

date: **3/5/17****Bible Passage: Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3**  
(John the Baptist)

## God Is Faithful

### REMEMBER VERSE

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

### Inspire

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

In a television series I watched, humanity lived through a yearlong occupation by hostile foreigners. During the occupation, people made difficult choices. Some chose to collaborate with the foreigners in order to obtain and deliver covert information, turning on their own people. Others organized a resistance movement and sacrificed members as suicide bombers. All felt justified, no matter their actions.

Later, trials convicting people of treason or murder began. The penalty for these crimes was death. However, just as they began, the president stopped the trials, as it was clear that if every person who had committed a crime was tried, the trials would last for years. After thinking it over, the president stood ready at her microphone to give her decision about who should be tried, in what order, and when. But when she spoke, she shocked everyone listening. She declared a general pardon. No one would be tried. Everyone would be forgiven.

Hearing this, I burst into tears. I thought of the sin in my life and how I'd been forgiven. I deserve to go to trial before God as a result of my sin, but instead I've been offered forgiveness through the sacrifice Jesus made for me—once and for all. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God made the way for us to be forgiven and to receive the gift of eternal life. God promised thousands of years ago to do this, and He did! He is faithful.

*Tori Funkhouser*  
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## Equip

*Offers perspective and context to the lesson's Bible passage*

Born in the hill country of Judah to Elizabeth, a relative of Mary the mother of Jesus, John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. He came preaching in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). In a sense, John the Baptist bridged the gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

John's first testimony to who Jesus was came before his birth. When Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus, came into the room, John leaped in his mother's womb (Luke 1:41). This foretold what lay ahead for John's future. His life's goal and mission would be testifying to who Jesus was.

Taking the Nazarite vow, John was set apart to God. He wouldn't drink wine or strong drink, cut his hair, or go near a dead body. His unique appearance and dress added to his likeness to Elijah. Jewish tradition holds that after Elijah's death, his mantle was stored in a small chamber in the golden altar in the temple. Hundreds of years later, when John was born, this tradition tells that Zechariah, John's father, took the mantle for his son to wear during his ministry.

John paved the way for Jesus by calling people to repent and be baptized as a symbol of turning away from their sin. Multitudes flocked to the wilderness to hear the message of John. When Jesus, too, came to be baptized, John acknowledged that this was indeed the Messiah Israel had been waiting for. Even in the face of death, John maintained his witness to King Herod. In Luke 7:28, Jesus described John as the greatest man who had ever lived.

The faithfulness of John reflected the faithfulness of our God. John provided a witness to the coming of God's Son, and John took the responsibility of fulfilling that mission.

## Support

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

Each of us has a sense of what it means to prepare. Preparation requires planning and considering various possibilities. This week, as you're preparing to welcome children to learn more about The Big God Story, consider how God has been faithful in your life. Look back at His promises and how He has worked in ways both expected and unexpected. You may want to make a list of each category to help remind you of His faithfulness in the past.

Then, look ahead. What is He calling you to do in the future? In your home? At church? In your community? How can you be a light and a voice that directs people to Jesus?

Take time to share what you're hearing from God with someone you trust. Ask that person to pray for you and encourage you in the days and weeks ahead. First Thessalonians 5:24 says, "The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it." Watch together as He works in your life and the lives of those around you to accomplish His plans, in His timing and in His way.

## 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.*

At the beginning of the New Testament we read about a man named John. John, whom God sent to prepare the way for Jesus, ate locusts, wore clothes made from camel hair, and lived in the wilderness. Lead the children through these EXPLORE activities to get them thinking about life in the wilderness.

## What Do We Need? (K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade )

### SUPPLIES

- [What Do We Need? images](#) (see Resources)

### PREPARE AHEAD

Print the images.

### RELATE

**Today we're going to hear about a man named John. John did things pretty differently from others. He ate locusts, or bugs kind of like grasshoppers, wore clothes made out of camel's hair, and lived in the wilderness. But God used him to give a very important message to Israel.**

**Would you ever want to live out in the wilderness? Invite responses. If I spent time in the wilderness, I would really need to bring some supplies! Even though you and I don't live in the wilderness, we still need to be prepared when we go places. Let's see if we can think of some supplies we might need for different kinds of situations.**

Encourage the children to sit in a circle on the floor or around a table, and place the images facedown in the middle of the group. Hold up one image at a time, and have the children point out the items they would bring with them if they did the activity shown in the image. Discuss why they would need each item and what issues they might face if they didn't have that item.

## What Would You Bring? (3-5<sup>th</sup> Grade)

### SUPPLIES

- [What Would You Bring? cards](#) (see Resources)
- Scissors
- Bowl or hat

### SET UP

Print the cards, cut them apart, fold them, and place them in the bowl or hat.

### RELATE

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wilderness. But God used him to give a very important message to Israel.

**Would you ever want to live out in the wilderness?** Invite responses. **If I spent time in the wilderness, I would really need to bring some supplies! Even though you and I don't live in the wilderness, we still need to be prepared when we go places. Let's see if we can think of some supplies we might need for different kinds of situations.**

Encourage the children to sit in a circle on the floor or around a table, and place the bowl in the center. Pull out one card at a time, and read the category aloud. Then have the kids brainstorm what items they would bring with them in order to be prepared for that activity or event. Discuss why they would need each item and what issues they might face if they didn't have that item.

## 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.

**Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**  
**Hebrews 4:16**

## Connect


### Question

If you were stranded in the wilderness, what would you look for to eat?

