YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM · AGES 11–18

HARD QUESTIONS WELCOME



WEEK 1 OF 6

Why Is There So Much Pain?

Theme: Suffering · Main text: John 11:32–44

REAL QUESTIONS.

Honest answers for the stuff you actually wonder about.

Inside: 45 / 60 / 75-minute plans · word-for-word scripts · 4 game options · response activity · Joys & Concerns · 3 student pages

DAHAM
NEXT GENERATION MINISTRY TOGETHER

WEEK 1 · LEADER GUIDE

Why Is There So Much Pain?

Theme: Suffering · Main text: John 11:32–44 · Memory verse: Psalm 34:18

THE BIG IDEA

God doesn't always explain our pain, but he never leaves us alone in it. Jesus came, and Jesus cried.

The question to carry all night

"Where is God when it hurts?"

By the end, students will…

- Know that hard questions are welcome here
- See Jesus weep *before* he fixes anything
- Pray one honest prayer to God

NIGHT AT A GLANCE · PICK YOUR LENGTH

SEGMENT	WHAT HAPPENS	45 MIN	60 MIN	75 MIN
Welcome	Greet new students; introduce the Question Box	2	3	5
Game 1	Pick from the Activity Menu (next page)	8	10	10
Game 2	A second game from the menu (optional)	—	—	10
Hook + Message	"But Why?" · John 11:32–36, 43–44	10	12	12
Response Activity	Come and See Cards + My One Step	10	12	12
Small Group Talk	Pick 3–4 questions	—	8	10
Joys & Concerns	"I lift up ___ to God." / "Lord, hear our prayer."	10	10	10
Pastoral Prayer	Leader prays over what was shared + send-off	5	5	5

Supplies

- Question Box (shoebox with a slot) + blank cards
- 2 index cards per student · pens
- Game extras: see the Activity Menu
- Student pages (last 3 pages) · Bibles · phone timer

Before students arrive

- Choose your games using the Activity Menu
- Read all of John 11 once through
- Set the Question Box by the door
- Recall a time you asked God "why?"
- Pray for each student by name

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

CHOOSE WHAT FITS YOUR GROUP

Activity Menu

Every group is different. Some nights you have fifteen students bouncing off the walls; some nights you have four quiet ones and a visitor. Pick one or two games, then finish with the response activity. Tonight's topic is heavy, so the games stay light and fun on purpose. The deeper stuff belongs in the message and small groups. Every game ends with a debrief that points back to tonight's question.

ACTIVITY	ENERGY	PREP	BEST WHEN…	MIN
A. Band-Aid Tag Get tagged, get frozen, get rescued by a conversation	High	None	Students need to move; lots of new students; zero prep time	10–12
B. Say This, Not That Vote on what actually helps a hurting friend	Medium	Read-aloud list	You want laughs and the strongest link to the message	10–12
C. Bad Day Rescue Kit Teams build the ultimate kit for a rough day	Medium	Paper, markers	You want teamwork and students learning what helps each other	10
D. Ouch! Stories Trios trade funny "that hurt" stories	Low	None	Small or quiet group; students who don't know each other yet	8–10
E. Come and See Cards Response activity (after message)	Reflective	Index cards, Question Box	Every night: this is the heart of the week	12

SUGGESTED COMBINATIONS

Big, high-energy group (10–15)

A. Band-Aid Tag → B. Say This, Not That → Message → E. Come and See Cards

Small group (4–6)

D. Ouch! Stories (whole group) → Message → E. Come and See Cards in a circle

Lots of first-time visitors

A. Band-Aid Tag → C. Bad Day Rescue Kit → Message → E. Come and See Cards (low-pressure option)

Short on time (45 min)

B. Say This, Not That → Message → E. Come and See Cards → Joys & Concerns

GROUND RULES FOR EVERY GAME *Nobody is forced to share. Nobody is the punchline. New students get paired with a regular. If a game ever starts to single someone out, change the round and keep moving.*

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

Welcome: Introducing the Question Box

2–3 min

Purpose: Start the series thread. The Question Box sits out every week, and students can drop in an anonymous question anytime. From Week 2 on, each night opens with "From the Question Box" (2 minutes).

