

OPENING: *Watch the video.*

DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever been told not to ask so many questions? Maybe you've felt annoying or guilty for asking questions — especially when it comes to your faith.
- *Tell a story from your life about a time you (or someone you know) were told to ask fewer questions about God, or your questions were ignored or silenced. Share how that interaction impacted you and your faith.*
- They thought my questions were a sign that I was drifting away from God, but they (and I) needed to understand that asking questions was actually a good thing.
- **My questions weren't a sign that I didn't have faith — my questions helped deepen my faith**, because seeking answers gave me the chance to learn more about God, myself, others, and the world.
- Faith isn't about uncritically listening and accepting what someone tells you. Faith is continuing to search for God in the midst of our questions.
- Like Zoe, asking questions like, "Why?" is a healthy sign of curiosity. It's a sign we want to learn, grow, and discover new things — that's a good thing.
- Speaking of questions, I've got a few for you. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions — they're just designed to get you thinking!

POLL YOUR ANSWERS: *Answer the following questions in only one of three ways:*

"never," "sometimes," or "always."

- *You pray about a big test coming up. Is it okay to doubt God will help you study well and get through it?*
- *You have a big test coming up. You haven't studied, but you ask God to give you the right answers anyway. Is it okay to doubt God will make you smarter overnight?*
- *You've had a crush on someone for over a year. You pray they'll fall in love with you in time for the school dance. Is it okay to doubt God will come through as your wingman?*
- *Your family is experiencing a crisis. You pray for God's help. Is it okay to doubt that God will fix the problem?*
- *It's time for college applications. You pray for God to get you into your ideal college and for a scholarship. Is it okay to doubt that God will fulfill all your hopes and dreams?*

- *You find yourself in a dangerous situation. You ask God to get you out of it. Is it okay to doubt that God will rescue you?*
- *You messed up and there are massive consequences. You pray for God's forgiveness and that people won't get too hurt by what you did. Is it okay to doubt God will forgive you or make everything okay?*
- *You see or hear about something tragic happening in the world. You ask God would fix the problem. Is it okay to doubt God will intervene?*
- Some of these scenarios were very serious and some weren't, but I'm guessing you've had personal experience with at least one of those kinds of prayers.
- **On a scale of 1 to 10, how often do you have doubts or questions about God?**
- **Are you able to share your doubts and questions with anyone? If so, who? If not, what's preventing you from sharing?**

WE'RE NOT THE FIRST TO HAVE DOUBTS OR QUESTIONS

- If you've ever had a question or doubt about God, you're not the first. Today we're going to look at two examples of people doubting or questioning God and see what we can learn from them.
- The book of Psalms is an ancient book of worship and songs to God. That's why you see so many references to harps, lyres, and lutes — those are the instruments they had when these songs were written.
- These songs were often opportunities for people to praise God, but they weren't all joyful. Many of the Psalms were expressions of desperation, heartache, and mourning. Some sound pretty hopeless.

SCRIPTURE: *Read Psalm 88 together.*

- Wow, the author of the Psalm really makes their feelings clear. Let's talk about it.
- **What's going on in this Psalm?**
- **What is the author's attitude toward God here? What brought you to that conclusion?**
- **What part of this Psalm do you identify with most?**
- **Did any of this Psalm make you uncomfortable? Which part and why?**

- There is raw honesty in this psalm. The Psalmist is wondering if God is going to show up, or if God has abandoned them. It doesn't have a happy or hopeful ending — it ends by saying the psalmist is alone and that everything feels dark.
- This must have been hard to write, but does anyone else find it comforting to read? It's encouraging to know God doesn't expect us to always be happy and carefree. **God allows us to express our pain honestly, openly, and publicly.**
- Sometimes life is painful, unfair, and overwhelming, so it makes sense that we might sometimes wonder (or even doubt) if God will ever come through.
- This psalm reveals it's okay to be raw and honest — God can handle our anger, disappointment, frustration, and even doubt.

