

Junior Soldiers

Unit 12 : Lesson 2

Doubting Thomas: Be Prepared!



PURPOSE : For the children to explore and understand that it is normal and okay to have doubts, even doubts about Jesus and what we believe about him.

‘Jesus said, “Thomas, do you have faith because you have seen me?
The people who have faith in me without seeing me are
the ones who are really blessed!”’

John 20:29

‘Dear Friends, keep building on the foundation of your most holy faith, as the Holy Spirit helps you to pray. And keep in step with God’s love, as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to show how kind he is by giving you eternal life.
Be helpful to all who may have doubts. Rescue any who need to be saved, as you would rescue someone from the fire. Then with fear in your own hearts,
have mercy on everyone who needs it’

Jude 1:20-23

Consider & Prepare

Read:

Jude 1:17-25

Romans 12:2

This is both a difficult lesson and also a lesson that is essential to explore with children. It is important that they know that doubts are both normal and okay and that, at different times, we all have doubts about a great range of things. If we don’t explore this area with children and prepare them for times when they might have doubts, then we are setting them up to fail. Children need to be aware of what it is really like to live as a follower of Jesus and that sometimes we will have doubts and uncertainty.

During this lesson we aim to help children explore and understand the story of the disciple Thomas and how he doubted that Jesus was alive. If Thomas had doubts about Jesus when he knew him personally and lived with him, how much harder it must be for us when we are 2,000 years away and cannot see Jesus in person.

We want the children to know that we do not have to see Jesus to believe in him, and that there are lots of other things that inform us about Jesus, who he was and how he impacts our lives. It is okay to explore what those things are by reading the Bible, praying, reading books or articles, talking to people who have been Christians for a longer time or had different experiences etc.

We want the children to understand that doubting is sometimes just part of life and learning, and that they need to be prepared for times when they may doubt certain things about Jesus. Having some of the supports and resources mentioned above in place will help us to explore our doubts without losing touch of what we truly believe about Jesus.

It is important during this lesson that leaders share (appropriately) some of the times they have had doubts about aspects of their faith, and how they wrestled and explored matters and learnt from their doubts.

We can learn lessons from all people in the Bible—what to do and what not to do—and from Thomas we can learn to have the courage to ask questions and to think carefully about spiritual matters as we establish our own unique relationship with God. The children should leave this morning not being afraid to ask questions and knowing that answers will be found if they are persistent in seeking, and do so with the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Connecting In

What you will need:

For 'Connecting In'

- Slips of paper in a bag or container
- Large signs saying 'I believe it' and 'I doubt it'

For 'The Main Thing'

- Bibles
- Butchers paper
- Textas

For 'Tying In'

- Red sticky dots
- Brainstorming sheet from 'The Main Thing'

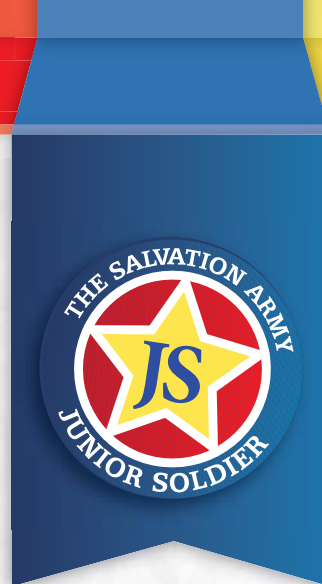
For 'Home & Beyond'

- Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards for each child.

Statements in a bag...

For this activity you will need a container or bag filled with a range of statements on slips of paper. You might like to choose from the list below or create some of your own.

'I wonder if I said to you, the other day while I was walking along the street I saw a blue cow drinking from the water fountain, whether you would say 'I doubt it very much' or 'I believe it'. (*Give the children a moment to respond.*) Okay, so we know that that statement is something you would doubt very much. We are going to participate in an activity where you need to choose one or the other response, 'I DOUBT IT' or 'I BELIEVE IT', when a statement picked out of the container is read out.'



Some examples of statements are:

- Outside it is raining lollipops
- I have a purple dog
- Jesus is God's Son
- Trains fly through the air
- Hens lay eggs
- Jelly beans grow on trees
- Giraffes can do somersaults
- When you turn the age of five, is this the oldest you have ever been in your life at that time?
- A human can live until they are 200 years old
- When you break a bone, do you have a fraction in your leg?
- Polar bears spend 90% of their time dancing
- Jesus is alive



Link... 'Just now we have looked at some very outrageous statements. For most of you it was clear very quickly whether you doubted the comment or believed the statement.

- What were some of the statements that you were totally certain about either way? Why?
- I wonder if there were any statements that you were not entirely sure whether you believed it or not. Why?
- I wonder if there are times when people around you say something that you are not sure about—perhaps it is someone telling of something that happened to them and you are not quite sure if it 'really' happened or if it happened 'exactly' as they say it did.

'There are times when people tell us things or we hear or read something, and we are not quite sure of it—we are having a doubt as to whether it is real or true or if we fully believe what is being said. This happens in all areas of our lives including in relation to what we believe about Jesus. As someone who loves and follows Jesus, we are all going to have doubts at different times; there will be things we are not quite sure of or fully believe. This is normal and it's okay to wrestle with how you might feel about something.