> **SAY**
>
> "Welcome, everybody. If you're new tonight, we're really glad you're here. For the next six weeks we're doing a series called **Real Questions**: the hard stuff people actually wonder about."
>
> "See this box? This is the **Question Box**. It's going to sit out every single week. Anytime tonight, grab a card, write any question you have, about God, the Bible, life, anything, and drop it in. No names. Every week I'll pull one out and answer it as honestly as I can. And if I don't know, I'll tell you, 'Great question, I'm going to look into that.' Here's the deal for this whole series: **hard questions are welcome here.**"

A. Band-Aid Tag

10–12 min · High energy

Purpose: A fast tag game where nobody gets back in on their own. When you're "hurt," someone has to come to you and have a quick conversation to set you free. Students burn energy, learn random real things about each other, and act out tonight's story without knowing it: someone has to show up.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Pick one tagger for every 6–7 players. Everyone else spreads out. Tags are a light two-finger tap below the shoulders.
2. When you're tagged, put a hand over the spot like a "band-aid" and keep playing. Tagged a second time? Second hand goes on. Third tag, you're frozen: sit down right where you are.
3. To rescue a frozen player, a free player sits down with them and they **both answer the "Doctor's Question"** the leader is calling out right now.
4. Once both have answered, both players are fully healed (no hands) and jump back in. Taggers can't tag anyone during a rescue.
5. Every 60–90 seconds, the leader yells a new Doctor's Question. Switch taggers every round.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "This is Band-Aid Tag. If you get tagged, put your hand on that spot like it's a band-aid, and keep running with your hand there. Get tagged twice, you've got two hands on. Three times? You're down. Sit right there."
>
> "Here's the catch: you can't heal yourself. Somebody has to come sit with you, and you both answer the Doctor's Question I'm calling out. Then you're both healed and back in. Taggers, no tagging during a rescue. First Doctor's Question: *what do you eat when you're sick?* Go!"

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

DOCTOR'S QUESTIONS (CALL ONE PER ROUND)

- What do you eat when you're sick?
- Best show for a sick day?
- Who takes care of you when you're sick?
- Worst-tasting medicine ever?
- Weirdest home remedy in your family?
- Chicken noodle or tomato soup?
- Ever been to the ER? For what?
- Scariest thing at the doctor's office?
- What's your comfort song?
- What cheers you up fast?

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** One tagger, and a frozen player is out after *two* tags so rescues happen fast. The leader can be a "doctor" who helps rescue.
- **Limited space:** Everyone walks, no running. Heel-to-toe "hospital walk" only.

LEADER NOTE *Watch for anyone who gets frozen and left alone. Jump in and rescue them yourself. Offer a "walking only" option to anyone who has an injury or doesn't want to run.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Did anybody get unfrozen by themselves? Nope. Every single time, somebody had to come to you and sit down with you. Hold on to that. Tonight we're asking one of the hardest questions there is: why is there so much pain? And the question to carry all night is: **where is God when it hurts?**"

B. Say This, Not That

10–12 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Students vote on the things people say and do when a friend is having a hard time, from the super helpful to the hilariously awkward. Between rounds, partners share what actually helps *them*. It sets up the message: when his friends were hurting, Jesus didn't give a speech.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Pair students up. Point to two sides of the room: one side is **"That Helps!"** and the other is **"Oof, No."**
2. The leader reads a situation and a response from the list below.
3. Everyone moves to the side they vote for. Standing in the middle means "It depends."
4. Ask one or two people from each side, "Why?" Keep it quick.
5. Partners find each other and both answer the **Talk Question** for that round (30–60 seconds).

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Find a partner. I'm going to read you a situation, and then something a friend says or does. If you think it would actually help, go to the 'That Helps!' side. If it would make things worse, go to the 'Oof, No' side. If it depends, stand in the middle. Then find your partner and answer the talk question. Round one: your team just lost the championship by one point, and your friend says, 'Well, at least you got a participation trophy.'"

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

ROUNDS

SITUATION	FRIEND SAYS OR DOES…	TALK QUESTION
Team lost by one point	"At least you got a participation trophy."	"What's your worst sports or game loss?"
Dropped your phone in a lake	Sends you 14 memes about phones in lakes	"What's the worst thing you've broken?"
Failed a test	"Want to get fries after school?"	"What food fixes a bad day for you?"
Your dog is sick	"It's just a dog."	"Best pet you've ever had?"
Didn't make the team	Sits with you at lunch and doesn't bring it up	"Who's a friend who always shows up?"
Big fight with a friend	"You should be over it by now."	"How do you calm down after an argument?"
A grandparent is in the hospital	"I don't know what to say, but I'm here."	"Who's someone older you're really close to?"
Something really sad happened	"Everything happens for a reason."	"Why might that be hard to hear right then?"
Bridge: Your friend is crying	Cries with you	Lead into the debrief

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Stay seated. Thumbs up for "That Helps!" and thumbs down for "Oof, No," then everyone answers the talk question.
- **Write your own:** For the last two rounds, pairs make up their own "Oof, No" response. Keep it kind and funny.

