

JOHN'S MINISTRY BEGAN

MATTHEW 3; MARK 1; LUKE 3; JOHN 1



KEY PASSAGE: John 1:14

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Is Jesus God or a human? Jesus is fully God and fully human.

CHRIST CONNECTION: John prepared the way for Jesus by calling people to repent of their sins. If we turn away from our sins and trust in Jesus, we will be saved.

STORY POINT: John prepared the way for Jesus.



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

The early ministry of John the Baptist is recorded in all four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This preacher whose dress, diet, and living conditions may have seemed eccentric to some, proclaimed the good news of One greater than himself: Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Two Old Testament passages tell us about John the Baptist, the first being Isaiah 40:3—a verse cited not only by the Gospel writers but also by John himself when questioned about his identity. The second passage is Malachi 3:1, in which the Lord declares, “See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me.” The people were expecting to witness the arrival of the Messiah and wondered if John was the one they had been waiting for. Many were drawn to John, traveling from far away to confess their sins and be baptized.

John, however, embraced his role of a messenger to the Messiah. John began his ministry, humbly declaring both his unworthiness and the supremacy of Christ. He ventured throughout the area near the Jordan River calling the people to repent and receive forgiveness from sin. He spoke against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, calling them, too, to repent and be changed through faith.

The crowds asked what God would have them do. John called them to love one another and be content with what they had. He exhorted them, yet proclaimed the good news, professing that Jesus is the Son of God and the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. These were weighty statements for one man to say about another, but John trusted God’s Word and proclaimed the same gospel we hear today—the same gospel you will teach to boys and girls this week.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would go before you to prepare children’s hearts to receive the good news for themselves. Ask the Lord to give you words to faithfully proclaim the truth that He alone is worthy of our repentance and trust.



Scan the QR code to listen to The Gospel Project for Kids Weekly Leader Training Podcast.



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10–15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25–30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- ☐ "Wilderness Man" activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- ☐ pretzel sticks
- ☐ honey
- ☐ chocolate chips
- ☐ napkins
- ☐ plates



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set



LIVE

Activity (Option 1)

- ☐ rolls of masking tape, 1 per 2 kids

Journal and Prayer

- ☐ Journal Page
- ☐ "John the Baptist Word Search" activity page



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- ☐ Countdown Video
- ☐ Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ "John's Ministry Began" video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster

Questions from Kids

- ☐ "Unit 20, Session 1" Questions from Kids video

Missions Moment

- ☐ "Send Kansas City" video

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ "Dwelt Among Us (John 1:14)" song
- ☐ dry erase board and markers
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

| **SAY** “Have you ever been camping? Where did you camp and for how long? Did you like it?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Wilderness Man” on the activity page.

| **SAY** “John the Baptist lived a different kind of life than most of us live now. We’re going to learn more about him today!”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: BUG ALERT



Give each kid a napkin and a plate with two pretzel sticks, a little bit of honey, and a small handful of chocolate chips. Instruct them to roll the pretzels in the honey and then place their chocolate chips on top of the pretzel sticks.

| **SAY** “Our snack looks a little like ants climbing on a stick, but these are yummy to eat. In our lesson today we will read about a man who ate locusts and honey.”

☐ OPTION 2: PREPARE THE WAY



Lead kids to stand in a line on one side of the room. Give each kid a piece of construction paper and instruct them to put it on the ground and stand on it. Give the last kid in line a second piece of construction paper. Explain that the kids need to make it to the other side of the room, but each step they take must be onto another piece of construction paper. Show the kids how they can pass the extra piece of paper down the line and have the first kid in line place it on the ground ahead of them and then take a step, causing a chain reaction and allowing each kid to then step ahead to the next piece of construction paper. Continue until the last kid has made it across the room.

| **SAY** “In this game, you had to prepare the way for the kids behind you to move across the room. Today we are learning about John the Baptist. **JOHN PREPARED THE WAY FOR JESUS.** John brought the same message as Jesus: repent and believe.”





LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “Hey kids, my name is [your name]. I am so glad to be here with you to study God’s Word. Today we will read about John the Baptist, his unique way of life, and the special message he brought to the people. If you have your Bible with you, please take it out. **[Distribute Bibles to kids who need them.]** Let’s pray together before we begin today’s lesson. ‘God, thank You for the opportunity to learn from Your Word. Help us to not only hear the lesson, but to really understand the message You want us to learn. Amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “We are beginning a new unit today, which means a brand new big picture question and answer. Our question for this unit is: **Is Jesus God or a human?** What do you guys think? **[Allow responses.]** This is a big question, and you guys gave some great answers and thoughts! The answer to this question is that **Jesus is fully God and fully man.**

Old Testament prophets promised that the Messiah was coming to save His people from sin. In our lesson today we will learn about John the Baptist who was proclaiming that the Messiah was coming, and preparing the way for Jesus to bring His message of hope. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “Over the past few weeks, we have learned about Jesus growing from a newborn baby to a young boy. Last week, we learned that He spent time among the teachers at the temple in Jerusalem. In this week’s story, Jesus is now an adult. Our lesson today is about John’s announcement for the people to repent because the Messiah was coming soon. John was talking about Jesus! ”



LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Matthew 3. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “John’s Ministry Began.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

JOHN’S MINISTRY BEGAN

“**The word of God came to a man named John who lived in the wilderness.** John wore a camel-hair garment and ate locusts and wild honey. **He preached a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** in the area around the Jordan River.

John proclaimed, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!” **People came from all over Judea to hear what John had to say and to be baptized** by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.

The prophet Isaiah had spoken about John many years before. Isaiah said:

“A voice cries out in the wilderness:

Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!”

Some of the leaders of the Jewish people called Pharisees and Sadducees came to see what John was saying and doing. When John saw them, he said, “Who warned you to escape God’s anger? Your lives don’t show you’ve turned away from your sin. You can’t just say ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you that God can even make stones into children of Abraham.”

Some people thought John might be the promised Messiah who had come to save God’s people. But **John knew that he was God’s messenger who was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah.**

John said, “I baptize you with water as a sign that you want to turn away from your sin. But the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I am. I’m not even worthy to untie his sandal straps. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Christ Connection: John prepared the way for Jesus by calling people to repent of their sins. If we turn away from our sins and trust in Jesus, we will be saved. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Family Tree: Remind kids that John the Baptist’s mother, Elizabeth, was the cousin of Mary, Jesus’ mother, which made John and Jesus relatives.

Sharing the Gospel: Tell the kids that John the Baptist was sharing the message of salvation with anyone who would listen. Sharing the gospel isn’t reserved just for pastors. All believers are called to share the gospel with others.

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “When many people think of John the Baptist, they may remember that he lived in the wilderness, wore camel-hair clothing, and ate unique food. What did John eat for food? [Allow responses.] That’s right, John ate locusts and wild honey. But John’s message to the people was much more important than his external



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

traits. John invited people to repent and believe. What was John doing at the Jordan River? **[Allow responses.]** John was baptizing people in the water of the Jordan River as a sign that they were choosing to turn from their sin and turn to God.

During John's ministry people often thought that he was the long-awaited Messiah, but John made it clear that he wasn't the Messiah. John said he wasn't even worthy to untie the Messiah's sandal straps. John's purpose was to prepare the groundwork for the Messiah, Jesus. If we look all the way back to the beginning of John's life, we see that even before he was born, the Holy Spirit was on him. Even in his mother's womb, John knew when the Lord was near, and we see that as John grew into an adult, he still recognized that the kingdom of God was near and that people needed to prepare themselves for Jesus' coming. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ The command to repent and believe has remained the same for all people since Adam and Eve first introduced sin into the world. Before we are saved, our sin separates us from God, but God wants to have a right relationship with us. If we confess that we are sinners, repent of our sins, and believe in His death and resurrection in our place, we will be saved. Have you done these things? **[Allow responses.]** If you aren't sure how to answer that question or if you have questions, I would love to talk with you. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 20, Session 1” Questions from Kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. How do I know if music I want to listen to is honoring God or not?
2. What does it mean to repent of your sins?



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

SAY “ Kansas City, Missouri is the biggest city closest to the geographic center of the contiguous United States. It’s an area famous for football, baseball, barbecue, and big businesses. But it’s also a place where many people need to know about Jesus. ”

Show the “Send Kansas City” video.

Kansas City, Missouri, is famously known as the City of Fountains, with more than 200 fountains scattered in parks and courtyards and on boulevards throughout the city. The city’s first fountains date back to the late 1800s and provided drinking troughs for animals and safe drinking water for the people living there. Kansas City has also been called the Heart of America and the Paris of the Plains. In Kansas City, only 20 percent of the residents claim to be Christians. Because there is a great range of people in the metro area, new churches must provide different options. The needs range from helping to reenergize older churches to starting new churches in the urban downtown areas. They also need assistance from new church starters, pastors, and existing churches who can help partner with the work in Kansas City.

