

March 29, 2020

Bible Passage: Matthew 14:22–36; John 6:16–21
(Walking on Water)

God Is Near

Schedule

EXPLORE

DISCOVER

RESPOND

BLESS

Leader Prep

Each week you'll find information to help you prepare your heart to present the lesson.

Equip

Offers perspective and context to the lesson's Bible passage

When it came time to say good night to the crowds, Jesus sent the disciples out in a boat ahead of Him. As the disciples set sail and the crowds dispersed, Jesus withdrew to the mountainside to pray.

Scripture tells us that it wasn't until the fourth watch of the night that Jesus met the men out on the water. For sailors, the night is split into four sections, or "watches." The fourth watch is the one during the darkest hours of the night. We know that the men had been fighting against the wind and the waves for quite some time. And judging from when Jesus sent them out and when He came to them, they had been on the sea for eight to 12 hours! Clearly, these men were exhausted and afraid.

When they saw Jesus walking out to meet them, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" In ancient Jewish culture, people believed they would see ghosts as their own death approached. But Peter did not think this. Instead, Peter said, "Lord, if it's you ... tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," Jesus said (Matthew 14:28–29).

Peter walked out on the water to meet Jesus and then took his eyes off of Jesus because he was afraid. As Peter began to sink, he shouted, "Save me!" (v. 30). Jesus reached out and saved him. Truly, Peter was safe the entire time. But because he thought he was in danger, he forgot what was true—Jesus was near.

Jesus knew this experience would be one of many Peter would have in his arsenal of faith. Through this situation, Jesus let Peter know He would always be near—even in a time of seemingly great danger.

Support

Provides reflection and assessment through encouragement, prayer, and time in God's Word

For most of us, facing the storms of life is not our favorite thing. We wish God would just blow away the storms, but often this is where God meets us. He comes to us in the middle of the storm and asks us to step forward to a new level of faith and trust. He grows us in the scary times, walks with us, and shows us new things about Himself.

What storms are you and your loved ones facing today? If possible, spend some time this week near water, even if it's just your bathtub. Take a few minutes to journal about how God has been near to you in this storm ... has He sent you people to walk alongside you? Has He met you in worship and strengthened you with His presence? Has He grown you to a higher level of faith and trust than you had before?

Then, spend some time meditating on Isaiah 43:1–4. No matter your storm this week, God has promised to be with you, to love you and strengthen you. Turn your eyes from the wind and waves and focus on His face ... He is near.

EXPLORE

Children engage in fun, creative activities designed to pique their curiosity about the day's portion of The Big God Story.

With these EXPLORE activities, get the children thinking about today's portion of The Big God Story, which describes Jesus inviting Peter to walk on water.

Option 1: Floating Boats (for younger or older kids)

SUPPLIES

- Tarp or plastic tablecloth
- Shallow plastic container filled with water
- Objects that float or resemble boats (small plastic storage containers, lids, etc.)
- Straws (1 per child)
- Optional: Boat Coloring template (and crayons or markers; Origami Boat Instructions and Perfect Square, scissors)

SET UP

Spread the tarp or plastic tablecloth on a table and place the container of water on top of it. Set out the floatable objects and straws. Optional: Print one copy per child of the Boat Coloring template and/or the Origami Boat Instructions and Perfect Square.

RELATE

Invite your children to play with things that float. Point out the container of water, and encourage kids to put the floatable objects on the water. Have them blow through the straws to create wind to move the objects across the water. Optional for younger kids: Let the children color the Boat Coloring template. Optional for older kids: Let the kids follow the Origami Boat Instructions to create boats out of the Perfect Squares. They can float their origami boats on the water.

Option 2: Crossing the Water (for older kids)

SUPPLIES

- Large blue tarp, sheet, or parachute
- Optional: bouncy balls or beanbags

SET UP

Spread out the tarp, sheet, or parachute over a large area of the floor.

RELATE

After the miracle of feeding the five thousand, Jesus sent His disciples away in a boat. They soon encountered a storm. Jesus walked out onto the water toward their boat! Peter walked on the water to meet Jesus, but the wind and huge waves made him afraid, and he began to sink. Jesus saved Peter and calmed the storm.

Invite the children to stand around the edges of the tarp, sheet, or parachute and grab it. Have them hold the

tarp close to the ground and shake it to make large, wave-like ripples—their own “storm” on a body of water. Then ask a volunteer to walk across the tarp while everyone continues to shake it. Optional: Toss in bouncy balls or beanbags to make the storm more chaotic. Repeat until everyone has had a chance to walk across the “water.”

DISCOVER

Children participate in discovering God’s Word through Bible verse memorization, interactive storytelling techniques, and worship as response.