LEADER NOTE *Some students may have heard "Everything happens for a reason" from people they love. Don't mock anyone who said it. Just notice together that even true-sounding words can hurt if they come too fast.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Notice something? The things that helped most usually weren't big speeches. It was 'I'm here.' It was fries. It was someone sitting with you. Tonight we'll see what Jesus did when his friends were hurting, and it might surprise you. Keep this question in your head: **where is God when it hurts?**"

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

C. Bad Day Rescue Kit

10 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Teams design the ultimate "bad day rescue kit," but every item has to be something that *actually* helps someone on the team. Students learn each other's comfort foods, songs, shows, and people, and it's a low-pressure way for new students to share something real.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into teams of 3–4. Mix friend groups. Each team gets a sheet of paper and a marker.
2. Teams draw a big box or backpack. That's the kit.
3. Teams have 5 minutes to fill it with **8 items**, one from each category below. The rule: every item has to be something that really helps *someone on your team*, and they have to explain why.
4. Each person must put in at least one item.
5. Teams "pitch" their kit to the room in 30 seconds. The group votes on Most Useful, Most Creative, and Best Snack.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Everybody's had a bad day. Your team is going to design the ultimate Bad Day Rescue Kit. But here's the rule: you can't just make stuff up. Every item in the kit has to be something that actually helps somebody on your team when they're having a rough day. So you'll have to ask each other. Eight items, five minutes. Go!"

KIT CATEGORIES

- A comfort food
- A song or playlist
- A show or movie
- A place to go
- A person to call
- Something to do with your hands
- A smell that feels like home
- Something funny
- Words someone could say
- Something from nature

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Build one kit together. Go around and have each person add one item and explain it.
- **Real kit:** If you have supplies, fill a real bag with a few items (candy, a card, tissues) to give to someone who needs it this week.

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "These kits are great. I want the one with the tacos. But look at the category 'a person to call.' Almost every team had a real name there. When things get hard, stuff helps a little. *People* help a lot. Tonight's question is huge: **where is God when it hurts?** Let's find out what Jesus did."

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

D. Ouch! Stories

8–10 min · Low energy

Purpose: A calm, story-sharing game for small or quiet groups. Trios trade funny stories about small, everyday pain: brain freeze, stepping on a LEGO, the worst sunburn ever. It sets up the message: some pain is funny later, and some isn't.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into trios. Mix it up: "Find two people you know the least."
2. The leader reads a prompt. Each person tells a quick story (about 30 seconds). Anyone can pass.
3. After each person shares, the other two rate it on the "Ouch Meter" by holding up 1–5 fingers.
4. Play 4–5 prompts. The leader goes first on the first prompt to model a funny, light story.
5. Last round, each trio shares the funniest story they heard (with permission).

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Everybody has an 'ouch' story. Stepped on a LEGO in the dark? Brain freeze from a slushie? I'm going to read a prompt, and you tell your trio your story. Then they rate it on the Ouch Meter, one to five fingers. Keep it funny. I'll go first."

PROMPTS

- Worst brain freeze ever
- Stepping on something in the dark
- Hurt yourself showing off
- Worst sunburn
- Most dramatic you've been about a tiny injury
- A shot or dentist visit you remember
- Biggest wipeout (bike, skateboard, ice)
- Spiciest food you've ever eaten
- Walked into a door or glass wall
- Funniest way a sibling or pet hurt you

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Stay together and go around the circle. Anyone can pass.
- **Draw it:** Draw a stick figure and mark every spot you've ever been hurt with an X. Explain your best X.

LEADER NOTE *Keep it to small, funny, everyday pain. Don't ask about scars or anything serious. If a student starts to share something heavy, thank them, keep it gentle, and follow up privately (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Most of those stories are funny now. You healed. But we all know some pain isn't funny, and it doesn't go away in a week. Losing someone. Things at home. Watching the news. That's what we're talking about tonight: **where is God when it hurts?**"

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

Hook: "But Why?"

