

FOCUSING



ON CHRIST

Adult Guide for VeBS® 2002

Focusing n Christ

A Bible Study for Adults from the Gospel of Matthew,
to be used in conjunction with *Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon*™ VeBS.®

Excerpts taken from Cook's expository curriculum for adults, *Understanding the Bible*.

Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon™
Very exciting Bible School® Curriculum
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Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon™ Adult Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Pointing People to Christ

Designed to correlate and run concurrently with *Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon™* VBS, this Bible study will give parents and other involved adults the opportunity to learn along with the children in your church and community, studying the life of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew.

Most of the sidebar information comes from Cook's expository curriculum for adults called ***Understanding the Bible***. If you are interested in ordering this curriculum, see the last page of this guide.

The sessions follow three simple steps:

- **Getting Started** will create interest and focus your group's attention on the session topic.
- **Digging In** involves your group so that they can discover God's truth and its implications for their lives.
- **Heading Out** helps the group members apply God's truth to their lives.

You will also find tips on how to connect with the kids who are involved in *Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon™* VBS.

As you lead this study, begin each session with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds and give understanding, so God's truth may be appropriately applied. Try to keep everyone involved; ask questions of specific people, and use their first names whenever possible. Arrange your chairs in a circle or semi-circle, or sit around a table. This kind of arrangement promotes eye contact and encourages more discussion. Have fun!

SESSION ONE

Focus

Jesus promises to guide me.

Supplies

- Bibles
- Resource Sheet #1

Preparation

- Read Matthew 10:1-26; think about a problem or challenge for which you'd appreciate some guidance.
- Make copies of Resource Sheet #1 for each participant.

Getting Started

If the people in your group do not know one another, take some time for each person to introduce himself or herself to the group. If the people in your group seem comfortable with each other, ask the participants to offer one little-known positive fact about themselves in addition to their names.

Explain to the group that you will be looking at events in the life of Christ (*as told in the Gospel of Matthew*) that correspond to the core concepts of each site in *Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon™*. These snapshots will focus on lessons the kids are learning each day in VBS and present the concepts in ways that are meaningful and relevant for adults.

Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew introduces us to the King of all the earth, showing us His humble beginnings, proclaiming to us His teachings, and convincing us of His miracles. Of course, the Old Testament prophets had foretold that a "Messiah", or "anointed one," would come to deliver the people of Israel. As the Jews languished under the strict rule of the Roman Empire, they longed for the appearance of this promised redeemer. Then, during the reign of Herod the Great, God fulfilled His Word by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to be born on earth as a human being.

Many Jews thought the prophesied Messiah would deliver them from their Roman overlords and set up a glorious kingdom in a strictly political sense. In reality, Jesus came to experience rejection and death as a suffering servant. By dying on the cross, this teacher from Nazareth not only brought spiritual deliverance to His followers, but altered the course of human history as well.

Readers of this beautiful Gospel discover how Jesus chose His 12 disciples, why the religious leaders rejected him, and what led to His crucifixion. The book powerfully demonstrates that Jesus' death, although tragic, was the means by which God set up His kingdom and made salvation available to the whole world.

Taken from *Cook's Understanding the Bible*, an expository adult curriculum for studying books of the Bible verse-by-verse. For more information about *Understanding the Bible*, visit Cook's web site at www.cookministries.com.

Getting the Guidance We Need

SESSION ONE

What adults hear from the kids each day may differ from what is examined in this adult guide. Those differences are the likely result of dealing with biblical truths in an age-appropriate manner.

At the heart of this study is this concept: "Jesus promises to guide me." The goal is to encourage each participant to look to Jesus when presented with life challenges where divine guidance is especially needed.

To help the group better understand the value of guidance, ask one of your students to take everyone through a "virtual tour" of his or her home. (*Just in case no one volunteers, be ready to lead this "tour" yourself!*)

In this exercise, ask group members to imagine that they are at the front door of the host home. Ask the volunteer tour guide to guide everyone through the house, describing each room and its purpose. The host may wish to offer an anecdote or two for each place visited. Of course, the main advantage of an imaginary tour like this is that the home will always be perfectly "clean" and everything will be in its proper place. (*So no one should object to such a "surprise" visit!*)

If you have time, other people in the group might want to lead you through a "virtual tour" of their homes.

When the tour is complete, ask: ***What information from the guide did you find especially helpful or interesting? If you were thinking about buying this home, how would having a guide help you make your decision?***

Give people in the group sufficient time to offer their responses. Remember that the key to a successful adult discussion is to keep people talking, offering their opinions and telling about their experiences. Once you've got the discussion going, feel free to join in as a participant, but don't feel you have to dominate the discussion just because you are the facilitator.