'I think that having doubts can help you to understand something better and think about something deeper, rather than just accepting everything all the time. We are going to explore today how even one of the disciples had doubts when Jesus came back to life, and also how the Bible encourages us to help each other when those times of doubting come.'



Believe it or not...

Put a large 'I believe it!' sign on one side of the room and a large 'I doubt it!' sign on the opposite side of the room. The leader reads out the questions from below and then the children run to the side they choose in response.

'Today I am going to tell you some things. If you believe what I am saying, go over to the 'I believe it' side but if you doubt what I am saying and think it might not be true, then go over to the 'I doubt it' side.

- Did you know that penguins can smell toothpaste from several miles away? (False)
- Did you know that in Tokyo in Japan, a bicycle is faster than a car for trips of less than 50 minutes? (True)
- Did you know every day, on average, 20 banks are robbed in the world? (True)
- Did you know 50 years ago, M&Ms were candy-coated peas during a chocolate shortage? (False)
- Did you know you are more likely to be stung by a bee in windy weather? (False)

- Did you know when glass breaks, the cracks move faster than 1,500 kilometers per hour. To photograph the event, a camera must shoot at a millionth of a second! (True)
- Did you know a violin contains about 70 pieces of wood? (True)
- Did you know the Irish like Thomas the Tank Engine so much that they have put faces on all their trains? (False)
- Did you know that elastic in your underwear will last twice as long if you freeze it after washing it? (False)
- Did you know they have square watermelons in Japan because they stack better? (True)



Link... ‘Have you ever had a time when someone has told you something that you didn’t quite believe it was true? Like maybe they went fishing and said they caught a fish this big...and you looked at them and said, “I don’t know...can you prove that it was that big?”

- I wonder if you saw the fish in a photo if you would you believe it then.
- I wonder why you think we might doubt things.

‘There are times when people tell us things or we hear or read something, and we are not quite sure of it—we are having a doubt as to whether it is real or true or if we fully believe what is being said. This happens in all areas of our lives including in relation to what we believe about Jesus. As someone who loves and follows Jesus, we are all going to have doubts at different times; there will be things we are not quite sure of or fully believe. This is normal and it’s okay to wrestle with how you might feel about something.

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The Main Thing

Doubting Thomas...

‘Today we have started to think about doubts or things that we are not quite sure about. After Jesus died and came back to life, one of the disciples named Thomas had doubts about what really happened. Thomas is often referred to as ‘Doubting Thomas.’ Maybe you have heard adults use that expression before. We are going to explore what the Bible says and see how the story of Thomas can encourage us that it is okay to have questions when it comes to matters of faith and belief.

‘Let’s look up the story from John 20:24–29 and read it together:

Everyone had seen Jesus die on that cross. So imagine their how excited they were when Jesus came to the disciples after he had risen from the dead. Now Thomas, one of the disciples was not with them when Jesus had come.

So when the other disciples told him that they had seen the Lord, Thomas couldn’t quite believe it. He said that unless he saw the nail marks in his hands and could put his fingers where they were or put his hand into Jesus’ side, he just wasn’t going to believe it.

Well, about a week later all the disciples were in the house, this time Thomas being with him. And even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. Jesus told Thomas to feel his hands and feel his side. He told Thomas to stop doubting and to believe! Of course then, Thomas believed it was him!

Then Jesus said this: ‘Thomas, do you have faith because you have seen me? The people who have faith in me without seeing me are the ones who are really blessed!’

- I wonder if you can imagine how Thomas might have felt. I think it would have been pretty difficult for him to truly believe what he was seeing.
- I wonder if you can think of a time where you have been like Thomas and doubted what was happening or being said. *(Allow some time for the children to share.)*
- I wonder if you always have to see something before you believe it or perhaps there are things that you believe without the proof. *(Explore this with the children.)*
- Jesus talks about believing without seeing – he is talking about FAITH – I wonder if you can tell me an example of believing something by faith.



Faith definitions:

- **Faith is confidence or trust in something or someone.**
- **A strong or unshakeable belief in something especially without proof or evidence.**
- **A confident belief in the truth, value or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing.**

‘Having faith and believing things without seeing proof can be difficult at times. There will be times in your life, as you follow Jesus, when you will have things you are unsure about. It might be in relation to who Jesus was or some of the things he did, or it might be about how you can believe all this happened, or it might be being unsure about how Jesus is asking us to live our lives.

‘I am sure that each of you has some questions about Jesus or some things you are not sure of. Having these questions is okay—we can see from the passage that even Thomas, who spent so much time with Jesus, had a hard time believing some things that happened, so it is pretty normal for any of us today to have questions or doubts.’

You may like to do this brief activity as a whole group or divide into small groups. Provide some butchers paper and textas for each group. Take some time with the children to explore some of the questions, doubts or things that they are not sure about. It is important for the leaders to share some of their own questions, too.

