God Dwells with His People

Remember Verse
With a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever.
Psalm 136:12

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

Located in the center of Westmont College campus, the small prayer chapel meant more to me than any other building. Different from any other space on campus, the chapel served as an intentional place to seek God. Students retreated there to write in their journals, have a good cry, or pray with a friend.

Some time later, a wildfire threatened my beloved chapel, but it was spared. When I visited the campus two years later, I saw signs of the fire: blackened tree trunks, empty building plots, and torn-up roads. Inside the chapel, I sat on the floor, crossed my legs, and prayed. I felt the Holy Spirit’s presence.

God wants to meet with us in His place of worship. I know He’s always with me, and I don’t need a building to meet with Him, but there’s something special about being with God in His appointed place of worship. In these places, the God of heaven stoops down to be with us.

Asriel Medina
ROCKHARBOR Church

Equip Offers perspective and context to the lesson’s Bible passage

God dwelled with His people in the desert after He freed them from Egypt. And when God called Moses to go up Mount Sinai, He revealed His instructions for the tabernacle, the ark, and other structures—as well as the Ten Commandments and more than 600 laws (sometimes referred to as the book of the law).

The tabernacle would be the place where God dwelled among His people, and the instructions, found in Exodus, are very detailed. Through Moses, God gave His people exact measurements, weights, sizes, colors, proportions, etc., for every curtain, hook, beam, covering, and decoration to go in the tabernacle—including details such as which way to twist the curtains to cover it and where to carve or draw depictions of the cherubim.

If the tabernacle was where God dwelled among His people, the Holy of Holies was where God met with the priests within the tabernacle. Inside the Holy of Holies sat the ark of the covenant. It might be tempting to suppose that God dwelled within the ark, but the mental image Exodus gives us is God’s presence hovering above it.

Outside the tabernacle, God’s presence came down as a cloud, and through the cloud, God led His people through the desert. It must have been reassuring to know that God was with them, but also a fear-inspiring reminder that they had agreed to follow and obey His laws as His covenant people.

Just as God’s presence dwelled in the tabernacle and His glory filled the temple after Solomon’s dedication, Paul says, “[We] are God’s temple and … God’s Spirit dwells in [us]” (1 Corinthians 3:16a).
Support Provides reflection and assessment through encouragement, prayer, and time in God’s Word

During the years the Israelites wandered in the desert, Moses was the model of a leader, a worshipper, and a friend of God. Through Moses, God spoke to His people, enacted His covenant with them, and gave them His laws and instructions.

As parents and practitioners, we act as models for the children in our charge—a daunting task. Even so, we read in Scripture that as Moses followed God’s commands, God filled the work with His glory. Take a moment to think about the responsibilities God has entrusted to you. Write them down or simply take a mental inventory. Thank God for giving you the role of being a leader, and ask Him to fill the work of your hands with His glory.

EXPLORE/ 10 minutes

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

Option 1: My Dwelling Place (K-2nd Gr)

In today’s portion of The Big God Story, children will hear about the tabernacle, where God dwelled with His people. With this activity, get your kids thinking about what kinds of dwelling places they might want to design for themselves.

SUPPLIES
• Butcher paper (approx. 3’–5’) or paper (1 sheet per child)
• Pens, pencils, colored pencils, or markers

RELATE
Today, in The Big God Story, we’ll hear about how God chose to dwell with His people—to come near to them in a special way—with a building called a tabernacle. If you could create your own building in which to dwell, what would it be like?

Encourage kids to think creatively about their dwelling places. How would they get from downstairs to upstairs? What would the walls be made of? What would come out of the kitchen faucet? What kinds of furniture would be inside—maybe a bounce house instead of a sofa? Invite the kids to draw their ideas. They can work together to create one ultimate dwelling place on a large piece of butcher paper, or they can work individually to create their own dwelling places on sheets of regular paper.

Option 2: Following Directions (3rd – 5th Gr)

When God gave the Israelites instructions for the tabernacle, they might have felt like construction workers following blueprints. During this EXPLORE, help the kids through an activity in which they follow directions to fold an origami dog face.

