? And more importantly, how did they choose to respond?

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 25:1–3

- David once wrote a psalm that came from a place of disappointment. He was in a situation where he felt he was being challenged unfairly, and he wrote a poem about it.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Psalm 25:1–3.
- Instead of letting his frustration with the situation eat him up from the inside, David went to God. He shared his feelings with God and discussed what he hoped to see. But this Psalm starts with David saying, "I put my trust in you." Whatever the specifics of this situation, David could recognize that people weren't trusting God. They might be the people attacking him or shaming him.
- David knew better than that, though. He tells anyone listening that his trust will be in God and God alone. Nothing could shake that. He became the thing he wasn't seeing in his community.
- We can follow David's example. When we feel disappointed in others who say they follow Jesus, we can go to God with our frustrations. Instead, we can see it as an invitation to love God and the people around us as God always intended.
- Our disappointments, doubts, and questions because of other people's hypocrisy don't have to keep us in the shadows. Instead, we can enter the light and live differently for ourselves and our community.

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.
 - **How would you have responded if you were in Jeremiah's position and had to tell the people of God that they were living in a way God knew was not the best for them or the people around them?**
 - **Why do you think God cares so much about the things mentioned in the Jeremiah passage? What do you think caring about those things looks like today?**
 - ★ **Based on the passage in Psalms, how did David handle his disappointment? Why do you think processing disappointment this way might be helpful?**

IMAGE | Seek-and-Find

- There are days when life feels like one of these seek-and-find puzzles. We know the things we're looking for are out there, but it's hard to find them.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, Show an image of a seek-and-find puzzle like *Where's Waldo*, *I Spy*, or an image [like this one from Gergely Dudás](#). Keep the image on the screen while you talk. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
- It can take so much of our focus and attention to find what we're looking for that we can get frustrated when we spend time looking. We can think, "Why isn't it right here where it's supposed to be?" Maybe you know what that's like. You've been waiting for your friends to follow through. You've been waiting for answers to

your problems. You've been waiting for something in your situation to improve.

- Over and over, you've been disappointed by what's in front of you. God invites you to change your approach and, instead of being frustrated, become the thing you've been looking for. Be the reliable friend you long for, the person who looks to right wrongs in your community, or the one who stands up for others. You don't need to keep looking and waiting for someone else to do it.
- When looking around and not seeing what you'd hoped, you can act courageously and step into the role. Just like we saw with Jeremiah and David, you can trust God to help you live how God wants you to. **When Jesus' followers disappoint you, be what you don't see.**

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

MUSIC | "Jesus I Have My Doubts" (Jon Foreman)

- We know that Jesus' followers are called to help heal wounds, right wrongs, love people well, and wisely speak the truth no matter the cost, but frequently, it seems they do anything but that.
- So, the next time Jesus' followers disappoint you, here are a few questions you can ask to help you start being what you don't see.
 - **WHAT'S MY ROLE IN THE PROBLEM?** Learning your role is about more than knowing how to respond. In some situations, we need to acknowledge we may have played a part in what is frustrating us. Maybe we spent much time thinking the issue was someone else's problem. Perhaps we didn't even notice there was a problem. Acknowledging the part you played is the first step in discovering a solution.
 - **WHAT DOES A SOLUTION LOOK LIKE?** This is when you get to be creative. You can start to brainstorm solutions to real problems with your friends. You might have big dreams of fixing a problem that other people are ignoring, but slowly whittle those down to something you can do with your time and other resources. Sometimes, the simple, loving solutions are better than the big, sweeping ones. Ask yourself, "What can I do right now to make a difference?" and see where that question takes you.
 - **ASK GOD FOR COURAGE.** Like Jeremiah and David, we won't get far without God's help. When we want to step up to be the things we're not seeing in our community, we need *lots* of courage. Standing out can feel scary and vulnerable, but helping others and setting an example of what it looks like to follow God's words is worth it. When you're ready, ask God to give you the courage to step out and be what you are not seeing in your community.
 - **WHAT AM I FEELING?** Be honest about what you're feeling. Both Jeremiah and David took what they were feeling straight to God. They didn't try to hide it away in the shadows. They went to God with their honest pain and questions. It's okay to admit you're frustrated or disappointed. Be honest about it. It's the only way to overcome the doubt it may be causing.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you close out this module and transition into the reflection, play the song "Jesus I Have My Doubts" (Jon Foreman). But make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. Here's [a link](#) to preview the song for your personal use. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- Sometimes, as we think about questions like this, we can get into our feelings in ways that stop us from doing something. When that happens to me, I find music to be really helpful. "Jesus I Have My Doubts" is a beautiful song that talks about what it looks like to name all the feelings we have around our doubts.

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.

- ★ **Who are some people who can help you get the perspective you need when dealing with disappointment?**
- **Read Psalm 42:11. What would it look like to ask yourself why you are so downcast? In what way does being self-reflective about disappointment help us process?**

REFLECTION | The Doubt Board

- Sometimes, just writing down our frustrations can help us find a healthy next step. We want to provide you with space to write down some of the doubts, questions, and disappointments you've seen, so the next time **Jesus' followers disappoint you, be what you don't see.**
- **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 for teenagers to write any doubts or questions they may be working through this week. If you feel 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.
- These are just a few ways to move from the shadows of disappointment into Jesus' light. We don't have to let our doubts have the final say. We can overcome and be a part of helping people experience a new way of following Jesus.

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.
- ★ **How can you tell you are stuck in disappointment when you are simply processing disappointment? What is something you can do when you feel stuck with disappointment?**
- **This week, when Jesus' followers disappoint you, what is one thing you will do to be what you don't see?**

PRAYER | Breath Prayer

- To wrap up our time together, we're going to practice something called a breath prayer. It's pretty simple: as you inhale, you'll pray one phrase and another as you exhale.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this prayer exercise, you need the slide included in [this week's series of materials](#). Have it on the screen as you lead your teenagers through the following breath prayer exercise.
- Today, as we pray, we'll focus on these words...
 - As you inhale, pray, "God invites me."
 - As you exhale, pray, "I can be what I don't see."
- In moments this week where you feel frustrated at how followers of Jesus are treating others, or even if you are frustrated at yourself for how you treated the people around you this week, use this prayer as a way to remind you that when **Jesus' followers disappoint you, be what you don't see.**