



Confronting Doubts

Session 10 • Matthew 11:1-6,16-24



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee), **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus's Mission), and **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus).

INTRODUCE: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 91.

ASK: What are some things you encounter that lead to doubt and skepticism? (p. 91)

EXPLAIN: Suggest that doubt and skepticism may be very natural and even necessary responses when we are confronted with new ideas or decisions. Note that, even as believers, we might experience times when we are tempted to doubt Jesus in one way or another.

SHARE: Point out **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus's Mission) and remind the group of why Jesus came to earth. Explain that while He fulfilled His role perfectly, even those who knew Him best had questions about Him. Share that today's session examines the doubts of one of these people and how Jesus responded in love and truth.

TRANSITION: By examining what Matthew had to say about Jesus and His response to skepticism and doubt, we can learn how to

respond to our own doubts—and the doubts of those around us.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Guide the group to read **Matthew 11:1-6** silently and to reflect on why John and his disciples might have had doubts about Jesus.

CONTEXT: Allow adults to share their thoughts about John's doubt. Note that John's ministry had diminished. Share that he had been arrested and imprisoned for taking a stand against Herod.

SAY: For some reason, John felt the need to question Jesus. He may have been seeking some measure of reassurance in prison. He also may have reflected the first-century understanding that the Messiah would drive out Rome and reestablish David's kingdom. He might have wondered why Jesus hadn't set him free. Regardless of the reasons, it's a good reminder that even Jesus's most loyal followers can have doubts at times.

DISCUSS: Refer the group to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Jesus's Mission). Allow adults to share how this description of Jesus's mission aligns with His own description in verses 4-5. Point out that while John's ministry was waning, Jesus was upending religious

tradition and His disciples were beginning to replicate His work.

ASK: How would John have understood Jesus's reply in verses 4-5 based on his knowledge of the Old Testament? (p. 93)

RECAP: To supplement the conversation, summarize the following information:

- **(11:4-6)** Jesus did not answer John's question directly. Rather, He challenged John's followers to look and listen for evidence of the Christ's activities. Jesus listed six diseases or conditions from which John's followers could draw material for their report to John. Most appear in Isaiah's discussion of the Messiah's work (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1). The blind regain their sight (Isa. 35:5; 42:7; Matt. 9:27-31). The lame walk (Isa. 35:6; Matt. 8:5-13). Those with leprosy are cleansed (Matt. 8:1-4). The deaf hear (Isa. 35:5; Mark 7:31-35). The dead are raised (Isa. 26:19; Matt. 9:18,23-25). The poor are told the good news (Isa. 61:1; Matt. 9:35).

ASK: How should we respond to our honest doubts or questions about Jesus? (p. 93)

TRANSITION: *It is one thing to have doubts. The key is knowing how to respond to those doubts. Jesus's response encourages us to bring our questions to Him and to ground ourselves in His words and actions.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 11:16-19 as adults compare Jesus's ministry and John the Baptist's ministry.

ASK: What primary complaints did people have about John and Jesus? Why? (p. 93)

EXPLAIN: Summarize this content for more context:

- **(11:16-19)** Jesus most likely was referring to two popular games that children played, weddings and funerals. The "flute" was typically used at weddings, while a "lament" was sung at funerals. Inevitably there would be a child or two who refused to play. With this comparison, Jesus set up the hearers for the condemnation He was about to bring. John and Jesus lived contrasting lifestyles, yet neither was acceptable to those who were skeptical of both men. They resented John's austerity and call for repentance, and Jesus wasn't strict enough in following the traditions of Judaism.

ASK: How do people's preconceived notions about God cause them to miss what He is doing? (p. 93)

TRANSITION: *In God's design, John's asceticism and Jesus's liberty were both appropriate. Each followed the purpose God had for them. Believers have to be careful to avoid the trap of cynicism, thinking that "one size fits all" when living out our faith.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 11:20-24 as adults consider the emotions they think Jesus felt.

CONTEXT: Point to **Pack Item 1** (Map: Jesus's Ministry Around Galilee). Note Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum are on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Point out that Jesus was calling out cities where residents had seen Him work miracles. Affirm that this privilege came with great responsibility to

demonstrate faith, a responsibility that many residents failed to embrace.

RECAP: To highlight unbelief in these cities, share the following information:

- **(11:20-24)** *The severity of the sins of Chorazin and Bethsaida was demonstrated by a comparison with Tyre and Sidon—two cities known for their sinful ways. Tyre and Sidon had a reputation for an opulent lifestyle that resulted in judgment from God (Isa. 23; Ezek. 26–28). Capernaum was compared with the city of Sodom, which was proverbial along with Gomorrah for its wickedness and God’s judgment of the city (Gen. 18:20; Matt. 10:15; Luke 10:12; Rom. 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7).*

ASK: Jesus pronounced a warning to the cities that had the greater opportunities to witness His miracles. How does this warning apply to you? (p. 93)

CHALLENGE: Emphasize that these verses warn us to take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus. Encourage adults to consider if their understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done for them needs an adjustment.

CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Review these application points from this week’s passage:

- We may experience honest doubts, but confessing our doubts to God is a step toward genuine faith.

- We are to be sensitive to the fact that God sometimes works in ways that contradict our expectations.
- Take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus.

REFLECT: Encourage the group to think about which of the following represents the greatest challenge for them: doubts about Jesus, being sensitive to God’s work, or accepting the responsibilities of our walk with Jesus. Spend a few minutes discussing their responses and why they made those choices.

DISCUSS: Direct adults to the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 93 and to identify reasons believers might struggle with doubts about Jesus. After a few minutes, lead a brief discussion about their answers. Allow them to suggest ways they can support one another without condemnation of honest questions.

PRAY: Close the session in prayer, asking God to give adults the courage to face their doubts and to seek ways to demonstrate their faith in genuine ways this week.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email the group and assure them that you are praying for any struggles they may be having. Invite them to send you a personal message describing their struggles if appropriate. Encourage them to read and reflect on the **Apply the Text** suggestion on page 97. Affirm that you are willing to help them connect with a mentor who can walk with them.