



A 4-WEEK
STUDY FROM THE
GOSPELS & PSALMS ON

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

FROM OUR ANNUAL *TEACHING STRATEGY*



WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED WITH . . .

PHILLIP LEWIS & ARELI ORTIZ

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focus

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SERIES OVERVIEW

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**.

WEEK 1

This week, we'll explore the time Jesus was tested in the wilderness and hear how to ask God for direction from the Psalms.

- **BIG IDEA:** Focus on what God has said.
- **BIBLE:** Matthew 4:1-11, Psalm 119:9, 33-37

WEEK 2

This week, we'll focus on what Jesus had to say about prayer and fasting, along with realizing God is our source of strength from the Psalms.

- **BIG IDEA:** Focus on giving something up.
- **BIBLE:** Matthew 6:16-18; Psalm 121:1-8; Romans 12:9-11

WEEK 3

This week, we'll unpack Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well and an example of asking God for help from the Psalms.

- **BIG IDEA:** Focus on talking to God.
- **BIBLE:** John 4:5-30; Psalm 18:6; Philippians 4:6

WEEK 4

This week, we'll discover the time Jesus fed the five thousand and what it means to rest from the Psalms.

- **BIG IDEA:** Focus on rest.
- **BIBLE:** Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 23:1-6; Exodus 33:14

MEMORY VERSE: "Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight." – Psalm 119:33-35 (NIV)

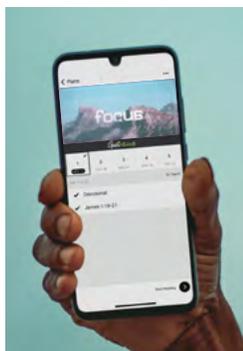
HOW TO DISCIPLE DURING THIS SERIES

We all know teenagers don't get disciplined just by sitting through a message every week. So here's what else we've provided to **help your students develop more consistent spiritual habits**.

THE 4 SPIRITUAL HABITS

We feature one of Grow's 4 Spiritual Habits every month with a unique activity or experience. But the 4 Spiritual Habits show up year-round! **Here are a few of the places you can spot them in this series:**

- **SPEND TIME WITH GOD:** This whole series is about spending time with God! To help teenagers do that, you'll walk them through strategies for practicing four spiritual disciplines: spending time in Scripture, fasting, spending time in prayer, and resting.
- **SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS:** In every week of this series, at least one of the suggestion application steps is to partner up with a friend. You'll challenge teenagers to help each other read Scripture, fast, pray, and rest.
- **USE YOUR GIFTS:** In Weeks 3 and 4, you'll encourage teenagers to talk to God and find rest in God in ways that are unique to them and align with their individual interests and makeups.
- **SHARE YOUR STORY:** In Week 3, you'll explain how the woman at the well was compelled to share her story after talking with Jesus. Plus, every week, teenagers will hear from others about how they practice these spiritual disciplines.

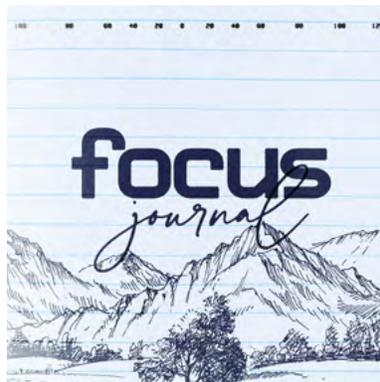


DEVOTIONALS

To help students regularly **spend time with God**, every series comes with daily readings and devotionals through The Bible App. You can access them on your browser or app [right here](#). And don't forget about your [Volunteer Devotional!](#)

DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITY

If you're following along with our scope and sequence, our discipleship activity this quarter is Focus Journal, an activity to help students **spend time with God**. We also made you some [posters and graphics](#) for this quarter's habit you can print, display, or share online.



MEMORY VERSE

Try challenging students to memorize a verse that corresponds with the Big Ideas or themes of this series. Here's the verse we chose — and [we made graphics](#) you can post, print, or show on screen too!



HOW TO PROGRAM FOR THIS SERIES

Outside of your teaching time, we have a few programming ideas to help this series really come to life — everything from how to **design your room**, to which **games to play**, to what **music to play and sing**.



ROOM DESIGN

For this series, you'll create a room design that takes the word "focus" literally!

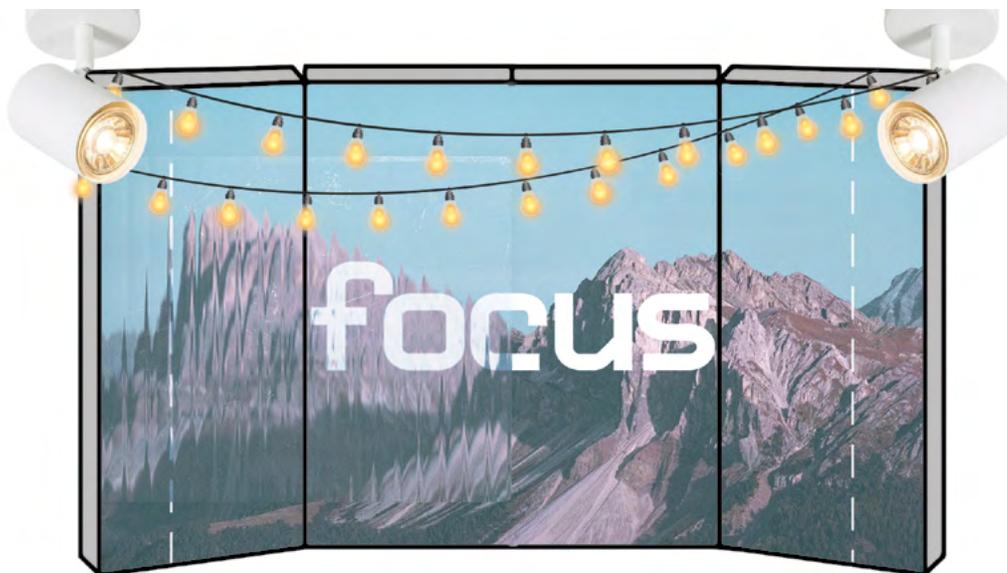
First, you'll need a backdrop with the series title. There are tons of ways to create a backdrop you can re-use multiple times each year. Check out [this post](#) for a list of ideas. For this series, **we recommend using foam boards or banners** with the series graphic printed or painted on them.