Pray for more churches to join the people and churches already on mission in Kansas City. Pray for people who live in Kansas City to have many opportunities to hear about Jesus.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud John 1:14 together. Before class write the key passage on the board. Invite the kids to recite the verse with you a couple of times. Before reading the verse again, erase a few words. Now recite the verse, including the missing words. Continue to erase words until there are no words. Keep reciting the verse each time you erase words.

SAY “ Our key passage tells us that ‘The Word became flesh.’ This phrase is referring to Jesus as ‘The Word’ that came and lived among us. It also points out that He ‘became flesh’ showing us that He wasn’t flesh before. Jesus willingly came to earth, took on flesh, and took upon Himself the sin of all people, paying the price for our sin, and conquering death. Through Jesus, we can have life forever with God. ”

Lead kids to sing “Dwelt Among Us (John 1:14).” You may also sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “ Lord, we are humbled by your kindness, that You would come and live among us and die in our place so we could have salvation and life eternal. Thank You for loving us that much! Amen. ”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the New Testament Israel Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to the book of Mark. Explain that God's Word is meant to be read, memorized, discussed, learned, shared, and thought over. One of the things we are told to do is hide His Word in our hearts so that we might not sin against God (Psalm 119:11). When we are filled up with God's Word and hard times come, the overflow out of our mouth and even our thoughts will be His words. Even in good times, His Word serves as a comforting companion.

Consider pointing out the location of the region of Judea (J3) and the Jordan River (E6-H6) on the New Testament Israel Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Mark 1:5 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verse aloud.

SAY “ People were coming from all over Judea to the Jordan River to hear John's message. The Jordan River is a significant place in the history of God's people. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they came to the edge of the Jordan River, which they needed to cross to enter the Promised Land. God made a way for His people to cross into the Promised Land by parting the waters of the river. This same river is where John was calling people to repent and be baptized in today's story. There wasn't anything special about this water, and the act of baptism doesn't save people, but it is a sign that a person has repented and trusted in Jesus for salvation. ”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “ What is repentance? What does the Bible say about repentance? ”

Biblical repentance is recognizing that our sin is against God, and we need to turn away completely in the opposite direction of our sin and instead, turn to God. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read 2 Chronicles 7:14.)

SAY “ Can you repent of a sin but continue sinning? ”

If we truly repent, then we are turning away from that sin and asking the Lord to keep us from it. We cannot live a holy life with God and a sinful life at the same time. There may be times we struggle with that sin again, and God continues to offer us forgiveness. But the act of repentance calls us to live differently. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Luke 15:7.)

SAY “ What does the Bible say about being in God's family? ”

When we turn from our sin and call upon the name of Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we become a child of God, a part of His family. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read John 1:12.)

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: MAKE YOUR PATH STRAIGHT

Ask the kids to pair off and line up with their partners at one end of the room. Give each pair a roll of masking tape. Instruct them to decide who will be the leader and who will be the follower. The leader will start placing the tape on the floor at the feet of the follower and then start unrolling the tape all the way across the room to the other wall. The path of tape may be straight, curved, looped, or overlapped with another team's tape line. Once the tape is laid, the other person will be given instructions on how to get from one end to the other, such as jumping, skipping, or walking forward or backward. As time allows, let the kids switch and each have a turn to move across the room.

SAY “ Similar to how you prepared the way across the room for your partner, John was called by God to come before Jesus and prepare the way. John helped prepare the people for the coming Messiah to proclaim salvation. ”

☐ OPTION 2: PRAYER OF REPENTANCE



Pass out paper and pencils and ask the kids to spread out across the room. Inform them that you are going to give them some time to sit alone, think, and pray, asking God to reveal anything in their lives that they may need to repent of. Instruct them to write a prayer of confession to God, seeking His forgiveness. If a child is confessing sin for the first time and seeking a right relationship with the Lord, be present and available for them to talk with you.

SAY “ Repenting of our sins is the first step in responding to what Jesus did for us on the cross. When we repent and turn from our sin, we are turning toward forgiveness and a right relationship with God. ”

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, thanking God for His forgiveness and love. As time allows, lead kids to complete “John the Baptist Word Search” on the activity page.