

DAY 1

MAGNIFY GOD

Jesus and the Children (John 1:1-3,12; Mark 10:13-16)

Think back to a time you watched a group of children sing or perform on a stage. Did you notice the children scanning the audience looking for special family members? I am drawn to those children and their pursuit of a familiar face. Witnessing that moment of connection when they finally find their person is priceless—and sometimes even comical.

One of the greatest needs children have is to be seen. The children in your care this week need to be seen by you—use their names, get to know their interests, and look for ways to connect with them. They also need to learn and experience the truth that God sees and knows them!

Today's Point, God sees me, magnifies an important truth about God. The Old Testament records an early instance of this concept. In Genesis 16, Hagar did something no other person in the Bible is said to have done. She gave God a new name: “El-roi” or “The God Who Sees Me.” Knowing God sees us is foundational to believing in the God who also wants to know us. We are not invisible to God!

The story of Jesus and the children in Mark 10 will help guide us in teaching children about the God who sees and loves them. Consider these details of this interaction:

- Mark 10:13—People were bringing little children to Jesus for Him to touch them. Parents were the likely “people” in this verse, however, Mark does not specify who brought the children to Jesus. The people were eager to bring the children to Jesus for a blessing, but Jesus gave them so much more!
- Mark 10:14—When Jesus saw the disciples rebuking the children, the Bible says Jesus was indignant. This word *indignant* means “much grieved.” Jesus was angry, but He was more than just angry. He was grieved because of His love for both the disciples and the children. Jesus might have even been disappointed that the disciples had failed to understand the graphic truth He spoke to them in Mark 9:47. How could the disciples fail so miserably when Jesus had just told them that it would be better to hang a millstone around their necks than to cause a little one to stumble? (See Mark 9:42.) Jesus saw the children as worthy to be included, blessed, and welcomed. He was grieved to know the disciples still did not understand the Kingdom He came to build.
- Mark 10:16—Jesus used this encounter with the children to clearly signal to the disciples and everyone watching that these children belonged and were accepted and valued. The embrace and blessing Jesus gave to the children powerfully communicated that children are worthy image-bearers of God, deserving our unconditional acceptance and respect. Jesus saw the children. Jesus saw their need. Do you?

Zoom In:

1. In today's Bible passage Jesus elevated the worth of children, embraced them, and blessed them. How can you do the same this week? Would you take some time each day to ask God to help you see each child in your care through His eyes?
2. What does it mean to you to know that God sees *you*?
3. How can you help children in your care understand the value Jesus places on them?



DAY 2

MAGNIFY GOD'S CARE

Jesus Calmed the Storm (*Mark 4:1,35-41*)

Does God care about me? When I am in the midst of suffering and consumed with worry, I find it harder to answer that question with yes. Do you remember a time when you wondered if God cared about you?

The Sea of Galilee is the setting for today's Bible story. The area of Galilee is where Jesus called His disciples and performed many miracles. The Sea of Galilee is nearly 700 feet below sea level with towering hills rising 1,500 feet above sea level around it. Its location makes the area subject to short, violent storms that usually come on quickly. The storm the disciples experienced in Mark 4 likely occurred as the winds blew down from the surrounding hills and hit the warm water, causing a sudden and furious storm. The waves were so high the boat filled with water. The disciples panicked!

Consider these other important details:

1. Jesus asked the disciples (who were unaware of the coming storm) to take Him in the boat to the other side of the sea.
2. Jesus appeared unaware of the peril as He slept during the storm.
3. The disciples questioned whether Jesus cared for them.
4. Jesus calmed the storm.
5. The disciples were terrified and asked each other who Jesus was.

The disciples were seasoned, professional fishermen. Surely they had experienced similar storms. Jesus demonstrated His power over nature and answered their question about His care for them. Their emotion and their question after the calm are thought-provoking: "And they were terrified and asked one another, 'Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!'"

Jesus calmed the waves and then asked the disciples why they had been afraid during the storm. After witnessing this miracle, the disciples were described as terrified. The obedience of the wind and waves to Jesus' command created more fear in the disciples than the storm itself.

How do the points above magnify God's care for us during difficult times?

