

Big Questions

8 Weeks of Apologetics for Preteens (Ages 11-12)

Introduction

This 8-week curriculum tackles the tough questions that preteens commonly ask about faith, God, and the Bible. Designed specifically for 11-12 year olds who are developing critical thinking skills and beginning to own their faith, each session provides a safe space for honest questions, balanced biblical teaching, and interactive activities that help students discover thoughtful answers. The program acknowledges that questions are a normal and healthy part of faith development while providing solid, age-appropriate apologetics content.

Week 1: How Do We Know God Is Real?

Big Question Focus: Can we prove God exists? Why can't we see Him?

Key Truth: While we can't see God directly, we can see evidence of His existence all around us and experience His presence in our lives.

Scripture Foundation:

- Romans 1:19-20 (Evidence of God in creation)
- Hebrews 11:1-3 (Faith and things unseen)
- Psalm 19:1-4 (The heavens declare God's glory)

Question Exploration Activities:

- **Anonymous Question Box:** Students submit additional questions about God's existence
- **Evidence Collection:** Small groups gather and present different types of evidence for God (creation, design, morality, personal experience)
- **"God Glasses" Experience:** Looking at the world through different perspectives to see evidence of design and purpose

Interactive Discussion:

- What are the differences between scientific proof and other kinds of evidence?
- If God wanted everyone to believe in Him, why doesn't He just appear to everyone?
- How do we respond when friends say God isn't real?

Bible Investigation:

- Examine Biblical passages about knowing God exists
- Explore how people in the Bible came to know God was real (Abraham, Moses, Paul)
- Investigate how Jesus revealed God's nature

Responding Activities:

- Create "Evidence Journals" for recording personal experiences of God
- Design "God's Fingerprints" collages showing evidence of God in the world
- Role-play conversations with friends who question God's existence

Take-Home Connection:

- Family discussion guide: "How has each family member experienced God's reality?"
 - "Evidence Collector" challenge to find three new evidences of God this week
 - Media recommendation: Age-appropriate video about evidence for God's existence
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Week 2: Why Does God Allow Bad Things to Happen?

Big Question Focus: If God is good and powerful, why is there suffering in the world?

Key Truth: Evil and suffering entered the world through human free will, not God's design. God works to bring good even from difficult situations and promises to one day end all suffering.

Scripture Foundation:

- Genesis 1:31, 3:1-19 (God's good creation and the entrance of sin)
- Romans 8:18-25, 28 (Present suffering and future glory; God works for good)
- Revelation 21:1-5 (God will wipe away every tear)

Question Exploration Activities:

- **Honest Expression Station:** Safe space for students to write or draw feelings about difficult experiences
- **"Why?" Wall:** Students post sticky notes with specific "why" questions about suffering
- **Good from Bad:** Examples of difficult situations that ultimately led to something positive

Interactive Discussion:

- What's the difference between God causing something and allowing something?
- How does free will connect to the problem of suffering?

- How can God use difficult things in our lives for good?

Bible Investigation:

- Examine Biblical stories of suffering that led to good (Joseph, Job)
- Explore how Jesus responded to suffering
- Investigate God's promises about the end of suffering

Responding Activities:

- Create "Comfort Cards" with Bible verses for people going through hard times
- Design a "God's Promises" bookmark with verses about God's presence in suffering
- Role-play how to respond to friends experiencing difficulties

Take-Home Connection:

- Family discussion guide: "Share a time when something difficult led to something good"
 - Journal prompt: "A question I still have about suffering is..."
 - Service project suggestion to help those who are suffering
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Week 3: Is the Bible Really True?

Big Question Focus: How do we know the Bible is reliable? Wasn't it written by humans?

Key Truth: The Bible is unique among ancient books in its historical accuracy, internal consistency, and fulfilled prophecies, showing it is both divinely inspired and historically reliable.

Scripture Foundation:

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (Scripture is God-breathed)
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 (Prophecy came from God through humans)
- Psalm 119:89-91, 160 (God's word is eternal and true)

Question Exploration Activities:

- **Ancient Message Challenge:** Activity demonstrating how accurately the Bible has been preserved
- **Archaeology Exploration:** Stations with archaeological discoveries that confirm Biblical accounts
- **Prophecy Fulfilled:** Interactive timeline showing major prophecies and their fulfillments

Interactive Discussion:

- What makes a historical document reliable?

- How can the Bible be both written by humans and inspired by God?
- Why are there different translations of the Bible?

Bible Investigation:

- Examine how the Bible was written, preserved, and compiled
- Explore the Dead Sea Scrolls and their significance
- Investigate historical confirmations of Biblical accounts

Responding Activities:

- Create "Bible Reliability" fact sheets to share with friends
- Design a visual timeline of Biblical manuscript evidence
- Practice explaining why we can trust the Bible

Take-Home Connection:

- Family Bible treasure hunt for fulfilled prophecies about Jesus
 - Challenge to read about a Biblical event and its archaeological evidence
 - Media recommendation: Age-appropriate video about Bible reliability
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Week 4: Aren't All Religions Basically the Same?