SUPPLIES
• Origami Dog Face directions (see Resources)
• Origami paper or regular paper cut into perfect squares (1 square per child)
• Colored pencils or markers
• Optional: scissors

PREPARE AHEAD
Print a copy of the Origami Dog Face directions for each child.
Today, in The Big God Story, we'll hear about how God gave His people instructions for building the tabernacle, where He would dwell with them. God gave a lot of instructions, and they have a lot of detail! Let's follow some instructions to make an origami dog face. Give each child a copy of the directions and a square of paper. Invite the kids to follow the instructions to create a dog face. Then they can draw eyes, a nose, and a mouth on the dog.

**DISCOVER**//30 minutes

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.

With a mighty hand and outstretched arm; his love endures forever.

Psalm 136:12

**Connect**

**QUESTION**

What is the coolest building you’ve ever seen?

**Activity: “Foot” Ball**

**SUPPLIES**
- Connect Question image (see Resources)
- Connect Activity image (see Resources)
- Balloons (1 per every 6–8 children)

**RELATE**

Have the children form groups of six to eight. Hand each group a balloon, and invite the kids to play a game of balloon volleyball using only their feet. They should try to pass the balloon around by kicking it in the air. If the balloon falls to the ground, the last person who kicked it gets to answer the Connect question. If the last person to kick the balloon has already answered the Connect question, he gets to choose another child to answer. Keep playing until each child has a chance to answer the Connect question within their group.

**The Big God Story**

Bible Passage: Exodus 25—40

Storytelling Technique: Props, Key Words, Actions, and Images
God Dwells with His People

SUPPLIES
• Timeline image (see Resources)
• Timeline animation (see Resources)
• Images: Spices, Incense, Olive Oil, Gold, Ark of the Covenant, Tabernacle (see Resources)
• Bibles
• Spices or incense
• Bottle of olive oil
• Chairs (4)
• Sheet (queen- or king-size)
• Shimmery gold fabric or tablecloth (any size)
• Box (about 3½’ x 2’ x 2’)

SET UP
Arrange the four chairs onstage in a square. Make sure they’re close enough that the sheet can drape over them to form a “tent.” Place the gold fabric and box in an inconspicuous place onstage. Ask a small group leader to ask three kids to help with storytelling today. Give each child an item—either the fabric, the spices or incense, or the olive oil. Let the children know that you’ll ask them to come up front with their items.

RELATE
Welcome the children. Invite the three kids with the items to come up front. One at a time, ask each child to tell everyone what he’s holding and how it’s typically used. Then thank the three children and have them return to their seats.

What do you think these three things might have in common? Invite responses. Good thoughts. Ask kids to place the items onstage and return to their seats. God asked the Israelites to use these items as they built a very special place, which we’ll hear about in a minute. But first, let’s pause to ask God to teach us. Lead kids in Prayer of Release to pause, be still, and ask the Holy Spirit to quiet their hearts and minds.

What have we been hearing about The Big God Story over the past few weeks? Pause for responses. Great thoughts. We’ve heard how God freed His people from slavery, brought them into the desert, and gave them His laws so they would know how to honor Him as the one true God. God loved His people, called them His own, and started a relationship with them. He desired for them to know Him.

As the Israelites traveled through the desert, God also desired to be close to His people. He desired to dwell with them. What does this mean? Invite responses. Great thoughts. When we talk about God dwelling with His people, we’re talking about how He comes near to His people in a special way. When I point to you, shout the word “dwell” as you raise your hands in the air and bring them to a point over your head, kind of like you’re making a tent. Got it? Let’s practice. Lead kids in practicing this a few times.

Invite kids to open their Bibles to Exodus 25 and follow along as you read verses 8–9. What’s a tabernacle? Pause for answers. A tabernacle is like a big tent. Have a volunteer come onstage and drape the sheet over the four chairs to create a “tent.” With the tabernacle, God would dwell (lead kids in shouting word and making motion) with His people.

Now, does God actually live in a house or tent or other building? Invite responses. Exactly—He’s God, so He’s everywhere! But when He chose to dwell (lead kids in shouting word and making motion) among His people, His presence came into the tabernacle. That means He came close to His people in a special way so they could spend time with Him.

God gave very specific instructions about how to build the tabernacle and asked for many different items. What three objects did we see earlier? Invite answers. Right. Hold up each item as you talk about it. The people brought fabric to make beautiful curtains to hang inside the tabernacle. They brought incense and spices (Tech: Cue Spices and Incense images) to burn and to create a nice smell. They brought olive oil (Tech: Cue Olive Oil image) to put inside lamps and burn, kind of like a candle. Invite a volunteer to come onstage and place the fabric, olive oil, and spices or incense inside the tent. Also have two volunteers to come onstage and drape the gold fabric or tablecloth over the tent as you continue.