# The Big God Story

**Bible Passage:** Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3  
**Storytelling Technique:** First-Person Monologue  
**God Is Faithful**

## SUPPLIES

- [Timeline image](#) (see Resources)
- [Timeline animation](#) (see Resources)
- [Images: Wilderness, Locusts](#) (see Resources)
- Bibles
- Costume for John the Baptist (robe or tunic made from scratchy fabric, messy-hair wig, etc.)
- Green beans or other food to represent locusts (about 1/4 c.) 
- Flashlight

## PREPARE AHEAD

Today's portion of The Big God Story will be told from the perspective of John the Baptist. Ahead of time, recruit a leader to play this role. Give him the costume supplies, green beans, and flashlight, along with a copy of the script. If possible, set up a time to rehearse before the service.

## RELATE

Lead children in a Prayer of Release to pause, be still, and ask the Holy Spirit to quiet their hearts and minds. Storyteller playing John the Baptist comes up to the stage, munching on the green beans. He strolls along, enjoying his snack, and then suddenly realizes he's not alone. **Oh, hello, there! I didn't see you there. I'm just enjoying a little snack as I go for my walk today. What kinds of things do you like to snack on?** Invite responses. **Wow, those things all sound really good. But you know what I love to eat?** John holds up a few green beans. **Locusts! Yes, crispy, crunchy, delicious locusts. They're bugs that look like grasshoppers. Don't they sound delicious?** John enthusiastically devours a few more "locusts."

**I know, I know—to you that may sound a little weird. But I always did things my own way. I like to wear clothes made out of the hair of camels, and I live way out in the wilderness by myself. But before I go any further, let me introduce myself: I'm John the Baptist.** John bows in greeting. **God used me for an important job in The Big God Story. He led me to tell people about His faithfulness as I prepared the way for the Messiah, Jesus! Let me tell you about it.**

**Remember how, a couple of weeks ago, you heard how Israel split into two nations, Israel and Judah? After that, something strange happened: God didn't speak to His people through prophets or judges for 400 years! It was a dark time for God's people while they waited for Him to speak again.**

**But even though it seemed dark, God hadn't gone anywhere. God still remembered His promise to send the Redeemer. He was waiting for just the right moment in history to bring His promise to bring Jesus to earth.**

**The prophet Isaiah spoke about how this would happen. What's a prophet? Pause for responses. That's right: A prophet shares God's message with His people. Let's take a look at one of these messages.** Invite children to turn to Isaiah 40:3 in their Bibles. **God spoke to the prophet Isaiah, saying, "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough**

ground shall become level ... And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together” (Isaiah 40:3–5).

This message said God’s Son would be revealed so everyone could see Him. It also said someone’s voice would cry out to prepare the way for Jesus. Whose voice do you think this was? Pause for responses. It was my voice! I was the one shouting (John cups his hands around his mouth and shouts), “Prepare the way for the LORD” (v. 3).

Like I told you earlier, I lived in the wilderness (*Tech: Cue Wilderness image*) and ate honey and locusts. *Tech: Cue Locusts image*. Maybe I seemed strange to some people, but God used me to deliver a message to His people for the first time in 400 years—a message that brought light to the darkness! *Tech: Dim lights*. John turns on flashlight and shines it around the room. The Bible says I “came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe” (John 1:7).

What does Jesus’ name mean? Pause for responses. That’s right: “God saves.” Jesus came into the world to save people from their sins and invite them to be a part of The Big God Story. John shines flashlight across the audience. God wanted His light to shine on everyone through His Son, Jesus. So God sent me to help tell people the Messiah had come ... and to prepare their hearts to receive Him. *Tech: Turn on lights* as John turns off the flashlight.

Now, I don’t mean to brag (John straightens his robe), but crowds of people came to hear the message God told me to share. Some people walked at least 20 miles to hear me speak—a long way! And what did I say? You can read it yourself by turning to Matthew 3:2: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Does anyone know what *repent* means? Pause for responses. To repent means to turn away from doing wrong and to turn toward Jesus. God said, “To all who ... believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). This means that when we trust and obey Jesus, we become a part of His family!

When a person chose to repent, I used water to give an outward sign of that. This is called *baptism*. But I wanted the people to know that I wasn’t the Messiah myself—no way! And only the Messiah can save people from their sins. I just baptized people to help them prepare their hearts for Jesus. I said, “After me comes the one more powerful than I ... I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:7–8).

God promised a long time ago to send the Redeemer, Jesus, to restore mankind’s relationship with God. And even though thousands of years had passed, God kept that promise because He is faithful. God made the way for us to be forgiven of our sins and to be with Him forever. Share a personal story about God’s faithfulness in your life.

## 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 Faithful

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

### Questions for Younger Kids

- **What did John do to prepare people for the Redeemer?** Matthew 3:1–2, 6
- **What does *repent* mean?**
- **How does someone repent?** Acts 3:19
- **Why do we need Jesus to save us?** Romans 3:23
- **What happens when we repent?** Acts 2:38

### Questions for Older Kids

- **What did John do to prepare people for the Redeemer?** Matthew 3:1–2, 6
- **What does *repent* mean?**
- **How does someone repent?** Acts 3:19
- **Why do we need Jesus to save us?** Romans 3:23
- **What happens when we repent?** Acts 2:38
- **Can we do or say anything to stop God from being faithful to us?** 2 Timothy 2:13

## 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)

### RELATE

As you prepare for the blessing, explain to the kids that an ancient seal was kind of like a stamp that people would press into wax to seal letters and packages. Seals were used as a way of marking an object to show possession, certification, or ownership of something.

Open a Bible and read Ephesians 1:13–14:

**And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.**

(Child's name), **you belong to God. He will always be faithful to you and take care of you.**

Finally, bless the entire group with these words:

**May you know that God is faithful. May you know that He always keeps His covenants.**