Big Question Focus: Why do Christians think Jesus is the only way? Aren't there many paths to God?

Key Truth: While religions share some common values, they make fundamentally different claims about God, salvation, and eternity. Christianity's unique claim is that God came to us in Jesus Christ.

Scripture Foundation:

- John 14:6 (Jesus is the way, truth, and life)
- Acts 4:12 (Salvation in no other name)
- 1 Timothy 2:5-6 (One mediator between God and humanity)

Question Exploration Activities:

- **Religion Comparison:** Interactive chart comparing key beliefs of major world religions
- **Claims of Christ:** Examine C.S. Lewis's "Lord, Liar, or Lunatic" argument at preteen level
- **"What's Different?" Challenge:** Identify unique aspects of Christianity compared to other faiths

Interactive Discussion:

- How can we respect people of other faiths while believing in Jesus as the only way?
- Why did Jesus claim to be the only way to God?
- How should we talk with friends who practice different religions?

Bible Investigation:

- Examine Jesus' claims about Himself
- Explore how the early Christians related to other religions
- Investigate what makes the gospel unique

Responding Activities:

- Create "What Makes Christianity Unique" mini-books
- Design a visualization of Jesus' claim to be "the way, the truth, and the life"
- Role-play respectful conversations about religious differences

Take-Home Connection:

- Family discussion guide: "What makes Jesus different from other religious leaders?"
- Research challenge to learn more about a classmate's religious background
- Prayer focus for people of different faiths around the world

Week 5: How Can I Know God's Will for My Life?

Big Question Focus: How does God guide us? How can I know what God wants me to do?

Key Truth: God guides us through His Word, wise counsel, prayer, circumstances, and the Holy Spirit's leading, helping us make wise choices that honor Him.

Scripture Foundation:

- Proverbs 3:5-6 (Trust in the Lord with all your heart)
- Psalm 119:105 (Your word is a lamp to my feet)
- Romans 12:1-2 (Renewing your mind to discern God's will)

Question Exploration Activities:

- **Decision Maze:** Interactive experience about making choices and finding God's guidance
- **Wisdom Council:** Panel of trusted adults sharing how they've discerned God's will
- **"Still Small Voice" Station:** Quiet prayer space for listening to God

Interactive Discussion:

- What's the difference between God's will and our wants?
- How can we tell if an idea is from God or just from ourselves?
- What if we make a wrong choice - can we miss God's will permanently?

Bible Investigation:

- Examine Biblical examples of God's guidance (Abraham, David, Paul)
- Explore the role of the Holy Spirit in guidance
- Investigate principles for decision-making from Proverbs

Responding Activities:

- Create "Decision-Making Maps" with steps for seeking God's guidance
- Design a personal prayer journal for recording questions and God's answers
- Practice discernment with hypothetical preteen scenarios

Take-Home Connection:

- Family decision-making framework for seeking God's will together
 - Journal prompt: "Something I'm seeking God's guidance about is..."
 - Daily practice of asking for God's guidance in one specific area
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Week 6: Why Doesn't God Answer All My Prayers?

Big Question Focus: Why does God seem silent sometimes? Does prayer really change anything?

Key Truth: God always hears our prayers and answers them according to His wisdom and love, sometimes with "yes," sometimes "no," sometimes "wait," and sometimes in ways we don't initially recognize.

Scripture Foundation:

- 1 John 5:14-15 (Confidence in approaching God)
- Matthew 7:7-11 (Ask, seek, knock; God gives good gifts)
- James 4:2-3 (Asking with wrong motives)

Question Exploration Activities:

- **Prayer Laboratory:** Testing different types of prayers and recording "results"

- **Prayer Wall:** Space for writing prayers and later adding how God responded
- **"God's Answers" Gallery:** Stories of different ways God has answered prayers

Interactive Discussion:

- Why might God say "no" or "wait" to a prayer?
- How do we keep praying when it seems like nothing is happening?
- What's the purpose of prayer if God already knows everything?

Bible Investigation:

- Examine Biblical examples of answered and seemingly unanswered prayers
- Explore Jesus' teaching on prayer
- Investigate prayers God always answers (salvation, wisdom, etc.)

Responding Activities:

- Create a "Prayer Stoplight" tool (green for yes, yellow for wait, red for no)
- Design a prayer journal with sections for requests and God's answers
- Practice different types of prayer beyond just asking for things

Take-Home Connection:

- Family prayer time with space for celebrating answers
 - Prayer challenge to pray consistently for one thing for a week
 - Discussion guide: "A time when God answered my prayer differently than I expected"
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Week 7: What Happens When We Die?

Big Question Focus: What is heaven like? What about hell? What happens right after we die?

Key Truth: God has prepared eternal life with Him for those who trust in Jesus, where we will have restored bodies and live in a renewed creation forever.

