

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

- ☐ "Tie It Up" activity page



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set (optional)



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
- ☐ map of Jordan River (optional)
- ☐ honey (optional)
- ☐ Allergy Alert (optional)

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
- ☐ balloons
- ☐ Allergy Alert
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 2)

- ☐ small objects (pencil, scissors, etc.)
- ☐ small blanket
- ☐ flashlight

Reflection and Prayer

- ☐ Bible story coloring page



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 been camping or hiking in the wilderness before? Where did you go?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Tie It Up” on the activity page.

| **SAY** “Great work tying and matching up the sandals! In today’s story, we’ll learn about a man named John who lived in the wilderness and prepared the way for Jesus’ ministry. Listen in our story for what John said about Jesus’ sandal straps.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: WILDERNESS WALK



Instruct the kids to stand and spread out throughout the room. Encourage the kids to begin marching in place, imagining the whole time that they are walking through the wilderness. Say things like, There’s a branch! Duck! or There’s a bear! Run! Encourage kids to perform the actions along with you while remaining in his or her. Gradually speed the kids up with fast-paced actions; then slow them back down to a walk.

| **SAY** “Our pathway through the wilderness led us down some crazy twists and turns! Today’s story involves a man named John who lived in the wilderness. Together we will learn how **JOHN PREPARED THE WAY FOR JESUS.**”

☐ OPTION 2: PAVING THE PATH

Have the kids sit down on the floor or at a table. Provide each kid with a sheet of paper and a crayon. Instruct everyone to place his or her crayon on the paper at the end closest to his or herself and begin slowly drawing a straight line. Explain that as they draw, you will give them instructions. Whatever you say, the kids must follow with their crayons. Some examples may include stop, straight, left, right, circle, etc. Once the kids run off the paper, he or she must put down their crayon.

| **SAY** “Those are some really twisty and wild pathways! God’s people had sinned, but God called a man named John to point them to the coming Messiah. Today we will learn that through his ministry, **JOHN PREPARED THE WAY FOR JESUS.**”





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 “Hi, kids! I’m so glad you’re here! My name is [your name], and today we will be reading a story that can be found in all four of the Gospels. Can anyone remind me what the Gospels talk about? [Allow responses.] The Gospels share the good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection! If you brought your Bible with you, please take it out and place it in your lap. [Distribute Bibles to any kid who needs one.] Over the past few weeks we have learned how God sent Jesus to save us from our sin. Today, we will learn that John prepared the people for Jesus’ ministry. Let’s pray together before we open God’s Word. ‘Thank You, God, for using your servant John to prepare the people’s hearts for Jesus’ work on earth. Open our hearts and minds as we read Your Word today. Amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “Today we will be learning a new big picture question together. Remember that we study big picture questions to teach us truths about God. In our last big picture question, we learned that Jesus is God’s Son and He came to save us. Only God can save us from sin because He is holy. He never sins! The Bible also teaches us that all humans sin. So if Jesus is able to save us from sin, there must be something special about Him. Our new big picture question is: **Is Jesus God or a human?** The answer we will be memorizing is **Jesus is fully God and fully human.** Let’s learn more about this through the story of John the Baptist. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

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

SAY “When the time was right, God fulfilled His promise by sending His Son, Jesus, to earth. God used Simeon and Anna’s worship, as well as the wise men’s, to show His people that Jesus is the Messiah, fully God and fully human. Jesus continued to grow in wisdom and found favor with God. Jesus reminded Mary and Joseph that He came to earth to do His Father’s will. Today, we will learn how the ministry of John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus, the all-sufficient sacrifice. ”



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

Map it out: Consider displaying a map of the Jordan River to help kids visualize the area where John was ministering and baptizing people.

Taste test: Make the story come alive by bringing in some honey for the kids to taste. Consult parents about any food allergies or restrictions prior to the lesson.

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “John warned the people that they needed to repent of their sins. What does it mean to repent? [Allow responses.] We repent when we make a decision to turn away from our sinful desires and choose to follow God’s commands. John also told the people that the kingdom of heaven had come near. What do you think John



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

meant when he said this? **[Allow responses.]** God had brought the kingdom of heaven to the people through Jesus the Messiah, who would soon begin calling the people to repent of their sins.

What did John say to the Pharisees and Sadducees? **[Allow responses.]** These leaders were Jews, descendants of Abraham, who God had called His chosen people. But John reminded these leaders that they could not enter into God's family based on who their ancestors were. They must respond to God personally by turning away from their sins. John warned them that those who would not repent would experience God's anger.

