

WEEK 3 TEACHING GUIDE

focus

BIG IDEA

Focus on talking to God.

BIBLE

John 4:5-30; Psalm 18:6;
Philippians 4:6

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Fast Focus

- We're halfway through our series *Focus*, so let's kick things off with another focused competition.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you'll need a box of marshmallow cereal (like Lucky Charms) and two paper bowls for each team, as well as a [kitchen scale](#). Divide your students into teams and give each team their cereal and bowls. Give teams one minute to sort their cereal into two bowls — one bowl for marshmallows and one bowl for the boring stuff. At the end of one minute, weigh each team's bowls to see who sorted the most cereal by weight and give them the remaining cereal as a prize.*
- So, do you think the winning team was super focused, or just lucky? It was probably a bit of both. Either way, we're going to be talking about focus again today. This time, we're talking about how focusing on the words we say can help us grow.

VIDEO | A Clip of John Moschitta, Jr.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (0:00-0:27) of John Moschitta, Jr. demonstrating his fast-talking abilities. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- There's a guy named John Moschitta, Jr. who was once known as the fastest-talking guy on the planet. He could say 583 words a minute and form syllables five times faster than anyone else. Let's just say he's a fast-talker who has no problems with words.

ACTIVITY | Fast Talkers

- Talking is something we all do, but it's not always easy to strike up a conversation or share things about ourselves. Let's break the ice by seeing how much talking we can do in 30 seconds.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Split students into pairs and start a timer for 30 seconds. Have one student in each pair share as many facts or stories about themselves as possible, as quickly as possible. At the end of 30 seconds, have them switch. Repeat for as many rounds as you'd like.*

STORY | Talk about a time you made a conversation awkward.

- Have you ever heard that public speaking is one of the biggest and most common fears humans have? But I don't think this only applies to speaking on a stage. It can feel intimidating to have a conversation one-on-one too — especially if we have a history of making things awkward.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a funny story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you stumbled, fumbled, lost track of what you were saying, or accidentally said something awkward or rude in a conversation. Share what made the experience overwhelming or intimidating and demonstrate how you can now laugh at yourself for the awkwardness.*
- Even though I really felt a type of way that day, I haven't stopped putting myself out there to have conversations with people!
- Talking to people may not always feel easy to you, which is why talking to God can feel challenging too. So let's talk about how to make it a little less awkward and a lot more meaningful.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **What's something you could talk about for hours?**
 - **What are some reasons a conversation with someone might get awkward?**
 - **What are some reasons people might find prayer awkward or challenging? Can you relate to any of those reasons?**

STORY | Talk about a time you found prayer challenging.

- Have you ever zoned out in the middle of a conversation? Your friend is in the middle of a story, or your teacher is in the middle of a lecture, when you hear those dreaded words: "Hey. Are you even listening to me?" The answer, of course, is no. You were busy thinking about that TikTok someone sent you earlier, and have no idea what they're talking about.
- If it's that easy to zone out in a conversation with a person who's standing right in front of us, you know it's a million times easier to zone out in the middle of a conversation with God, who we can't really see or hear in the usual ways.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you found prayer challenging. Maybe talking to God felt forced, unnatural, or ineffective. Maybe you struggled to pay attention or maybe you weren't sure you believed God was really listening. Share why you were struggling and how your struggle with prayer made you feel about your relationship with God.*
- Learning a new hobby, sport, or habit is awkward. It's like trying to ride a bike for the first time without training wheels. You'll mess up at first, get discouraged, and be tempted to quit.
- Learning how to talk to God can be the same way. It might feel uncomfortable or weird for a while. But don't worry! You aren't the only one who feels this way. There are people in the Bible who felt awkward talking to God too.