When Jesus sent His disciples out on an assignment, He was very good about giving guidance and shaping their

Silence Tip

It's easy to get nervous when there's a lull in the discussion of a small group. When people are new to one another, these periods of silence tend to be a little longer or are more frequent. Sometimes group facilitators feel compelled to fill the silent void. However, prolonged periods of silence can be fruitful when people process what they have heard and, most importantly, discover God's truth for themselves.

If you ask a thought-provoking question and are greeted with (*apparently*) glum silence, congratulate yourself for asking something that could not be answered without real thought. A good question requires quiet time for people to mull over their answers. Be careful not to answer your own questions just to break up an awkward silence. Bite your lip. Count to 12. By that time, one of the group members will probably be ready to get the discussion going.

Getting the Guidance We Need

SESSION ONE

expectations. Let's take a look at an incident where Jesus sent out the Twelve on a special mission. Then we will look at some concrete ways that Jesus provides specific guidance for the challenges we face today.

Digging In

Hand out Resource Sheet #1.

Ask someone to get ready to read Matthew 10:1-26 out loud. If the people in your group have Bibles, encourage them to open to the passage.

Before the reading, ask your students to listen for specific instructions Jesus gave, and look for ways He shaped the expectations of those He sent out. Encourage them to write their responses in the appropriate spaces provided on Resource Sheet #1.

When everyone is paying attention, ask your volunteer to read Matthew 10:1-26 out loud.

After the reading, ask the following questions listed on Resource Sheet #1; some possible responses are listed.

What specific guidance or instructions did Jesus give to the disciples?

1. Go to a specific group of people.
2. Preach a particular message.
3. Perform specific types of miracles.
4. Don't take any money or extra clothes.
5. Look for friendly people to help you in the towns you visit.

6. Give your greeting to the homes you enter, and be sensitive to the response you get.
7. Shake off rejection and move on.

How did Jesus shape their expectations?

1. He told them to expect hostile responses.
2. He told them to be on their guard.
3. He told them that they would be arrested.
4. He told them to depend on the Holy Spirit to give a proper response.
5. He told them that people close to them would betray them.
6. He told them that they would be hated and persecuted.
7. He told them that they would be treated in the same manner He was by people who opposed Him.

Say to the group, ***Keep in mind: this set of instructions and expectations was for a specific group of people on a specific mission.***

[In fact, later on in Jesus' ministry, the Lord gave this same group a different set of instructions for a very similar mission (see Luke 22:35-36).]

However, the principles of Jesus' guidance in this passage can certainly be applied to any challenge we're facing today.

Getting the Guidance We Need

SESSION ONE

Heading Out

Ask your students to look at the second half of resource sheet #1. In the box provided, have them write down a particular challenge they're facing for which they could use some supernatural guidance.

Assure your students that this information will remain private if they wish; you'll ask for volunteers to share the information, but this will be entirely optional. It might happen that no one wants to talk about what they wrote down, and that's okay.

In the guidance column, have them answer the following questions:

In regard to the challenge you're facing . . .

- 1. What is the core issue or problem?***
- 2. Who are the people involved?***
- 3. What resources do you need?***
- 4. Who are some friendly people who can help you?***
- 5. Who will oppose you or be hostile to you as you seek to resolve this problem?***
- 6. What supernatural or miraculous intervention is necessary to resolve the problem?***

Encourage your students to use their answers in Resource Sheet #1 to create action plans to meet the challenges they defined.

Assignment

Ask your students to read Matthew 15:29-39 and to think about how Jesus has provided for their needs in sometimes miraculous, and sometimes ordinary, ways.

Kid Connection

At Site 1, the kids "explored" the jungle at night with a very dependable guide. The Bible story focused on the way God guided His people out of Egypt (see *Exodus 12:31-42; 13:17-22*). The kids were encouraged to depend on Jesus to guide them every day. Ask children who are attending *Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon™* how they are learning to depend on Jesus to guide them every day.

Getting the Guidance We Need

RESOURCE SHEET 1

Read Matthew 10:1-26

What specific guidance or instructions did Jesus give to the disciples?

How did Jesus shape their expectations?

Identify a specific challenge for which you need Jesus' guidance:

What is the core issue or problem?

Who are the people involved?

What resources do you need?

Who are some friendly people who can help you?

Who will oppose you or be hostile to you as you seek to resolve this problem?

What supernatural or miraculous intervention is necessary to resolve this problem?

Getting the Guidance We Need

SESSION TWO

Focus

God's promise to provide all that we need, and the fulfillment of that promise in our lives today.

Supplies

- Bibles
- Resource Sheet #2

Preparation

- Read Matthew 15:29-39; think about some miraculous and some ordinary ways that Jesus has provided for you.
- Make copies of Resource Sheet #2 for each participant.