SCRIPTURE: *Read Psalm 22*

- If this phrase ("Why have you forsaken me?") sounds familiar, it might be because of the Person who quoted it in Matthew 27:46. When Jesus was dying on the cross, suffering for our sake, He cried out using these same words. Even Jesus, in His moment of suffering, used the Psalms to express His pain, as well as His hope.
- Even though this psalmist begins by asking why God has abandoned him, it becomes more hopeful.
- **How are Psalm 88 and Psalm 22 different?**
- **Psalm 22:3 & 9 both start with the word "yet." Why are these verses so important?**
- **What is happening in Psalm 22:11 & 19? What are some reasons you might say something like this to God?**
- **In your own words, what is the Psalmist saying in Psalm 22:24-28?**
- In these two psalms alone, we can see that doubts and questions can take many forms.
 - In Psalm 88, the psalmist seems to blame God for their painful situation. Their cries to God are dark and hopeless.
 - In Psalm 22, while the psalmist is still feeling abandoned, there is hope. Despite their pain, they still trust in God's faithfulness.
- Isn't it reassuring that our journeys with God (even our questions and doubts) don't all have to follow a specific formula?
 - Sometimes we doubt or question God because we're in pain.

- Sometimes it's because we just need to vent, or think, or work things through.
- Sometimes it's because we're asking hard questions and really trying to find the answers.
- I don't know what doubts or questions you have now, or will have in the future, but I hope you'll remember this: like the psalmists, like everyone who has ever followed God, and even like Jesus, you're not alone. **You're not alone in your questions**, doubts, pain, or frustration.
- When we think we're alone in our doubts and questions, it's easy to lose hope. But when we understand we're not alone, and that having doubts and questions doesn't disqualify us from following Jesus, we can discover how to move forward.
 - Having doubts and questions doesn't necessarily mean you don't have faith. Asking questions like, "why?" is part of how God created us.
 - But if we ever want to move past our questions, to say "and yet," to our doubts, then we (like the psalmist) need to start by admitting they exist.
- Remember those situations we looked at in the beginning of our conversation? There are so many everyday situations that could cause us to question or doubt God.
 - When you ask for God's help on a big test or important challenge, but you still fail, you might wonder why God didn't come through for you.
 - When you ask God to make your crush fall in love with you, but they never do, you might wonder if God is really listening to your prayers at all.
 - When your family experiences a crisis God doesn't fix, you might wonder if God really is as good or as kind as they say.
 - When you don't get the college acceptance letter or scholarship you prayed for, you might ask if God really will take care of you, or if you're on your own.
 - When you're in a dangerous situation and God doesn't rescue you, or you mess up big time and hurt people, or you're overwhelmed by something tragic happening in the world, you might think, "Either God isn't the all-powerful miracle-worker I thought He was, or God just doesn't care."
- I don't know how doubt or questions will show up in your life, but I know that they will. And when they do, I hope you remember this: **you're not alone in your questions**.
 - You're not alone because you're not the only one who has ever had doubts or questions. Even Jesus
 - And you're no alone because in the midst of everything, God remains faithful to you. God never leaves your side.

- When you know you're not alone, you can begin to find hope in the midst of even your biggest questions and doubts. So, I'll say it again: **you're not alone in your questions.**

DISCUSSION: (If you don't have anyone to discuss with, answer on your own)

- **What stood out to you most from today's conversation?**
- **Which Psalm (22 or 88) did you identify with more, and why?**
- **How is it encouraging to know you're not alone in your doubts or questions?**
- **Why do you think it's helpful to be honest about our doubts or questions with God? What about with others?**
- **Have you thought of anyone who you could share your doubts or questions with? Who?**
- **Have you ever had a question or doubt about God? Share it, if you feel comfortable.**
- **Have you ever shared one of your questions or doubts about God with someone else? If so, how did that conversation go?**
- **Has anyone ever shared a question or a doubt with you? If so, how did you feel and respond? Is there anything you wish you'd done differently?**
- **When was the last time you talked to God about one of your questions or doubts?**
- **Read Hebrews 4:14-16. What can we learn from this passage about dealing with our own doubts and questions?**
- **Based on our conversation today, what do you think God would want us to know about our questions or doubts?**
- **What's one way today's conversation is going to change the way you see your own doubts or questions?**
- **What's one way today's conversation is going to change the way you see others' doubts or questions?**

REFLECTION: *Take a few moments to write a psalm to God, expressing any questions or doubts. It could be a poem, a song, a letter, or even a drawing.*