- ‘I wonder what you wonder about Jesus or God or the Bible. I wonder what you are unsure of. I wonder what you have doubts about.’ *(Write down the responses.)*



Getting in shape spiritually...

‘As we have already discussed, having doubts and questions is normal but what we do about them can be very important for our faith and how we continue to follow Jesus. Just like we need to look after ourselves physically and think about what we eat and the exercise we do, we need to look after ourselves as a follower of Jesus. This might be thinking about ways that will help us to explore the doubts and questions that we sometimes have.

‘If you were in a sporting team, you would need to be prepared for the game and all the challenges by listening to the coach, practicing hard and getting in shape physically. Today we are going to do some exercises.’

- Ask the children what sort of exercises they would do to prepare themselves for sport.
- As the children suggest some exercises, either ask them to give a demonstration or do the exercise as a group. Examples might be push-ups, sit-ups, star jumps, jogging on the spot, stretches etc.

‘We have had fun doing some exercises to help make us physically fit, and just like we need to be physically fit we also need to get into shape spiritually to be a healthy follower of Jesus.’

→ Ask the children if they have suggestions on what would help us be spiritually fit as followers of Jesus. (Some of the children may come up with some from the suggestions below. If they do, elaborate the point.)

After the children have come up with their suggestions, go over the following ones that may not have not been covered or that you would like to reinforce.

- It is healthy to have a range of friends from all different areas of life but be aware that it is very helpful to include many Christian friends. Choose your friends carefully, it reminds us of this in the Bible when it says, 'Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character"' (1 Corinthians 15:33). Choose friends who will be supportive and encouraging and a good influence on you and how you follow Jesus.
- Be wise with what TV shows you watch. Choose shows that show and encourage a good way to live, how we speak to others and how we treat people. Are the shows you watch appropriate for your age?
- Make sure when you listen to music that you have a good balance in your choices. Listen to music about Jesus as well as the latest songs that are out. Be wise about what latest songs you listen to, some of them are not appropriate for your age and are not encouraging or supportive of people and how we should treat them.
- Pray and stay connected with God, tell him about all the things that you have questions about and are not quite sure of. Make time regularly to talk to God.
- It's also important to chat with other key people such as your family, your Big Bud and other significant people in the church community to help you as you wrestle with questions and doubts and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.
- Read your Bible. Read other books that will help you to understand Jesus, who he is and what that means to you as a follower of Jesus. If you are not sure what to read ask your Big Bud or someone in your family to help you choose something that might be helpful.



'It is important as followers of Jesus that we get into shape spiritually and listen to our coach, Jesus. So when we have doubts, we can find some ways to work through and wrestle with them as we continue to follow Jesus. We need to be prepared for those doubts.'

Tying In

Support and encourage each other...

Read Jude 1:20–23 (CEV) together:

Dear friends, keep building on the foundation of your most holy faith, as the Holy Spirit helps you to pray. And keep in step with God's love, as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to show how kind he is by giving you eternal life. Be helpful to all who may have doubts. Rescue any who need to be saved, as you would rescue someone from the fire. Then with fear in your own hearts, have mercy on everyone who needs it.

'The Holy Spirit can do that work in you, to shape you into the image of Jesus and to stand out in this world as a follower of Jesus. We also need to support and encourage others who might have questions and things that they are not sure of.'

Distribute two dot stickers to each child and they can place one dot on the back of each hand.

'These dots are going to represent the doubt that Thomas had about Jesus coming back to life. It was when Jesus showed Thomas his wounds that Thomas truly believed something he was having difficulty believing.'

Explain to the children that if they start to doubt Jesus, all they need to do is remember to continue their spiritual fitness campaign and to ask and rely on the Holy Spirit to help them.

Prayer...

'Maybe there is something that you have been praying about for a while, something that you have not been sure about. Perhaps it was one of those questions that we brainstormed about earlier. Don't give up! Just because you are not totally sure or you have doubts, this does not mean that you are not a follower of Jesus. Put into place some of the strategies to keep healthy that we spoke about—support and care for each other as the verses from Jude reminded us and ask the Holy Spirit to help you to see and understand and believe.'

- Put the butchers paper with the questions from brainstorming on it in the middle of the prayer circle.
- Spend some time together praying about some of these things and for the children.
- Suggest to the children that they place a finger on the sticky dot on the back of their hand while they are praying as a reminder that Jesus can help us to understand and grow in our faith.



Home & Beyond

Print off the 'Home and Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

Physically and Spiritually Fit....

During the week, focus on doing some exercises that are going to help you keep physically and spiritually fit. You might also like to include some members of your family or Big Bud. You might like to use some of the following suggestions or come up with some of your own. Perhaps you can choose one each day.

- Do five sit-ups then read the verse from the Bible that reminds us:
Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him. (Romans 12:2)
- Do five push-ups then choose a song to listen to or sing about Jesus.
- Jog on the spot while listening to a song you love and thank God for all the good things he has given you.
- Do five star jumps and then thank God for a special friend you have, this might be your Big Bud.
- Do some stretches and then 'stretch' your mind by drawing all the things you love about God.