Getting Started

During this second session, ask everyone to fill out a name badge and put it on, just in case some group members have trouble remembering names. Be sure to say people's names out loud as you engage them in the small group discussion.

Optional suggestion: in addition to their names, have the participants write down a number that's significant to them. For example, Mary might put down "5" because there are five people in her family, or Joe might write "32" because he recently lost 32 pounds. When all have completed their badges, ask them to explain the significance of their numbers.

Explain that today's discussion centers on a miraculous event in the life of Jesus—one of the times He fed more than 4,000 people, starting with only a few loaves of bread and some fish.

To begin the discussion, ask your students to list some of the things that were provided for them, free of charge, in order to have this discussion. Don't worry if it takes them a minute to figure this out; they might take many of the things for granted.

The Purpose of Jesus' Miracles

Jesus performed many miracles during His earthly ministry, some of which, according to John, are not even recorded in the Gospels (see *John 21:25*). His miracles were extraordinary expressions of God's power. When Christ performed a miracle, God directly altered, superseded, or counteracted some established pattern in the natural order.

The miracles of Jesus served several purposes. First, they confirmed His claim to be the Messiah. Second, they validated His assertion that He was sent by God and represented Him. Third, they substantiated the credibility of the truths He declared to the people of Israel. Fourth, they encouraged the doubtful to put their trust in Him. Fifth, they demonstrated that the One who is love was willing to reach out to people with compassion and grace.

Taken from Cook's adult expository curriculum, *Understanding the Bible*.

Provisions for the Journey

SESSION TWO

For one, you probably have a building in which to do this study—a church, or perhaps a home. That building protects the group from nature’s elements (*maybe the wind or rain*) that could be distracting to the discussion. Someone might graciously offer that you, the facilitator, have been provided for the group. Lastly, the church is providing this VBS program, without which there would be no adult study. Be sure to commend any response that is offered.

Digging In

Hand out copies of Resource Sheet #2.

Ask one of your students to get ready to read Matthew 15:29-39 out loud. Ask your other students to listen for the miraculous things that Jesus did, the rather ordinary things that Jesus did, and how people participated in what He was doing. Have them write their responses in the appropriate spaces on Resource Sheet #2.

When everyone is paying attention, ask your volunteer to read Matthew 15:29-39 out loud.

What miraculous things did Jesus do?

Possible responses: He healed the lame, the blind, the mute, and many others. In addition, He fed thousands of hungry people.

What ordinary things did Jesus do?

Possible responses: He went up to a mountainside and sat down; He told His disciples what was concerning Him; He

asked them what food they had available; He asked God to bless the available food; He sent the crowd away, got into a boat, and sailed to a different area.

How did people participate in what Jesus was doing?

Possible responses: They came to Jesus after He sat down on the mountainside; they brought their sick friends to Jesus and laid them at His feet; they praised God; they stayed around, even though they were hungry; they (*the disciples*) pointed out to Jesus the apparent impossibility of their situation; they gave Jesus what they had (*seven loaves and a few fish*).

After this discussion, ask one of your students to get ready to read John 6:13-15—a passage describing another time when Jesus fed several thousand people. Ask your students to listen carefully to the crowd’s response to Jesus’ miraculous provision, and consider why He rejected this response.

When everyone is paying attention, ask your volunteer to read John 6:13-15.

What was it about the crowd’s reaction to Jesus’ provision that apparently turned Him off?

Possible response: The people merely saw what He could do for them, so they were determined to make Him their king. They wanted Him to be their supernatural meal ticket!

Provisions for the Journey

SESSION TWO

After this discussion, say:

Let's talk about what it means to depend on Jesus to provide for all our needs, and explore how He expects us to participate in that process.

Heading Out

On the right side of Resource Sheet #2, ask your students to list something they expect to need in the coming months or years. For some, it might be next week's groceries. For others, it could be college tuition for their children. Of course, there's no limit to what people might put down.

In the "Miraculous" column, have your students list some spectacular ways that Jesus might meet that particular need. In the "Ordinary" column, have your students list some rather mundane ways that Jesus might provide for that particular need. In the space provided for "How Will You Participate?" ask your students to list some things that God can reasonably expect them to do. These may range from spending time in prayer to taking steps, which require legwork and elbow grease.

When group members have finished filling out their forms, ask them to talk about what they wrote down. Again,

respect people's reticence to share; their immediate needs might be deeply personal, and they may not feel comfortable sharing these things with the group. If appropriate, offer to make yourself available to meet with group members one-on-one to talk about the challenges they're facing.