2 min

> **SAY**
>
> "Anybody here have a little brother, sister, or cousin who's about four years old? What's their favorite word?" (*Let students answer: "Why?"*)
>
> "'Why is the sky blue?' Because of the light. 'Why?' Because of the air. 'Why?' Because… 'Why?' And eventually the grown-up says, 'Because I said so!'" (*Pause.*)
>
> "We never really stop asking why. We just ask bigger ones. Why did my grandpa get sick? Why did my parents split up? Why do kids get hurt? If God is good and powerful, why is there so much pain? Here's what I want you to know tonight: that's not a bad question. It's a real one. And the question to carry all night is: **where is God when it hurts?**"

Message: Jesus Wept

10 min

1. It's okay to ask

> **SAY**
>
> "People have been asking this question for thousands of years. Christians ask it. People of other faiths ask it. People who don't believe in God ask it. Some people say pain is the main reason they can't believe. I get that. If you're in that spot tonight, you are welcome here, and your question is welcome here."
>
> "And here's something surprising: the Bible is full of people asking God 'Why?' and 'How long?' out loud. God didn't delete those prayers. He put them in the Bible. It's okay if you're not sure what you think yet."

LEADER NOTE *If you have a short, honest story about a time you asked God "why?" as a teenager or recently, tell it here. Thirty seconds is plenty. Don't wrap it up with a neat bow. Students trust leaders who go first.*

2. Read the story

> **SAY**
>
> "Jesus had three close friends who were siblings: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Lazarus got really sick. The sisters sent Jesus a message: 'Come quick.' And Jesus… waited. By the time he got there, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Listen to what Mary says when she sees Jesus."

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

[32] *Therefore when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother wouldn't have died."* [33] *When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews weeping who came with her, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled,* [34] *and said, "Where have you laid him?" They told him, "Lord, come and see."* [35] *Jesus wept.* [36] *The Jews therefore said, "See how much affection he had for him!"*

JOHN 11:32–36 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

3. Jesus didn't explain. He cried.

SAY

"Mary brings Jesus her hardest question, right to his face: 'Lord, if you had been here…' Basically: 'Where were you?' And look what Jesus does. He doesn't argue. He doesn't give her a lecture. He doesn't say, 'Everything happens for a reason.' He's troubled. He asks to see where it hurts. And then the shortest verse in the whole Bible: **Jesus wept.**"

"Here's the wild part. Jesus already knew he was about to bring Lazarus back. And he still cried. He didn't skip past their pain to get to the happy ending. He felt it with them."

"I'll be honest with you. The Bible doesn't give us a neat answer for every 'why.' Some pain comes from people's choices. Some comes from a world that's broken: sickness, accidents, disasters. And some we just don't understand. Christians don't have every answer. But this story shows us *who* God is when it hurts. He comes close, and he cares."

4. Pain doesn't get the last word

SAY

"Then Jesus goes to the tomb and does something nobody expected."

[43] *When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"* [44] *He who was dead came out, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Free him, and let him go."*

JOHN 11:43–44 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"Jesus doesn't always fix things right away in our lives. But this story is a preview. A little while later, Jesus himself goes through the worst pain there is, on the cross, and then walks out of his own tomb. And the Bible promises a day when God will 'wipe away every tear from their eyes.' Pain is real. But it doesn't get the last word."

"So maybe you don't get every answer to 'why?' tonight. That's okay. But you can know this: **where is God when it hurts?** Close. Crying with you. And not finished yet."