Who did the people think John was? **[Allow responses.]** John reminded the people that he was not the Messiah, for he was not worthy to even untie Jesus' sandal. Jesus was coming, and those who would trust in Him would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. But those who turned away from Him would receive God's judgment.

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. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ Jesus, the Messiah, came just as John said He would. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He called people to repent and trust in Him as Lord, and He wants us to do the same. When we turn away from our sin and trust Jesus, we are welcomed into God's family and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. To learn more about what it means to trust your life to Jesus, you can see one of your parents or a church leader. ”

(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?



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THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

SAY “Kansas City, Missouri, is a big city 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.

SAY “Through our new key passage, we are going to explore Jesus’ identity as the Word. Jesus is both a human and God, full of grace and truth!”

Prior to the session, post an Allergy Alert for latex, if needed. Blow up several balloons. Using a permanent marker, write each word or phrase of the key passage on the balloons. Toss the balloons up in the air and invite the kids to work together to keep the balloons from hitting the ground. When a balloon touches the ground, set it aside. When there is only one balloon left, invite the kids to line the balloons up in the correct order of the key passage. Lead kids to sing “Dwelt Among Us (John 1:14).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “God, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to live among us, die for our sins, and rise again. Give us courage to share who Jesus is and the good news of salvation with others. 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 Mark 1. Explain that the Gospel of Mark is the shortest of all four Gospels. This Gospel was written by John Mark, likely while he was in Rome. Through his writing, Mark wanted to help readers understand that Jesus is the Son of God.

Consider pointing out the location of the Jordan River (E6-H6) on the New Testament Israel Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Mark 1:4-8, or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

SAY “ Have you ever tried to break a habit? [Allow responses.] When we do something everyday, whether it’s a good thing like brushing our teeth, or a bad thing like biting our nails, this action becomes a habit. We might even do it without realizing! The Bible reminds us that we are all guilty of sin, and it has become the way we live our life. John warned the people that Jesus was coming to call them to turn away from their sin. Jesus wants us to stop living a life of sin and to trust Him as Lord. When we turn our hearts to Jesus, He changes our desires so that we want to live according to God’s commands. We will still sin, but when we do, the Holy Spirit will lead us to want to repent and become more like Jesus. ”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “ What did John mean when he said Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire? ”

When people believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of them. This is what John meant when he said Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Christians have different views on what John meant by saying Jesus would baptize by fire. Some Christians think this fire represents God’s judgment on people who keep rejecting Jesus; others believe this fire represents the Holy Spirit who appeared as flames of fire later in the New Testament. Either way, John was saying that Jesus is the most important person and that people should worship Him as their King. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read John 3:36.)

SAY “ Does baptism save us from our sins? ”

John said he baptized the people as a sign that they wanted to turn away from their sins. Baptism does not save us. Baptism is the outward expression of how Jesus changes our heart when we repent of our sin and follow Him. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Titus 3:5.)

SAY “ What should our lives look like when we turn away from sin? ”

When we follow Jesus, there should not only be a change in our hearts, but our actions should also be different as a result. Share that our actions cannot save us, yet when God changes our hearts, He changes our desires. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read 1 John 2:6.)

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





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: COLOR CHANGE



Hang two different colored pieces of construction paper, one in one corner of the room and one in another. Line the kids up shoulder to shoulder on the opposite end of the room. Explain that you will ask the kids a yes or no question. Some examples could be *Are chicken nuggets your favorite food?*, *Do you have a dog?*, etc. Designate one color as yes and the other color as no. The kids must answer the questions by running to one of the two colors, spinning around in a circle, and running back to the other side of the room.

SAY “ Similar to how you spun around and changed directions, to repent means to change the direction of your heart so that you want to follow Jesus instead of your sin. **JOHN PREPARED THE WAY FOR JESUS** by calling the people to repent of their sins and be baptized. ”

☐ OPTION 2: SHADOW CHARADES

Before the session, gather some small objects from around the classroom. For example: pencil, cup, scissors, Bible, etc. Choose a volunteer to hold up a blanket in front of the objects, hiding them from the other kids' view. Turn off the lights and shine a flashlight onto the wall from behind the blanket. Begin placing the objects in front of the flashlight one at a time, casting their shadow onto the wall. Allow the kids to take turns guessing what each object is based on its shadow. Play until the kids have guessed each of the objects.

SAY “ Shadows are not the actual object, but they do point us to the real thing. John was not the Messiah, but **JOHN PREPARED THE WAY FOR JESUS**, the Messiah, who was coming to call the people to repentance. ”

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids. If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.