SCRIPTURE | John 4:5-30

- When I'm struggling to talk to God for whatever reason, I think about a conversation Jesus had with a woman at a well, because that's exactly prayer is — a conversation.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize John 4:5-30.*

- Have you ever wished you could talk to Jesus like this woman did? Wouldn't prayer be so much easier to talk to him if . . .
 - We could actually see or hear Jesus with our eyes or ears?
 - Jesus would have set up his social media accounts before leaving earth? Being able to send a quick DM would have been really convenient.
 - God would somehow let us know when our prayers get delivered and read?
- We may not have any of those hacks to make prayer easier, but there are a few things we can learn from Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman that can help.
- The chat Jesus had with this Samaritan woman wasn't just an ordinary chat. It had a lot of history around it — history that had the potential to make this conversation pretty awkward.
 - Jews (like Jesus) and Samaritans (like the woman at the well) had a long history of disagreements. They clashed culturally, but they also had big disagreements about God. Those differences had created a big divide.
 - Not only did tension exist because of the cultural differences between Jesus and this woman, but also because of their genders. In that time and location of the world, women were not regarded or treated equally. By having a conversation one-on-one with this woman, Jesus was defying a lot of social norms. To most people, it would have been pretty scandalous to see them talking!
 - On top of all that, there's also the issue of this woman's love life. Now, remember, this story doesn't take place in our time or culture, so the things we might assume about this story might not always be correct.
 - When Jesus counts her husbands, we might think he's implying she has been sinning and should be ashamed of her choices. While that could be the case, other things are more likely.
 - At that time, women didn't have the same kind of freedom to choose their husbands they have today. Without a husband, women were often excluded from society — based on the time of day she was drawing water from the well, it's likely she was there to avoid other women (or because other women wanted to avoid her). Plus, women relied on their husbands for financial security, since women didn't have the same kinds of opportunities to make an income on their own.
 - So while it's possible Jesus was challenging her life choices, many believe Jesus was letting her know he understood her needs before she even mentioned them to him. He saw the truth of her situation.
 - For these reasons, this woman was astounded that Jesus would acknowledge her and confused about whether or not she should be talking with him.
- Despite the potential awkwardness, the woman decided to continue talking to Jesus anyway. Through that conversation, two things were revealed to her:
 - The truth about who she was, because Jesus knew everything about her!
 - And the truth about who Jesus was.
- Their conversation was full of surprises, but the biggest surprise was when she realized she was indeed speaking with Emmanuel, God with us — Jesus, the promised Messiah.
 - She was so amazed and in awe of the words they exchanged that she left her water jug right behind as she ran home to tell others about what she learned.
 - Talking to God inspired her to feel something different, become something different, and do different things too. Talking to Jesus changed her life.

- When she shifted her focus to talking to God, she learned more about who Jesus was, and who she was too. The truth of what she learned set her free to experience and talk about God's love openly.
- We might think we need to use certain words, have music playing, have the right attitude, or stand in a specific building in order for God to understand us clearly. In reality, we don't have to have everything figured out when we talk to God. We can talk to God by simply being ourselves, just like the Samaritan woman did.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **What's something that, if it were possible, would make prayer much easier for you? Why don't you think God chose to make prayer work like that?**
 - ✪ **Have you ever learned something about yourself or about God while you were praying? If so, what did God show you?**

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 18:6

- It can be a little intimidating talking to God. Sometimes we may not be sure what to talk to God about. But one of the easiest places to start is by talking to God about the things that concern us.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 18:6.*
- The writer of these words didn't wait until things were resolved to have a conversation with God. This conversation (which is also a song) happened in the middle of the confusion.
 - In other Psalms, we see the sort of things you might expect from the Bible, like a lot of "God, you're so awesome's and "God, thank you's".
 - But there's a lot of other things in there too. You'll see prayers of rage, disappointment, pity, passion, and doubt all mixed in.
 - What we learn from prayers like these is that it's safe to share it all. You can come to a conversation with God using all of your emotions and feelings. You can be real.
- Talking to God can feel intimidating, and "crying out" can feel vulnerable. But Jesus shows us God isn't out to get us. God sent Jesus to love and care for us.
- I know prayer can be a challenge, but remembering it's a conversation with someone who loves us so much makes prayer so much easier. When you pray, remember you're talking to a God who is both listening and talking back to you. Then see how that helps you **focus on talking to God.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