Encourage your students to use their answers on Resource Sheet #2 to create action plans that will define the role they will play as Jesus provides for the particular need they identified.

Assignment

Ask your students to read Matthew 26:6-12 and to think of a time when someone protected or shielded them from harm.

Kid Connection

Children attending *Cruisin' the Amazing Amazon*™ VBS program in Site 2 learned about how God miraculously provided for Elijah and the widow in I Kings 17:1-16. The kids were encouraged to depend on Jesus to meet their everyday needs. Ask children who have attended VBS how the story of Elijah and the widow shows God's power to provide for us, and discuss how God expects people who participate in His plans.

Provisions for the Journey

RESOURCE SHEET 2

Read Matthew 15:29-39.

Pressing need:

What miraculous things did Jesus do?

What miraculous things can Jesus do to meet this need?

What ordinary things did Jesus do?

What ordinary things can Jesus do to meet this need?

How did people participate in what Jesus was doing?

How do you think Jesus expects you to participate in this process?

Provisions for the Journey

SESSION THREE

Focus

Jesus is our refuge.

Supplies

- Bibles
- Resource Sheet #3

Preparation

- Read Matthew 26:6-12; think about a time when someone protected or shielded you from harm.
- Make copies of Resource Sheet #3 for each participant.

Getting Started

“Bullying” is still a big problem in many schools. Despite pleas from administrators to students to treat everyone respectfully and equally, some kids still get picked on. Many are afraid to speak up for fear of further reprisals. At best, some remain silent to prevent more teasing. At worst, some students stay quiet out of fear for their lives.

Ask your students to reflect on their days in school.

Without naming any names, have them describe a local bully who pushed kids around when they were growing up.

What kinds of things did he (or she) do to intimidate people? How did he keep getting away with what he was doing? Was there anybody in the neighborhood that the bully was afraid of? Was the bully ever “shut down” by those in authority, or did he ever meet his match?

After people have had a chance to talk about their experiences with bullies, introduce today’s story out of the life of Jesus. Obviously, no one intimidated Jesus. And He frequently stood up for people who were being bullied. Today’s story from the Book of Matthew describes what happened when Jesus’ disciples, no less, tried to bully a woman who merely wanted to express her gratitude to Jesus.

Digging In

Ask someone to get ready to read Matthew 26:6-12 out loud. If the people in your group have Bibles, encourage them to turn to the passage.

Before the reading, ask your students to listen for the disciples’ reactions to a penitent woman who interrupted their time with Jesus, and how the Lord came to the woman’s defense.

When everyone is paying attention, ask your volunteer to read Matthew 26:6-12 out loud.

After the reading, ask:

What did the woman do that seemed to upset the disciples?

Possible responses: She poured very expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet as an act of contrition; the disciples thought this was wasteful, because the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. To them, this was nobler than the woman’s unsolicited actions.

Finding Refuge

SESSION THREE

How did the disciples, directly or indirectly, verbally attack the woman?

Possible responses: They immediately judged her actions without first obtaining the facts; they questioned and insulted her judgment.

How did Jesus protect the woman from the disciples' spoken barbs?

Jesus immediately came to her defense and explained the truth behind her actions.

How do you think the woman felt after Jesus came to her defense?

At first she might have felt horrified that she did something terribly wrong; she only wanted to express her love for Jesus, when the disciples accused her of being wasteful. When she heard Jesus' defense, and complete understanding of her actions, she probably was relieved, and felt an even deeper love for the One who had forgiven all of her sins.

After this discussion, hand out Resource Sheet #3. This resource lists several instances of Jesus defending someone who was being bullied. Sometimes His disciples were the ones being attacked, and sometimes they were the ones doing the attacking!

Ask your students to go through this list and identify how Jesus protected and sheltered the people involved.

After this discussion, say:

Surely Jesus was willing to protect and shelter those who were being bullied. He will do the same for us today.

Time to Pray

When is the right time to pray in a small group? The following suggestions might help you determine some good times to pause during a discussion and allow some time for spontaneous prayer.

- When you feel emotionally or physically weak, and you need an extra boost from the Holy Spirit to strengthen you and continue with the lesson.
- When conflict begins to emerge among the small group participants.
- When someone is obviously moved by what the Scripture is teaching.
- When one of the group members asks to pray for someone outside of class concerning something that has just been discussed.

Taken from Cook's adult expository curriculum, *Understanding the Bible*.

Finding Refuge

SESSION THREE

Heading Out

Many of the adults in your group are still facing bullies in their lives. These bullies might be tailgating drivers, controlling bosses, abusive spouses, rebellious kids, or gossiping “friends.”

The bullies in their lives might not be people at all, but rather emotional struggles or painful life circumstances.

