



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Session 7: Strengthens

Suggested Week of Use: October 15, 2023

Core Passage: Mark 9:17-29

News Story Summary

For many years now, church leaders have recognized the disturbing trend of students leaving the church when they leave the student ministry. However, recent research suggests that many young people are not waiting until graduation to become non-religious. While high school seniors have typically led the way in saying that religion is not an important part of their lives, one study suggests that this worldview is now filtering down to younger high schoolers and even middle school students. Almost a third of seniors and sophomores dismiss faith, while a quarter of eighth graders feel the same way. Based on the analysis of additional research data, the movement away from religion and faith is probably complete by age 15. Researchers believe most students who end up rejecting faith were raised in religious homes, though the family's values and beliefs failed to take personal root in their lives.

For more about this story, search “Lifeway Research next generation leaving faith.”

Engage

To supplement or replace the Engage activities, ask: *When did you ultimately decide that faith was an important part of your life? What struggles did you have to overcome to reach that point?* Allow adults to share their experiences. Point out that many young people are wrestling with the idea of faith—or rejecting it outright. Read the information about students leaving their faith earlier than previously thought. Encourage adults to share if they are surprised or not by these findings and why. Lead a brief discussion on what makes faith so difficult to embrace sometimes. Affirm that every believer struggles with faith at some point. Explain that today's session highlights how Jesus helped one man navigate his doubts and strengthen his faith.

Challenge

To supplement the Challenge activities, ask: *What were some ways Jesus helped the father in today's session grow in his faith? What are some practical principles we can draw from that?* Remind adults of the research on teens leaving their faith. Ask: *How would these principles help youth—and even adults—embrace their faith?* Challenge adults to examine their own lives this week. Encourage them to be honest with Jesus about their faith struggles and to ask Him to help their unbelief. Close in prayer, asking God to strengthen the faith of teens who have questions and adults who are also struggling with their faith.