OBJECT LESSON | The Well

- That day at the well, the Samaritan woman had to overcome all sorts of fears and hesitations to have a conversation with Jesus that eventually changed her life.
 - I wonder what your fears or hesitations are when it comes to talking to Jesus. Do you fear he's not listening? That he's not there? That he doesn't care? That he won't forgive you or understand?
 - Fear-setting, or saying what our fears are, is one way to quiet them down. Once we put our fears and hesitations into words, we can help each other respond to those fears with truth.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this object lesson, you'll need a water jug or bucket, scrap paper, and a marker. Ask students to share fears, hesitations, or frustrations people might have about talking to God. Write each one down and add it to the jug.
- These fears sometimes prevent us from talking to Jesus. But what if we took these fears directly to him instead? What if, like the woman at the well, we voiced our concerns instead of hiding them? How do you think Jesus might change our lives with what's true, like he changed hers?

DISCUSSION

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 - **If you decided to talk to God more regularly, how do you think it might change you like it changed the woman at the well?**
 - ★ **Right now, what's the biggest obstacle between you and a more focused prayer life?**

REFLECTION | Copycat Prayers

- Sometimes we don't know what to say when we talk to God. When that happens, you don't always have to start from scratch. Saying the psalms to God may be a way for you to practice, using someone else's words as an example.
 - In Psalm 18, you see both a cry for help and an announcement that God can turn it all around.
 - If you repeat these words to God often, you'll have more chances to experience these things in your heart and words ready when you face difficult things.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Psalm 18:6 slowly out loud, inviting students to simply listen to the words. Then invite them to repeat the words out loud together. Finally, ask them to repeat them silently. Repeat the process with Psalm 18:28.

PRAYER | Talking To Jesus

- Whether you've been talking to Jesus for years, you're just getting started, or you've never talked to him before, today you're invited to focus on talking with him in a new way.
 - Maybe you'll ask him to show you something true about who God is.
 - Maybe you'll ask him to show you something true about who you are.
 - Maybe you have some thoughts, questions, requests, or concerns to voice.
 - Or maybe it's a little bit of everything.
- Whatever you have to say to him today, here's what the lyrics to this song remind us: "There's no wrong way to talk to Jesus. There's no bad way to start."
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Invite students to pray while you play the song "Talking to Jesus" (Maverick City Music and Elevation Worship), but make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. For more information, [read this! Here's a link](#) to preview the song for your personal use.
- This week, I hope you'll continue having conversations with the God who knows everything about you and can change everything about your life. I know prayer can be a challenge, but remembering I'm talking to a God who is both listening and talking back to me is what helps me **focus on talking to God.**

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 - ★ **What kinds of conversations are you most likely to have with God right now? Would you ask for help, say thank you, ask questions, be angry, or something else?**
 - **Read Philippians 4:6. Why do you think Paul tells us to be thankful while we're asking God for help?**
 - **This week, what's one way you want to focus on talking to God and how can we help?**

WEEK 3

DISCUSSION GUIDE

focus

It's not easy to stay focused. Especially these days, when we're connected to a never-ending stream of new notifications, ads, messages, videos, posts, and entertainment, it makes sense if we feel a little distracted sometimes. Maybe you've struggled recently to stay focused on your homework, or on the story your friend was telling you, or on the movie you were watching — but have you ever struggled to stay focused when you were spending time with God? In this four-week series, we're going to get honest about how difficult it can be to stay focused when we're trying to pray, read the Bible, or grow in our faith. Each week, we'll explore passages from Psalms and the Gospels as we challenge ourselves to focus on practicing four spiritual disciplines that can help us grow. Together, we'll try focusing on **what God has said**, on **giving something up**, on **talking to God**, and on **rest**.

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Share your habit stacks with each other! See if anyone has identified a habit stack that would be helpful to someone else in the group.

WEEK 3

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

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