1. Our obedience to God may put us in storms that we don't see coming. The disciples were doing what Jesus asked them to do.
2. The absence of perilous storms in our lives is not a measure of God's care for us.
3. Our tendency is to question God's care when we are going through storms.
4. God's care is felt through His presence with us as we go through storms.
5. When storms are over, we may question who God is and how He works. This is an opportunity for a deeper understanding of God.

The power of God is demonstrated through Jesus' ability to calm the storm. Children are drawn to the awe of this story as they learn God can do things no one else can. There will be children with you at VBS who are in the middle of circumstances that they didn't expect. Some of these situations may be incredibly hard on them. These children may not articulate the question, but they are likely wondering if God cares for them.

Zoom In:

1. Have you been obedient to God and then found yourself in difficult circumstances? What can this passage teach you about God's care for you?
2. The disciples learned some new things about God as a result of going through the storm. What has God revealed about Himself to you through the storms you have experienced?
3. How can you guide children to be aware of God's presence and care when they are going through difficult times?

DAY 3

MAGNIFY GOD'S LOVE

The Woman at the Well (*John 4:1-42*)

Do you wonder why it seems easier for children to believe that God loves them than it is for adults?

Teens and adults tend to be more skeptical and question the unconditional love of God. It is fascinating that Jesus did not demand people immediately accept His teachings. Scripture documents His willingness to engage the individual and speak to her deepest need.

Consider the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42. A Jewish Rabbi talking with a woman was unconventional, but him talking to a Samaritan woman was shocking. Jesus knew everything about this woman. He knew her rejections, her betrayals, and her shame. Yet He offered her a new life. John 4:26 reveals an even more astounding detail in the story. Jesus revealed Himself to her as the Messiah. Would anyone have imagined Jesus would choose her? This story reminds us that Jesus knows us better than anyone and still chooses to love us deeply.

Not only was she fully known and loved, but the Samaritan woman was also used by Jesus to proclaim the gospel to her entire town. John 4:39 says, "Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of what the woman said when she testified, 'He told me everything I ever did.'" To think of this in today's terms, we could definitely say she was an influencer!

For the children in your care to feel known and loved, it is vitally important that you and other leaders are attuned to them. Attunement is more than just attention. Attunement does not happen from a stage or in a large group. Attunement is a deep connection that comes from sitting next to the child, making eye contact, listening to her thoughts and questions, and creating an environment where she feels safe and known. Jesus demonstrated this type of attunement with the Samaritan woman. Attunement is being physically, emotionally, and spiritually present for each child.

Magnifying God's love and helping children know and experience the depth of God's love is essential to their spiritual formation. No matter what they do, God still loves them. Like the Samaritan woman, God has plans to use them in ways that are hard to imagine.

Zoom In:

1. What is God trying to teach you through this story?
2. You may be thinking you are just crowd control at Vacation Bible School. What if God has plans to use you in an unexpected way this week? Pray and ask God to give you the ability to see, know, and love the children you invest in this week.
3. What parts of this story do you think will be surprising to children? How could you magnify this concept of unconditional love to the children? How could you help children understand God often uses unlikely people to accomplish His will?



DAY 4

MAGNIFY GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3:1-21; 18–20; 1 Corinthians 15:6)

On Day 3, the Bible story of the Samaritan woman focused on God's love. On Day 4, children will be introduced to Nicodemus and discover their need for forgiveness. Despite the different backgrounds of the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus, the invitation from Jesus was the same. Let's magnify some of those differences and discover how they each responded.

Nicodemus is called by name in John 3. In chapter 4, John leaves out the woman's name and refers to her as the Samaritan woman. As a Jewish man, Nicodemus had higher status. He was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. The Samaritan woman had no status. Nicodemus came to visit Jesus privately at night. The Samaritan woman's interaction with Jesus occurred during the day in a public setting.

John 3 does not indicate whether Nicodemus decided to believe in Jesus. John 4 reveals the Samaritan woman's response to her encounter with the Messiah. She proclaimed to her whole town that He knew everything she had ever done.

The Samaritan woman acknowledged her past and asked for the living water Jesus offered. Nicodemus, a religious ruler, acknowledged Jesus came from God as a teacher but did not recognize Him as Messiah.

