

date: **5/7/17****Bible Passage: Matthew 14:22–36; John 6:16–21**
(Walking on Water)

God Is Near

REMEMBER VERSE

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

John 11:25–26a

Inspire

Shares personal stories from fellow ministry leaders about how God has worked in their lives

When I accepted a new job with a church in New York City, I had no clue how to find a good, affordable apartment. I sought help from Google and went up to hunt for housing a few weeks before I needed to move. Place after place was a complete letdown ... much tinier than the pictures showed, astronomical rent, or locations that didn't feel safe. By the end of the day, I was feeling weary. I thought God had called me to this city, but where was I going to live?

As the sun was setting over the Big Apple, I met up with a friend who went with me to visit one last place. It was our last opportunity of the day before realtors stopped showing apartments. We walked up the block, scanning the buildings for the right address, when suddenly our eyes fell on my name written in large pink graffiti letters with a heart next to it. My name was written right in front of the apartment we were supposed to tour.

As you may have guessed, the apartment ended up being the perfect fit. The price was unbelievably low for one of New York's most sought-after neighborhoods, and it was within walking distance of my church. I still smile thinking back on how it felt to see my name written in my favorite color outside of the apartment God gave me. In the midst of my storm of anxiety and confusion, God was near.

Kelly Goddard
HRock Church

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.

SMALL GROUP
SECTION

EXPLORE// 10 min.

Small Group Leaders

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.

Crossing the Water

SUPPLIES

- sheet

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 sheet 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. Repeat until everyone has had a chance to walk across the “water.”

LARGE GROUP
SECTION

DISCOVER// 30 min.

Host/Worship Leader/Storyteller

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

Traditions and Remember Verse

SUPPLIES

- [Remember Verse image](#) (see Resources)
- [Remember Verse animation](#) (see Resources)
- Mementos for your church Traditions (rocks, marbles, gum balls, etc.)

RELATE

Give the children mementos (such as rocks, marbles, or blocks) for accomplishments such as memorizing the Remember Verse or bringing their Bibles. Have them put the objects into a clear container or add them to a structure, and celebrate when it’s complete.

This week’s Remember Verse focuses on a character trait of God that’s highlighted in today’s portion of The Big God Story.

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. John 11:25–26a

Connect

Question

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

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

- [Timeline image](#) (see Resources)
- [Timeline animation](#) (see Resources)
- [Image: Boat](#) (see Resources)
- Bibles
- Shower caps (4)
- Spray or squirt bottle filled with water
- Wooden spoons (4)
- Large blue sheet or blanket

SET UP

Ask five children to help act out today's portion of The Big God Story. Three kids will be disciples, one will be Peter, and one will be Jesus. Let them know you'll prompt them as you storytell.

RELATE

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.** *Tech: Cue Boat image.* **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.

SMALL GROUP SECTION

RESPOND// 15 min.

Small Group Leaders

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.

BLESS// 5 min.

Small Group Leaders

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.

SUPPLIES

- Remember Verse cards (see Resources)
- Bible

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.