Scripture Foundation:

- John 14:1-6 (Jesus prepares a place for us)
- 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 (Resurrection bodies)
- Revelation 21-22 (New heaven and new earth)

Question Exploration Activities:

- **Heaven Misconceptions:** Identifying and correcting common misunderstandings
- **"New Earth" Exploration:** Stations examining Biblical descriptions of eternity
- **Hope Wall:** Space for expressing what students most look forward to about heaven

Interactive Discussion:

- What does the Bible actually say about heaven vs. popular ideas?
- What will our resurrection bodies be like?
- How should our belief in eternity affect how we live now?

Bible Investigation:

- Examine Biblical descriptions of heaven and the new earth
- Explore Jesus' teachings about eternity
- Investigate the connection between Jesus' resurrection and our future

Responding Activities:

- Create "Eternity in Our Hearts" artwork expressing Biblical hope
- Design a "Resurrection Hope" comic strip showing transformation
- Write encouraging messages for someone who has lost a loved one

Take-Home Connection:

- Family discussion guide: "What questions do you have about heaven?"
- Bible reading plan focused on resurrection and eternal life
- Reflection activity: "How does believing in heaven change how I live today?"

Week 8: How Can I Share My Faith Without Being Weird?

Big Question Focus: How do I talk to friends about Jesus? What if they ask questions I can't answer?

Key Truth: Sharing our faith happens naturally when we live authentically, care genuinely, and are prepared to give honest answers about what we believe and why.

Scripture Foundation:

- 1 Peter 3:15-16 (Always be prepared to give an answer)
- Colossians 4:5-6 (Let your conversation be full of grace)
- Matthew 5:13-16 (Being salt and light)

Question Exploration Activities:

- **FAQs from Friends:** Collecting and addressing common faith questions from peers
- **Conversation Simulator:** Practice responding to challenging questions
- **"Your Story" Workshop:** Developing a natural way to share personal faith journey

Interactive Discussion:

- What makes talking about faith feel awkward or natural?
- How can we show Jesus to others without just using words?
- What should we do when someone asks a question we can't answer?

Bible Investigation:

- Examine how Jesus conversed with different people
- Explore Paul's approach to sharing faith in different contexts
- Investigate Biblical examples of personal testimonies

Responding Activities:

- Create "My Faith Story" cards with simple talking points
- Design "Honest Answers" cards for common questions
- Role-play authentic conversations about faith

Take-Home Connection:

- Family faith story sharing: How each person came to follow Jesus
- Challenge to pray for opportunities to naturally share faith
- Resource list for finding answers to tough questions

Celebration and Commissioning:

- "Big Questions Showcase" where students share what they've learned
- Prayer stations for ongoing questions and growth
- Commitment to continue asking questions and seeking answers

Implementation Resources

Weekly Format (60-90 minutes):

1. **Welcome & Question Warm-up (10 min):** Ice-breaker activity related to the week's question

2. **Big Question Introduction (5 min):** Presenting the week's focus question
3. **Exploration Activities (15-20 min):** Interactive stations or experiences related to the question
4. **Bible Investigation (15 min):** Scripture study and discussion
5. **Interactive Discussion (15 min):** Guided conversation about the big question
6. **Responding Activities (15-20 min):** Creative expression and practical application
7. **Take-Home Connection (5 min):** Introduction to family follow-up activities

Creating a Safe Question Environment:

- Ground rules for respectful discussion
- Anonymous question submission options
- "No question is stupid" culture
- Leader transparency about not having all the answers
- Celebration of good questions

Teaching Approaches for Preteens:

- Balance of direct teaching and self-discovery
- Concrete examples before abstract concepts
- Opportunities for critical thinking and evaluation
- Peer discussion and collaborative learning
- Multi-sensory engagement
- Technology integration where appropriate

Leader Preparation Resources:

- Background reading on each topic
- Anticipated questions and age-appropriate responses
- Guidance for handling unexpected or advanced questions
- Personal reflection questions for leaders
- Prayer guide for each session

Parent Partnership Components:

- Pre-program parent orientation
- Weekly parent guides with question summaries
- Suggested family discussion questions

- Resource recommendations for parents
- Mid-program parent check-in
- End-of-program parent-child celebration

Classroom Environment:

- Question wall for ongoing submission
- Biblical truth displays that grow throughout the program
- Resource library with age-appropriate apologetics books
- Technology station for appropriate online resources
- Prayer space for reflecting and asking God for answers

Assessment and Growth Tracking:

- Beginning and ending faith questions inventory
- Weekly reflection journals
- Question evolution tracking
- Parent observations of faith conversations at home
- End-of-program personal faith statement

Additional Resources:

- Recommended books for preteen apologetics
- Vetted websites and videos for further exploration
- "Big Questions Toolkit" for ongoing faith questions
- Connection to youth ministry for continued growth
- Mentor matching for one-on-one faith conversations