John 3 is only part of the story for Nicodemus. Later in John, Nicodemus questions the Sanhedrin's decision to arrest Jesus. (See John 7:45-52.) After the death of Jesus, Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes for the burial. (See John 19:39.) Scripture does not definitively tell us if Nicodemus became a disciple of Jesus. However, the significance of these later actions suggests a shift in the heart of Nicodemus toward faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Today's bonus verse, John 3:16, is one of the most familiar verses in the Bible. Nicodemus was the first to hear these words from Jesus. Let that sink in. Consider the impact of hearing Jesus speak the gospel to you: "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

The heart of Vacation Bible School is to share the gospel with children. For over 100 years, Vacation Bible School has provided an opportunity for churches to focus on helping children understand God loves them, God cares for them, and God forgives them.

Some of the children in your classroom will take clearly recognizable steps of faith (like the Samaritan woman) and some will take more gradual steps toward faith (like Nicodemus). Our responsibility is to share the gospel and trust the Holy Spirit to do His work. Take a moment to pray for the children in your care this week. Pray that the gospel would be made known to each child.

Zoom In:

1. Do you remember when you first realized your need for a Savior? Are you prepared to briefly share your testimony in a way that children can understand?
2. The contrast between the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus reminds us of the truth of John 3:16. Take a moment and reread the verse. What stands out to you? How can you help children understand the gospel is for everyone?
3. What barriers might exist for children in your care to respond to the gospel?



DAY 5

MAGNIFY GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Jesus Taught about Worry (*Matthew 6:25-34*)

According to a 2022 Pew Research study, 4 in 10 parents said they were extremely or very worried about their children struggling with anxiety or depression. In 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics declared a national emergency in children's mental health.

Why are our children suffering from worry and anxiety? Why have worry and anxiety become the enemies that rob children of the joy of everyday life? This issue is complex. Societal pressures and harmful influences paired with the built-in alarm system God designed to identify danger makes it difficult for children not to overreact or feel overwhelmed.

However, meditating on today's Bible story passage can serve as a reminder and magnify the truth that God keeps His promises!

Matthew 6:25-34 is nestled in the middle of the passage known as the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5–7. The setting is on a mountain, near the Sea of Galilee. The people present are Jesus, the disciples, and the crowds.

Why was Jesus addressing the topic of worry? When Jesus called each of the disciples, they immediately left their livelihoods behind and followed Him. No questions asked! Jesus knew the disciples still worried about how their daily needs would be met. Jesus acknowledged their concerns and challenged them to stop worrying about what they would eat or drink or what they would wear.

As Jesus often did, He used the beauty of nature to illustrate His teaching. Jesus pointed out the birds and flowers. The birds do not plant, harvest, or store food. The flowers are better dressed than Solomon in all his splendor. Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that if God cares for the birds and flowers, how much more He will provide for them.

Matthew 6:33 contains Jesus' cure for their anxiety: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."

Anxiety fixates on the future and diminishes the involvement of God. Instead of trusting that God is in control, we wring our hands and wear ourselves out with worry. Corrie Ten Boom put it this way, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength." Seeking first the Kingdom of God is the cure for anxiety.

Children in your care may be struggling with worry and anxiety. They may not be able to articulate these strong feelings, but their behaviors may be a signal to pay attention. For young children, worry may show up in clingy behavior, emotional outbursts, or simply not wanting to join activities.

Consider following Jesus' example and take the children outside for this Bible story. Point out birds and flowers as you tell the story. Being in nature also calms the mind, lowers stress, and provides an opportunity for children to learn the way the disciples learned and focus on the greatness of God.

Zoom In:

1. One way to help children with their anxiety is for parents and teachers to address their own anxiety. Has there been an emptying of strength in your life because of the worries and burdens you carry? Read Matthew 6:25-34. Be open to how God may be speaking to you through this passage.
2. Go for a walk in the woods or sit under a tree. Notice the birds and the flowers. Pray. Prayer can be a cure for worry. Thank God for your blessings. Tell Him your worries. Experience the peace He brings to your spirit. Thank Him for being with you even in the midst of worrying situations.
3. How can you help children know that God keeps His promises?