Connect

Question

Would you rather use a raft to float on a river, a pool, or the ocean?

Activity: Finding My Raft

SUPPLIES

- Connect Activity image (see Resources)
- Connect Question image (see Resources)
- Inflatable inner tubes, floats, or rafts (3)

SET UP

Inflate the inner tubes, floats, or rafts, and place them around the room.

RELATE

Encourage children to walk around the room and ask one another the Connect question. Give them about 30 seconds. Then, when you’re ready, assign “river,” “pool,” or “ocean” to each raft, and tell the kids to run to the rafts matching their answers. Once the children reach the raft, they must sing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

The Big God Story

Bible Passage: Matthew 14:22–36; John 6:16–21

Storytelling Technique: Children Acting Out the Narrative

God Is Near

SUPPLIES

- Bibles
- Shower caps (4)
- Spray or squirt bottle filled with water
- Wooden spoons (4)
- Large blue sheet or blanket

SET UP

Ask children to help act out today’s portion of The Big God Story. Kids can be disciples, one will be Peter, and one will be Jesus. Let them know you’ll prompt them as you tell the story.

RELATE

If applicable, briefly tell about a time you experienced a harsh storm and how you felt in the midst of it. **Last week we heard how Jesus fed more than five thousand people with only two fish and five loaves of bread. After this amazing miracle, Jesus went away to pray by Himself while the disciples got into a boat and headed out onto the water. Soon, they found themselves caught in a terrible storm. Before we hear more, let's pray together.** Lead children in a Prayer of Release to pause, be still, and ask the Holy Spirit to quiet their hearts and minds.

Invite children to open their Bibles to Matthew 14 and follow along. **The terrified disciples sailed in the storm for several hours.** Invite the three disciples and Peter to the stage. Have them put on the shower caps, and take the spray or squirt bottle and start misting the air above the four actors. **They must have been exhausted! This boat didn't have a motor. The disciples had to row the boat the whole way!** Hand each disciple a wooden spoon, and encourage the actors to line up, facing the side of the stage, and use their wooden spoons as if they're rowing. Continue squirting water into the air above the disciples. **They rowed and rowed for hours and hours, late into the night.** Encourage disciples to slow down their rowing and slump over as if exhausted.

Suddenly the disciples saw something that really scared them. Invite child playing Jesus to walk toward the disciples. **They saw a man walking toward them in the middle of the storm—on the water! “It's a ghost!” they said, and cried out in fear**” (v. 26). Encourage disciples to cry out in fear. **But then they heard a familiar voice say, “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid”** (v. 27). Encourage Jesus to say those words. **When they looked closer, they realized it was Jesus!**

Invite kids to continue following along in verses 28–30. Have Peter and Jesus come to the center of the stage, and invite Peter to repeat his words after you. **Peter yelled out to Jesus, “Lord, if it's you ... tell me to come to you on the water”** (v. 28). **Wow! Peter was a gutsy guy! When Jesus told him to come, he climbed out of the boat. He took one step (pause) and then another (instruct Peter to step slowly toward Jesus) ... and he was walking on water, in a storm, with Jesus!**

But Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and remembered the storm. Squirt some more water above Peter. **He became afraid, and—does anyone know what happened next? Pause for responses. Peter's doubt caused him to sink.** Hand one end of the blue sheet to one of the disciples while you hold the other end. Have Peter stand behind the sheet. Start with the sheet bunched up near Peter's feet and slowly raise it up to look like water rising as Peter sinks. **As Peter sank down in the water, he shouted, “Lord, save me!”** (v. 30).

The Bible tells us that right away Jesus reached out and grabbed Peter by the hand, saving him from drowning. Have Jesus grab Peter's hand, and lower the blue sheet to look like Peter is rising in the water. **Even during Peter's most frightening moment, Jesus was near. He was just one arm's length away. Jesus looked at Peter and said, “You of little faith ... why did you doubt?”** (v. 31). **Jesus was near and wanted Peter to trust Him.**

Squirt one last long, slow spray across the front of the stage, and then set the squirt bottle aside as you speak. **Then, when Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat together, the storm stopped immediately. Everyone who was watching worshipped Jesus, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God”** (v. 33). Invite the disciples to repeat this phrase after you. Then thank the actors for their performances and have them sit down in the audience.

The disciples may not have fully believed Jesus was the Messiah before this experience. But, after they saw Jesus' power, they believed. Sometimes, when we experience hard times, we expect God to take all of our problems away. But God never promised to give us a problem-free life. He promises to

be near to us in the middle of it all. When we have challenges and learn to trust God in the middle of our struggles, we grow in faith. Share a personal story about a time God was near to you in a difficult time.