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

E. Response Activity: Come and See Cards

12 min

Purpose: Help students pray one honest prayer using Mary's words, privately and safely. Then everyone drops a card in the Question Box for the first time, so the series thread starts tonight. Students leave with a prayer card to keep and one small step for the week.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Give every student two index cards: **Card 1** and **Card 2**.
2. **Card 1: "Lord, if..."** Students privately finish Mary's sentence: "Lord, if you ___." It's the honest question or hurt they'd bring to Jesus. Nobody will read it.
3. Under it, students write **"Lord, come and see ___."** This is an invitation: "Come and see my family." "Come and see how tired I am." Fold it and keep it.
4. **Card 2: The Question Box.** Every student writes one question, about pain or anything else, and drops it in the box. No names. Anyone who has no question writes "No question tonight," so nobody knows who wrote what.
5. Read Psalm 34:18 together from the student page. Give 30 seconds of quiet for students to pray Card 1 silently.
6. **My One Step:** Students fill in "My One Step This Week" and the "My Real Question" box on their student page.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY (CARD 1)**
>
> "Mary said, 'Lord, if you would have been here...' She brought her real question to Jesus. On Card 1, finish that sentence your way. 'Lord, if you...' Maybe it's a question. Maybe it's something you're mad about. Nobody is going to see this card. Not me, not your friends. It's between you and God."
>
> **SAY (COME AND SEE)**
>
> "Underneath, write 'Lord, come and see...' and finish it. When Jesus asked where it hurt, they said, 'Come and see.' You can say that to him too. Then fold it up."
>
> **SAY (QUESTION BOX)**
>
> "On Card 2, write any question you have and drop it in the Question Box. It can be about tonight or anything else. If you don't have one, write 'No question tonight' and drop it in anyway, so nobody knows whose is whose."
>
> **SAY (ONE STEP)**
>
> "Last thing. Turn to your One Step page. Write one small thing you'll do this week to bring something real to God. Keep it tiny. Like: 'Every night before bed, I'll tell God one honest thing about my day.' And there's a box for one question you still have. Write it down so you don't lose it."

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

"Lord, if..." examples (read aloud if stuck)

- "Lord, if you're good, why did my grandma get sick?"
- "Lord, if you care, why does my family fight?"
- "Lord, if you're real, why do I feel so alone?"
- "Lord, if you're listening, help my friend."
- "Lord, if you can hear me, I'm tired."

"Lord, come and see..." examples

- "...how stressed I am about school."
- "...my mom, who's having a hard time."
- "...the thing I haven't told anyone."
- "...how much I miss my dad."
- "...my friend who doesn't believe in you."

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. After the quiet time, go around and each person says just the words "Lord, come and see," and the group answers, "Lord, hear our prayer."
- **Low-pressure option:** Students can write just one word on Card 1, or simply hold the blank card while you pray Mary's words aloud for everyone.
- **Question Box preview:** If time allows, pull one card and say, "I'm going to think about this one and answer it next week."

LEADER NOTE *Never collect or read Card 1, and don't have students share it. Some students may write about real grief or danger. Read every Question Box card privately before the next week. If a card mentions someone being hurt or unsafe, follow the Care Note right away.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "You just did what Mary did. You brought your real question to Jesus. He didn't push her away, and he won't push you away. You might not get an answer this week. But you're not alone with it. **Where is God when it hurts?** Close enough to come and see."

Small Group Talk

8–10 min · Optional

Groups of 3–5, with one adult or student leader per group if possible. Pick 3–4 questions that fit your group.

WARM UP

1. What's the best thing someone has ever done for you on a bad day?
   Follow-up: Was it something they said or something they did?
2. Were you a big "why?" kid when you were little? What did you always ask about?
   Keep it light. It's a warm-up.

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

GO DEEPER

3. Jesus knew he was about to raise Lazarus, and he still cried. Why do you think he did that?
   What does that tell you about how God feels about your pain?
4. Mary said, "Lord, if you would have been here..." Is it okay to say something like that to God?
   Why do you think some people are scared to be that honest with God?
5. When people you know go through hard things, what helps them keep believing, and what makes it harder?
   It's okay if you're not sure yet.
6. If a friend asked you, "Why would a good God let bad things happen?", what would you honestly say?

TAKE IT HOME

7. Who is someone you know who is hurting right now? What's one small way you could "show up" for them this week?
8. What's one honest thing you want to tell God this week?

LEADER NOTE *Silence is okay. Count to seven in your head before rephrasing. If no one answers, answer it yourself briefly and honestly, then ask again. Don't rush to fix anyone's pain with a quick answer. Listening is the answer tonight.*

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

Joys & Concerns

10 min

Purpose: Students practice praying *for each other*, not just hearing about prayer. It's often the moment new students realize this group actually cares about them. Tonight it fits the theme perfectly: Mary brought her real pain to Jesus, and this is where we do the same thing together.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Sit in a circle if you can. Explain the response: when someone shares, they end with "**I lift up ___ to God.**" Everyone responds together: "**Lord, hear our prayer.**"
2. Start with **joys** (things to thank God for), then move to **concerns** (things we're worried about or carrying).
3. The leader goes first to model it, with one joy and one concern.
4. Anyone can share, or pass. "Unspoken" requests are welcome, too.
5. Jot down what's shared (first names only) so you can pray for each one in the Pastoral Prayer.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Tonight we saw Mary bring her real pain to Jesus, and Jesus didn't turn away. He cried with her. This is our chance to do the same thing for each other. We bring the good stuff and the hard stuff, and we carry it together. So what's something good that happened this week you're thankful for? Or something that hurts right now, for you, your family, or a friend?"
>
> "When you share, end with 'I lift up ___ to God.' And all of us will say together, 'Lord, hear our prayer.' Let's practice. I lift up this group to God..." (*All: "Lord, hear our prayer."*)
>
> "I'll go first. My joy is ___. I lift up ___ to God. My concern is ___. I lift up ___ to God."