Other bullies in their lives might be purely supernatural—demonic forces that provoke and intimidate them, even though these people might not be “possessed” in any literal sense.

No matter who or what the bully, Jesus is ready to shelter the people in your group from the oppressive influences in their lives.

Using Resource Sheet #3, ask your students to identify any bullying powers

in their lives. Give them a few minutes to think about how Jesus can and will come to their defense, if only they will ask. Many of the biblical examples of Jesus’ defense were preceded by the faithful actions of the oppressed. Encourage your students to make an action plan to seek the shelter that Jesus has to offer them.

Assignment

Ask your students to read Matthew 26:47-56, and to think about the greatness of Jesus and the power at His disposal in contrast to the power of Jesus’ enemies.

Kid Connection

At Site 3, the kids heard the story of Noah’s ark, and how God sheltered Noah and his family from the torrential rains that covered the earth. Ask children who went to VBS today how Jesus might shelter them in times of trouble.

Finding Refuge

RESOURCE SHEET 3

How did Jesus stand up for these bullied people?

The woman who anointed Jesus' head with expensive perfume
—Matthew 26:6-12

The woman caught in adultery
—John 8:1-11

The repentant thief on the cross
—Luke 23:39-43

The children seeking the Lord's blessing
—Mark 10:13-16

Matthew and his friends
—Luke 5:26-32

The paralytic and those who opposed his forgiveness and healing by Jesus
—Mark 2:1-12

The disciples and their "failure" to fast
—Luke 5:33-39

The disciples and their "failure" to keep the handwashing tradition of the elders
—Matthew 15:1-14

The disciples and their "failure" to keep the Sabbath
—Matthew 12:1-8

The blind man healed by Jesus and interrogated by the Pharisees
—John 9:1-41

Jesus' defense of John the Baptist, who had been imprisoned
—Luke 7:18-30

The widow who could only offer two pennies
—Mark 12:41-44.

The Samaritan woman who was looked down upon by her neighbors and kept at arm's length by the disciples
—John 4:1-42

The man who was oppressed by demons
—Luke 4:33-37

The people exploited in the temple by the money-changers
—Matthew 21:12-13

Those who offered praise to Jesus, thus offending the chief priests
—Matthew 21:14-16

Zacchaeus, the hated tax collector
—Luke 19:1-9

The servant whose ear was cut off in the Garden of Gethsemane
—Luke 22:49-51

The man healed at the pool of Bethesda
—John 5:1-14

Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet, which offended Judas
—John 12:1-8

The Christians persecuted by Saul
—Acts 9:1-5

Who or what is bullying you?

What would Jesus say or do to defend, protect, or shelter you?

Finding Refuge

SESSION FOUR

Focus

Jesus is greater than any enemy.

Supplies

- Bibles
- Resource Sheet 4

Preparation

- Read Matthew 26:47-56; contrast the greatness of Jesus and the power at His disposal with that of those considered His enemies.
- Make copies of Resource Sheet #4 for each participant.

Getting Started

In the last session, we talked about Jesus' ability and willingness to protect and shelter us from the bullies in our lives, whether those bullies are actual persons or oppressive influences. Several times during Jesus' earthly ministry, He stood between the bullied and their oppressors, sheltering the downtrodden with His power.

In this session, we'll see that Jesus is willing to go even further on our behalf. Not only is He willing to protect us during the storms that come against us, but He is also willing to do battle for us.

Today's Scripture takes us to the Garden of Gethsemane, after Jesus has struggled in prayer. The enemies of God, emboldened by the powers of darkness, were coming to deliver Jesus to a kangaroo court—only to crucify Him less than 12 hours later.

While His disciples were ready to do physical battle to prevent this from happening, Jesus showed them a higher way, even though He had the hosts of heaven at His disposal.

To begin this discussion, ask your students to name some of the most powerful national forces in the world today. Encourage them to talk about how some of those forces might consider each other "enemies." Ask them to identify the nature of the imminent or real conflict between them—whether it is ideological, political, religious, or geographical. ***For whatever reason, why do these groups consider themselves enemies?***

Digging In

Some local leaders of Jesus' time had clearly declared themselves enemies of Christ, especially toward the end of His ministry. Jesus had verbally defended and sheltered His disciples against the attacks of the chief priests and Pharisees. These religious leaders had repeatedly tried to trap Jesus and failed, resulting in public humiliation. When they finally had enough, now they determined to destroy Jesus and anyone who identified with Him.

Ask one of your students to get ready to read Matthew 26:47-56 out loud. Ask the other students to pay attention to the way Jesus handled the ensuing conflict, and how He instructed His followers to battle their enemies in such a way that honors God.