Using many beautiful items (Tech: Cue Gold image), the Israelites built a tabernacle where God’s presence would dwell (lead kids in shouting word and making motion) among His people. The people could come inside the courtyard, or outside area, of the tabernacle and spend time with God. What person do you like to spend time with? Invite a few kids to share; interact with their responses.
That's not all. God also told His people to make something called the ark of the covenant. Read Exodus 25:10–11 or ask a volunteer to read it. Tech: Cue Ark of the Covenant image. God’s presence would dwell (lead kids in shouting word and making motion) above the ark. Wow! Invite a volunteer to move the ark of the covenant box inside the tent. But the ark sat in a room called the Holy of Holies, and a curtain separated it from everything else. What does holy mean? Pause for responses. Good thoughts. God is holy, or set apart, which means He can’t dwell (lead kids in shouting word and making motion) with sin. Sin separates people from God, and that’s what the big curtain represented.

Once the people finished the tabernacle (Tech: Cue Tabernacle image), God’s presence came down on top of it in the form of a cloud. Read Exodus 40:36–38 while everyone follows along. What do you think it might have looked like to see the cloud in the day and fire lighting up the cloud at night? Invite responses. God didn’t leave His people to figure out their journey alone; He always showed them where to go.

God chose to dwell (lead kids in shouting word and making motion) with His people. His presence was inside the tabernacle and could be seen in the cloud that the people followed. This way, His people could see and know that He was near.

But God desired to be even closer to His people. How do you think He planned to do this? Invite responses. Exactly! Hundreds of years later, God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross and rise again so people didn’t have to be separated from God because of their sins.

And Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to dwell (lead kids in shouting the word and making a new motion: pointing to themselves with their thumbs) inside everyone who chooses to trust Jesus. Isn’t that awesome? Because the Holy Spirit lives inside us, God dwells (lead kids in shouting the word and pointing to themselves with their thumbs) with us, and He will never, ever leave us. Share about a time you realized that God dwelled with you. Specifically, share about how that realization changed you.

Worship as Response

This time allows kids to respond to God through worship. Make plans for your worship time, but prepare yourself and your team to hold them loosely if the Holy Spirit leads the group in a different direction.

SUPPLIES
• None

RELATE
God desired to dwell with His people, so He asked them to build the tabernacle. But that wasn’t enough; God wanted to be even closer to His people! So God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins on the cross and rise again. When we trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside us. We will never be alone because He’s always with us. He will never, ever leave us. Invite the kids to spend some time in silence thinking about how God is always with them and will never leave them.

What would you like to say to God for sending Jesus so we could be close to God? How does it make you feel to know He will never, ever leave you, no matter where you go? Encourage the kids to take turns standing up and publicly sharing words of thanks and praise to God for dwelling with us. The kids can also share personal stories of ways they’ve experienced God’s presence in their lives.

SMALL GROUP SECTION

RESPOND//15 minutes

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

Reflect: God Dwells with His People

Encourage the kids to open their Bibles and read the suggested passages.
Questions for Younger Kids
• Why did God want His people to build a tabernacle? Exodus 25:8
• What was the ark of the covenant? Exodus 25:21–22
• How did the Israelites know when to move camp? Exodus 40:36–38
• What do you think it would be like to follow God—to actually see His presence moving?
• How does God dwell with us today?

Questions for Older Kids
• What is a tabernacle?
• Why did God want His people to build a tabernacle? Exodus 25:8
• What was kept inside of the ark of the covenant? Exodus 25:16
• What happened when the tabernacle was finished? Exodus 40:34
• How did the Israelites know when to move camp? Exodus 40:36–38
• What do you think it would be like to follow God—to actually see His presence moving?
• How is God closer to us than He was to the Israelites?
• How does God dwell with us today?

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
Open a Bible and read Hebrews 13:5b:

God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Now read the verse again, and let the kids know that this time, when they hear the word “never,” they should shout it out as loudly as they can.

Finally, finish with this blessing.

May you know that God dwells with you, no matter where you go. May you sense Him with you every day this week.