Joy starters (if students are stuck)

- A good grade or finishing a big project
- A birthday, new sibling, or new pet
- My team won / a great practice
- Someone I love got better
- Just having a good week

Concern starters

- A test or tryout coming up
- A grandparent or relative who is sick
- Someone I miss who has died
- A friend who's going through something
- "I have an unspoken request."

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn, and everyone is allowed to pass.
- **Big group (12+):** "Popcorn" style: anyone shares when ready. Cap it at about 8 minutes.
- **Written version:** Students write joys and concerns on slips of paper. The leader reads them (no names) and the group responds.

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

LEADER NOTE *Say once at the start: "What's shared here stays here, unless someone's safety is at risk." Tonight students may name real losses. If a student shares something serious, thank them, pray, and follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

Pastoral Prayer

3–5 min

Pray this over the group. The **[bracketed]** lines are where you name the joys and concerns students just shared.

Jesus, you wept with your friends,

Thank you for every person in this room. Thank you that we don't have to pretend with you. Mary brought you her hardest question, and you didn't push her away. You came close, and you cried with her.

Thank you for the good things you've given us this week. *[Name the joys shared: "Thank you for Maya's grandma coming home from the hospital, for Chris's team winning..."]* Every good gift comes from you.

And we bring you the things that hurt. *[Name the concerns: "Be with Ethan's family. Comfort Sophia as she misses her grandpa..."]* And for the things that stayed in our hearts tonight and weren't spoken out loud, you already know them. Come and see them. Hold them too.

We don't understand why there's so much pain in the world. Some of us are angry about it. Some of us aren't sure what we believe. Thank you that our questions don't scare you. Be near to the brokenhearted in this room tonight, just like you promised. And remind us that pain doesn't get the last word.

For anyone who feels alone in something hard tonight, let them know you are close. For anyone who is new here, thank you for bringing them. Help them feel at home. And help us show up for each other this week the way you showed up for Mary.

In Jesus' name, amen.

> **SEND-OFF**
> "Take your student pages home. There's a five-day devotional in there, just a few minutes a day, and a tracker for your one step. Bring it back next week. And remember, the Question Box will be here every week. Next time we're taking on a question a lot of people think has only two sides: **'Science vs. Faith?'** And every week we're asking one big question: **can I bring my real questions to God?** Tonight's answer: yes. He can handle them. See you next week."

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

Next Week Follow-Up: Open Week 2 with "From the Question Box": answer one card from tonight honestly, or say, "Great question, I'm going to look into that." Then ask students to look at their One Step tracker. "How many days did you tell God something honest? What helped? What got in the way?" Celebrate any progress, even one day.

Care Note for Leaders

Talking about pain can open real wounds. A student may be grieving a death, living with a family crisis or illness, or carrying abuse, self-harm, or thoughts of not wanting to be here. Watch the Question Box cards and Card 1 conversations closely, and notice anyone who goes quiet tonight.

- **Stay calm and thank them** for telling you. "I'm really glad you told me." Listen more than you explain.
- **Skip the quick answers.** Avoid "Everything happens for a reason" or "God needed another angel." Try: "I'm so sorry. I'm here."
- **Don't promise to keep secrets** if someone's safety is at risk.
- **Follow your church's safety policy** and tell your lead pastor the same day.
- **Connect them to trained help:** parents or guardians, a school counselor, or a licensed counselor. In the U.S., anyone can call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) any time.

You're not expected to be a counselor. Your job is to listen well, take it seriously, and make sure they're connected to the right people.