Greater than Any Enemy

SESSION FOUR

When everyone is paying attention, ask your volunteer to read Matthew 26:47-56 out loud. When the reading is finished, ask,

Who are the enemies in this passage?

Possible responses: Judas, the armed mob, the chief priests and elders who sent them, and the dark supernatural powers that energized these people.

What was the knee-jerk reaction of at least one of the disciples when these enemies made their move against Jesus?

Possible response: One of the disciples took his sword and cut off the high priest's servant's ear, apparently ready to physically fight anyone else who would try to take Jesus away.

How did Jesus correct the wrong thinking of the over-zealous disciple?

Jesus reprimanded the disciple for thinking that he could solve this problem through violence. All Jesus would have to do is say the word, and He would have thousands upon thousands of angels ready to do His bidding, including decisive physical warfare, if He so desired.

How did Jesus confront His enemies?

He told them the truth and reprimanded them for their cowardice. He said they would never have arrested Him in daylight, in front of the crowds who at least tacitly supported Him. Jesus reminded His enemies that they

A Cruel Death

Crucifixion as a means of torture and execution was invented in the East and adopted by the Romans, who used it for slaves and lower-class persons. A victim of Roman crucifixion typically had to carry the crossbeam of his cross to the place of execution. He or someone else would also carry a tablet citing the charge against him, which was then nailed to the top of the cross. At the execution site, the crossbeam would be attached perpendicularly to a longer beam, at or near the top of it, while it was still lying on the ground. Then the victim's hands, and sometimes his feet, would be affixed to the cross by means of cords or nails. Finally, the cross would be lifted and dropped into a hole.

Victims eventually succumbed to death due to blood loss, poor circulation, and respiratory failure. If the crucifiers wanted to make the victim last longer, they would outfit the cross with a block of wood as a seat or footrest, which would allow the victim to breathe a bit easier—and thus prolong his death. If the crucifiers wanted to shorten the victim's life, they would break his legs so that he could no longer support his diaphragm, thus making him slowly asphyxiate.

Despite the bitterness and cruelty of this fate, Jesus continued to confront His enemies, not with force but with God's love and truth.

Taken from Cook's adult book-of-the-Bible curriculum, *Understanding the Bible*.

Greater than Any Enemy

SESSION FOUR

were nothing but pawns in God's hand, for the Scriptures had predicted these very events.

How did the disciples respond when forced to face the enemy Jesus' way?

They ran off and left Jesus with those who were bent on defaming and destroying Him.

Heading Out

Jesus wept brokenheartedly over Jerusalem (*Luke 19:41*) because they had failed to see Him and accept Him for who He is—Savior, Master, and King. Ask the members of the group to consider silently their answer to the following question: ***If Jesus scrutinized my life as He did the people in Jerusalem, would He see anything that could cause Him to weep?***

Spend some time in silent prayer as each individual talks with God about his or her answer to the question. Suggest that members might want to write a letter to God asking forgiveness for the things that were brought to mind.

Ask your students to identify "enemies" in their lives. These might include some of the bullies they thought about in Session Three. They could expand their lists to include people they may not know personally, but who are clearly opposed to that which honors God. Have them write these at the top of their sheets.

In the left column group members should describe merely human, ineffective, usually sinful ways to battle the enemies they listed.

Possible responses include: Physical injury, insults, verbal abuse, sabotage, gossip, defamation, libel, slander, rumor, and other responses which do not honor God.

In the right column, ask your students to describe ways Jesus would enter into battle with those who oppose His Father's will.

Possible responses include: speaking the truth in love; confronting privately, then with witnesses, then before the church, depending on the response of the enemy (*see Matthew 18:15-17*); fervent prayer; loving correction and reprimand; all forms of discipline that have redemption and restoration as their goals.

Give your students a few minutes to look at their lists, and create a battle plan to confront the enemies in their lives. Remind them their plans should reflect the fact that Jesus fights our battles for us, armed with the weapons of His Father's love and truth.

Assignment

Ask students to read Matthew 14:22-33, and to think about a time when the storms of life distracted them, causing them to take their eyes off Jesus.

Kid Connection

At Site 4, the kids in VBS read the story of Elisha's servant, and how God opened Elisha's eyes and revealed angel warriors—the same angels who were at Jesus' disposal in the Garden of Gethsemane. Ask the children to explain how Jesus goes to battle for them.

Greater than Any Enemy

SESSION FIVE

Focus

Jesus showed how to deal with pressure.

Supplies

- Bibles
- Resource Sheet 5
- 3 X 5 cards

Preparation

- Read Matthew 14:22-33; think about a time when the storms of life distracted you, causing you to take your eyes off of Jesus.
- Make copies of Resource Sheet #5 for each participant.