It's okay to pray for God to take our troubles away, and sometimes He does. But we should also pray for God to remind us that He is near. Sometimes the way God serves us is by increasing our faith. We can always trust God to know what is best for us. We can also trust Him to comfort us because He is near.

Worship as Response

This time allows kids to respond to God through worship.

SUPPLIES

- Prayer Journals

SET UP

Set up the worship response stations.

RELATE

When Peter was walking on the water with Jesus, he got distracted by the storm and took his eyes off of Jesus. Because of this, he sank. But when he yelled, "Lord, save me!" Jesus rescued him. Jesus was near—only an arm's length away.

We all go through struggles and challenges. Sometimes the problems in our lives make us feel like we're drowning and we need somebody to save us. But we can have faith that even though life is difficult, Jesus is right there with us.

Have the kids spread out and find comfortable spots where they can sit or lie on their backs and close their eyes. Tell them to think about situations in their lives that are hard for them. Then ask them to imagine Jesus standing with them, right next to them. Encourage them to reach out their hands to Jesus in worship. Explain that sometimes physically reaching out in worship can increase the heart's willingness to praise God.

After about five minutes, invite each child to write in a Prayer Journal. Encourage the kids to tell God what they are struggling with, what they are afraid of and ask God to be near.

RESPOND

Children reflect on what the Holy Spirit is teaching them and respond through creative activities and games.

Reflect: God Is Near

Encourage the kids to open their Bibles and read the suggested passages.

Questions for Younger Kids

- **How do you think the disciples felt in the middle of the storm?** Matthew 14:24; John 6:16–18
- **How would you have felt if you had been Peter stepping out onto the water?** Matthew 14:28–29

- **Why did Peter start to sink?** Matthew 14:30
- **Why can hard times be a good thing sometimes?** Job 23:10
- **Does anyone want to share a story about experiencing God being near? Tell us about it.**

Questions for Older Kids

- **Why did Jesus send His disciples out on the water, knowing there would be a storm?**
Matthew 14:23–24
- **If you had been in Peter’s shoes, would you have walked on water to Jesus?** Matthew 14:29
- **How does God help us in hard times?** 2 Corinthians 1:3–5
- **How did Jesus serve Peter though this situation?** Matthew 14:31
- **How does God strengthen us in times of fear or uncertainty?** Isaiah 41:10
- **Does anyone want to share a story about experiencing God being near? Tell us about it.**

Letters of Encouragement

SUPPLIES

- Bible
- Construction paper or card stock (1 sheet per child)
- Markers and pens
- Misc. decorating supplies (stickers, glitter, glue, etc.)

RELATE

Earlier, we talked about how Jesus and Peter walked on water. Even though Jesus was there with him, Peter still became distracted by the storm. When he took his eyes off Jesus, he was in danger—sinking into the stormy sea. But, of course, Jesus was so close to Peter that Jesus only needed to reach out His hand and save him. Peter’s struggle is similar to the struggles we have in our lives. Even though our struggles might be scary (parents divorcing, people who are sick, moving to a new town), we know God is near. We can have faith that He is always with us.

Give each child a sheet of construction paper or card stock. Have each older kid look up one of these passages and read it to himself. After a few minutes read them, one at a time, out loud: Psalm 57:1–2; Psalm 136:1; Psalm 139:1–6; Psalm 34:17–18. Then discuss: **What do these verses tell us about God? How do we know God is near? How can these verses help us trust God? How do you need God to be near you?**

Ask all the children to take a minute to think of responses. Have older kids write letters for themselves; have younger kids draw on their cards. In the letters and on the cards, they should write or draw about what they learned today and some words of encouragement about how God is near to them. Help them think of truths about God, such as “God loves me” or “God is with me.” Afterward, they can decorate the letters and cards.

When the kids finish, suggest they take their letters and cards home and place them somewhere special. Remind them that when they’re having a bad day, they can pull out their letters or cards and remember that God is near. If there’s extra time, have the kids think of other people who might need letters or cards of encouragement. Give them the option to serve others by writing them letters or cards of encouragement as well.

BLESS

Children receive a blessing from their leaders and sometimes one another.

A blessing may be prayer of commission, a portion of Scripture, or words to encourage and guide.

RELATE

Encourage the kids to hold their hands in front of them, palms up. Open a Bible and read Hebrews 12:2 and Psalm 123:1:

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I lift up my eyes to you, to you who sit enthroned in heaven.

Invite the children to close their eyes and picture Jesus Christ, seated on His throne, looking at them with love.

May you know that God is near you in hard times. May He give you patience, peace, and joy, and may your faith grow as you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.