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

THE FULL SERIES

REAL QUESTIONS · 6 Weeks

Each week stands alone, so new students can jump in any week. Taught in order, the six weeks take on the hard questions students actually ask, about pain, science, the Bible, other religions, unanswered prayer, and hypocrisy, with honest answers and room to keep asking. The question every week: *Can I bring my real questions to God?*

#	WEEK	TEXT
1	**Why Is There So Much Pain?** Suffering	John 11:32–44
2	**Science vs. Faith?** Science and faith	Psalm 19:1–4
3	**Can I Trust the Bible?** The Bible	Luke 1:1–4
4	**What About Other Religions?** Other religions	Acts 17:22–31
5	**Why Didn't God Answer?** Unanswered prayer	2 Corinthians 12:7–10
6	**Why Are Christians Such Hypocrites?** Hypocrisy and the church	Luke 18:9–14

Every week includes

- 45 / 60 / 75-minute schedules
- Activity Menu with 4+ game options
- Word-for-word leader scripts
- Scripture (World English Bible) and one big idea
- Response activity + "One Step" challenge
- The Question Box: anonymous questions answered every week
- Tiered discussion questions
- Joys & Concerns prayer time
- Pastoral prayer with space for your group
- Student pages and 5-day devotional
- Next-week follow-up

Built for real youth groups

These weeks were written for a real Wednesday night group: 5 to 15 students, often with a new face or two, led by a pastor or volunteer with limited prep time. Games never single anyone out. Every activity has a small-group version. And every leader script can be read word for word when you're short on time.

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together. All rights reserved.
Purchasers may photocopy and share the student pages and leader guide for use within their own church or ministry.
Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (public domain).

Name: _____ Date: _____

TONIGHT'S BIG IDEA

God doesn't always explain my pain, but he never leaves me alone in it. Jesus came, and Jesus cried.

THE STORY · JOHN 11:32–44

Mary said: "Lord, if you would have been _____, my brother wouldn't have died." (v. 32)

The shortest verse in the Bible: "Jesus _____." (v. 35)

Then Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come _____!" (v. 43)

Jesus knew he would raise Lazarus. Why do you think he cried anyway? _____

HONEST PRAYERS LOOKUP

The Bible is full of people telling God the truth about their pain. Look up each one and write what the person feels or what God does.

VERSE	WHAT THEY FEEL, OR WHAT GOD DOES
Psalm 13:1–2	
Psalm 34:18	
Psalm 56:8	
John 11:35	
Revelation 21:4	

MY HONEST PRAYER

Lord, if you _____

Lord, come and see _____

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

My One Step

MY ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Bring something real to God. Keep it small enough to actually do.

Every _____ (morning / lunch / bedtime / car ride)

I will _____

Example: "Every night before bed, I will tell God one honest thing about my day, good or hard."

My Real Question

One question I still have: _____

Where I could look or who I could ask: _____

Drop it in the Question Box anytime, no name needed. Hard questions are welcome here.

MY WEEK TRACKER

Check each day you did your step.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

MY PRAYER LIST

Write down the joys and concerns people shared tonight (first names only) and keep praying this week.

JOYS: THANK YOU, GOD, FOR…	CONCERNS: PLEASE BE WITH…

✂ CUT OUT AND KEEP IN YOUR PHONE CASE, WALLET, OR BIBLE

"Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit."

PSALM 34:18

Lord, come and see: _____

My step: M ☐ T ☐ W ☐ T ☐ F ☐ S ☐ S ☐

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together

5 Honest Days

TAKE-HOME DEVOTIONAL · 5 MINUTES A DAY

Each day: read the verse, think about the question, write one honest sentence. That's it.

DAY 1 John 11:32 · "Lord, if…"

Mary told Jesus exactly how she felt. What's one thing you've never said out loud to God? Try saying it today.

DAY 2 John 11:35 · Jesus wept

Jesus cried with his friends. How does it change things to know God feels your pain with you?

DAY 3 Psalm 13 · How long?

David starts this prayer upset and ends it trusting. Where are you right now: the start, the middle, or the end?

DAY 4 Psalm 34:18 · Near

God is near to the brokenhearted. Who do you know with a broken heart right now? Pray for them by name.

DAY 5 Revelation 21:4 · No more tears

God promises a day with no more pain. What's one thing you're looking forward to God making right?

A prayer you can pray this week

Jesus, I don't understand why there's so much pain. Thank you that I can tell you that. Thank you that you came close to Mary and cried with her. Come and see what I'm carrying, and stay close to me. Help me show up for people who are hurting. Amen.

Next week · Week 2: **Science vs. Faith?**

© 2026 Daham Next Generation Ministry Together