Getting Started

Today's Bible story highlights the full spectrum of one man's faith. On one end was unwavering, action-inspiring belief in Christ. On the other end was distracting, unhealthy doubt that would have cost him his life had Christ not intervened.

Sometimes a questioning mind can be healthy for our faith; it may compel us to examine what we may have taken for granted—to make sure that we genuinely “own” what we believe. The truth of God is like an immovable anvil: It can withstand any questioning, any test. It does not change or reshape itself for anybody, no matter what doubts are thrown at it.

When doubt becomes distracting and debilitating, forcing our focus away from Christ, it becomes unhealthy. We deserve to be lovingly reprimanded for our lack of faith.

To begin this discussion, tell the people in your group about three “events” in your life. Tell them beforehand that two of the events really happened, but one of them is fictional. After you’ve told your stories, allow each person in the group to ask three questions to test the validity of your stories. After everyone has had a chance to ask questions, have them privately write down which of your three stories they think you made up.

When everyone has written down their guesses, ask for volunteers to guess which story they think is untrue, and explain why. After everyone has had a chance to speak up, reveal the answer.

Digging In

Explain: *Today we’re going to take a look at Peter’s attempt to walk on the water, following the Lord’s example and command. On the one hand, Peter showed incredible faith just stepping out of a boat in the middle of a lake, in the middle of a storm.*

On the other hand, his unhealthy doubts got the best of him when he focused on the chaos around him instead of keeping his eyes on Christ.

Keep in mind that the disciples had earlier witnessed Jesus calming a violent storm, perhaps in this same boat, in the middle of this same sea, by merely rebuking the wind (see Matthew 8:23-27).

Hand out Resource Sheet #5.

Certain Hope

SESSION FIVE

Ask one of your students to get ready to read Matthew 14:22-33 out loud. Ask your other students to pay attention to Peter's expressions of faith, or lack of faith, as he stepped out of the boat. Have your students write their responses in the appropriate columns of Resource Sheet 5.

When everyone is paying attention, ask your volunteer to read Matthew 14:22-33 out loud. When the reading is finished, ask,

What things did Peter do to demonstrate his faith?

Possible responses:

He got into the boat and went to the other side of the lake as Jesus commanded.

Peter stepped out of the boat, in the middle of the lake, and started actually walking on the water toward Jesus.

Peter asked Jesus to save him, admitting the hopelessness of his situation.

What things did Peter do that demonstrated a lack of faith?

Possible responses:

Presumably Peter was terrified along with the other disciples, because they thought a ghost was walking toward them.

Peter doubted the identity of the water-walker and asked for proof.

Peter allowed himself to be distracted and began to sink.

How did Jesus respond to Peter's on-again, off-again faith?

Jesus sent the disciples into a situation that would test their faith.

Jesus spent time prior to this event in prayer.

Jesus attempted to calm their fears and identified Himself (*the same person they had seen calm a similar storm*).

Jesus accepted Peter's offer of a test and invited him out on top of the water.

Night Watches

The events of Matthew 14:22-33 occurred during "the fourth watch of the night." In ancient times, the night was divided into four "watches." These time periods were used by guards to regulate their shifts: (1) sunset to about 9:00 p.m.; (2) 9:00 to midnight; (3) midnight to 3:00 a.m.; and (4) 3:00 a.m. to sunrise.

If Jesus had walked out to the boat during the fourth watch, then we could presume the disciples had been up all night battling the storm. They would have been pushed to the emotional and physical edge.

Taken from Cook's adult book-of-the-Bible curriculum, *Understanding the Bible*.

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SESSION FIVE

When Peter's faith wavered, Jesus was there to rescue him.

Jesus gently rebuked Peter for his lack of faith.

Heading Out

After your students have had a chance to talk about Peter and Jesus' actions in this story, explain:

Sometimes questioning our faith can be a healthy thing; if something is true, it can withstand any fair test.

When doubts paralyze us, however, preventing us from seeking resolution, they become harmful to our faith.

Take a minute to contrast healthy questioning with unhealthy doubts on Resource Sheet #5. These items may or may not reflect an issue for you; they could be fair questions or obstacles to faith common to many people.

Possible responses:

Healthy Questioning:

How do I know that the Bible is reliable?

What is the evidence that Christ rose from the dead?

How can God be all-powerful and all-loving if evil exists in the world?

Unhealthy Doubts:

The Bible must be untrue because it describes miraculous events.

There's no way that the Bible can say anything relevant to me because it is thousands of years old.

I cannot reconcile God's sovereignty with personal responsibility, so I will believe in neither.

If any of the people in your group do list questions or doubts that are issues for them, encourage these people to seek out knowledgeable, mature Christians to help them resolve these doubts. If you're not comfortable personally handling these issues, you might want to direct these people to your pastor or other leaders in the church.

During these studies, it may become evident to you that some people in your group have no faith at all because they haven't received God's gift of salvation. If this is the case, and they appear to be ready to respond positively to the Gospel, be ready to help them experience reconciliation with God through trusting in Christ.

Assignment

Since this is the last session in this VBS adult guide, you may want to suggest a post-study reunion, say, three or four weeks from now. Encourage those who participate to talk about how their lives have been changed for the better because of your time together.

Kid Connection

At Site 5, the kids in VBS read the same story of Peter's attempt to walk on the water toward Jesus. Ask the children to talk about why we can trust Jesus to save us, no matter what our situation.

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RESOURCE SHEETS

Read Matthew 14:22-33.

What things did Peter do to demonstrate his faith?

How did Jesus respond to Peter's on-again, off-again faith?

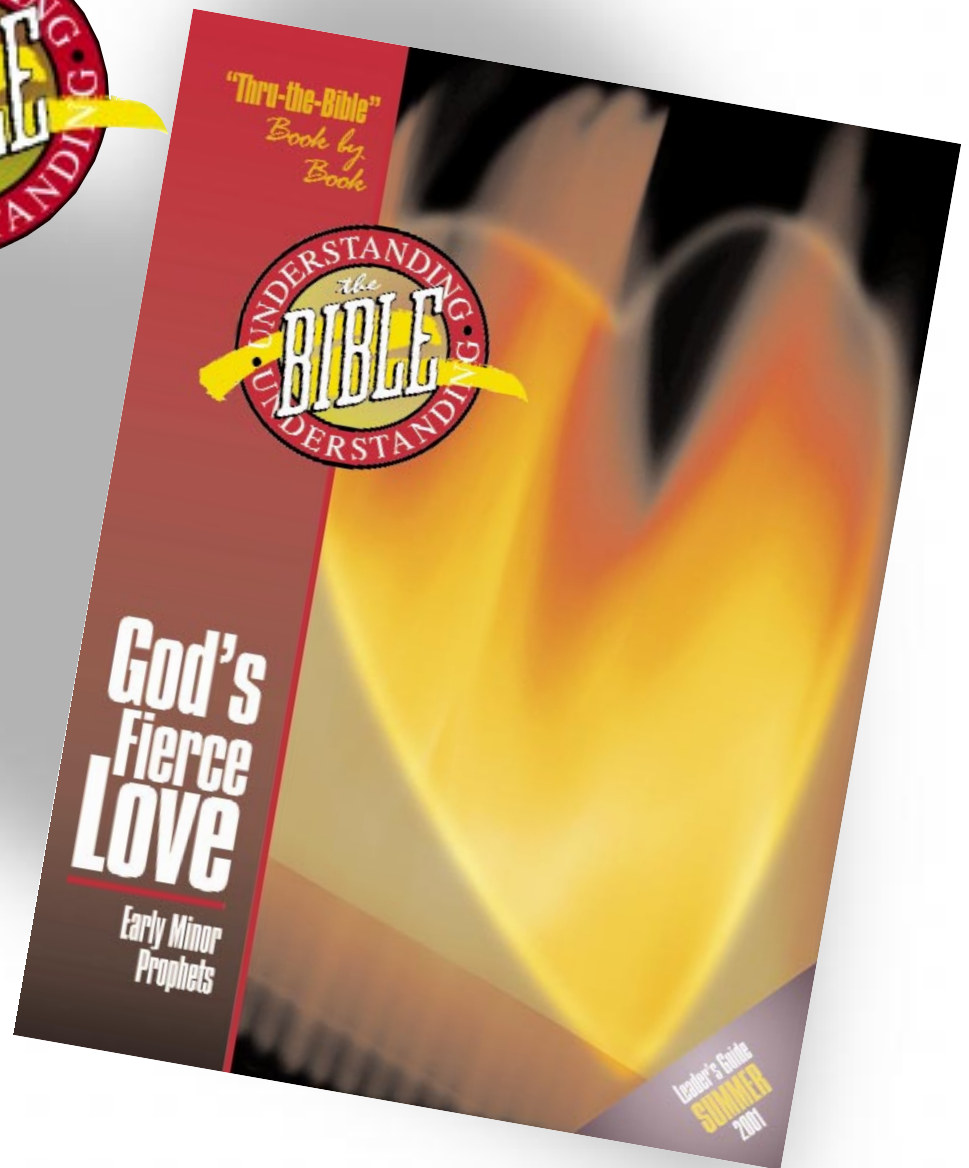
What things did Peter do that demonstrated a lack of faith?

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