Next, you'll create four frames in which the Big Ideas for this series can be progressively revealed. There are a number of ways to build these frames, based on the amount of time, effort, and resources you have available, but here's the idea — [frame](#) all four Big Ideas, but use [privacy film](#) to create an out-of-focus blurred effect over the images until you're ready to reveal them. Use the Big Idea images provided in your Graphics and Video folder to make this simple! Display your frames on easels, hang them on a wall, attach them to your backdrop, or suspend

them from the ceiling, depending on the space and tools you have available.

For a simple solution, display your Big Ideas in a [frame](#) of your choice. You could apply the [privacy film](#) directly to the glass, but make sure the glass is easy to remove from the frame when you're ready to reveal the Big Idea. If you need to take the entire frame apart in order to remove the glass, you may want to apply the privacy film to a sheet of [loose clear plastic](#) that you place on top of the glass until you're ready to reveal the Big Idea.

If you'd like to invest a little more effort into your Big Idea frames, try adding dimension and lights! Instead of four flat frames, use wood or [coroplast](#) to create four shadow boxes behind your frames. Mount the Big Idea prints on the inside back panel of the shadow box and add [LED lights](#) to the inside walls. Finally, attach the [frame](#) (containing only glass) to the front of the shadow box and add the [privacy film](#).



GAMES

If you have a designated time for games before your worship and teaching time, we have a few suggestions for games you can play! Since this series talks a lot about focusing, all the games for this series will include an aspect of maintaining focus on a specific task. To get the instructions and graphics for each game, click the

images to the right or visit the Games section of your Grow Students dashboard.

- [Tower From Above](#)
- [Cup Focus](#)
- [In Focus](#)
- [Cups, Cups, Cups, Cups!](#)

MUSIC

Here are a few on-theme worship songs you may want to feature throughout this series . . .

- **"Our Psalm 23"** (Common Hymnal)
- **"One Thing"** (ARISE Worship)
- **"We Want More"** (Bri Babineaux)
- **"Endless Alleluia"** (Bethel Music)
- **"Show Me Your Glory"** (Brandon Lake)
- **"Remember"** (Bryan & Katie Torwalt)
- **"Still"** (Brian Courtney Wilson)
- **"Never Have I Ever"** (Hillsong Young & Free)
- **"Rest"** (Kari Jobe)
- **"Shall Not Want"** (Elevation Worship & Maverick City Music)

And if you want to sing or sample a non-worship song or two (maybe as an opener, a closer, a bonus song during your program), try some of these . . .

- **"I am Yours"** (NEEDTOBREATHE)
- **"Focus"** (Craig David)
- **"All I Need Is You"** (Lecrae)
- **"The One Where I Talk To God"** (Marty, Andy Mineo, Tree Giants)
- **"Rest For Your Soul"** (Austin French)

We've added these songs to our [Grow Students \(Volume 6\) Spotify playlist](#) for your personal use only, according to Spotify's [terms and conditions](#). For more information on how to use copyrighted music in your services legally, [read this!](#)

GRAPHIC DESIGN

We give you editable graphics so you can make everything your own! If you're going to **edit our graphics** or **create something brand new** . . .

Use this font! Download it [here](#).

Carbon Regular

Use this font! Download it [here](#).

Carbon Bold

And use these colors!

-  HEX: #5C95AB
CMYK: 71-32-27-00
-  HEX: #6A737A
CMYK: 61-47-43-11
-  HEX: #A99FB2
CMYK: 34-34-20-00
-  HEX: #8BC8DC
CMYK: 42-08-12-00

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS SERIES

SHOPPING LIST

If you want to try all of our suggestions for this series, here's what you'll need to buy, borrow, Google, or dig for in your storage closet . . .

WEEK 1:

- The handouts provided in your Week 1 folder
- A board
- Sticky notes or index cards and thumb tacks
- Pens
- Reflective music
- A song like ["We Say Yes," by SEU Worship](#)
- The Focus Journal, from the Discipleship section of your Grow dashboard

WEEK 2:

- [Handheld maze party favors](#)
- Two large buckets, boxes, or jars
- Scrap paper
- Duct tape
- Two household mirrors or an [inexpensive set of mirrors](#)
- A song like ["Shall Not Want," by Elevation Worship and Maverick City Music](#)
- The Focus Journal, from the Discipleship section of your Grow dashboard
- Pens

WEEK 3:

- Boxes of marshmallow cereal (like Lucky Charms)
- Paper bowls
- A [kitchen scale](#)
- A video [like this one](#) (0:00-0:27) of John Moschitta, Jr. demonstrating his fast-talking abilities
- A water jug or bucket
- Scrap paper
- A marker
- A song like ["Talking to Jesus," by Maverick City Music and Elevation Worship](#)

WEEK 4:

- ["Eye spy" books](#)
- Markers
- Comfort objects, like small blankets, stuffed animals, pillows, or cozy sweatshirts
- Soothing music

PREP LIST

WEEK 1:

- For the game **Fast Focus**, print multiple copies of the handout provided in your Week 1 folder and cut it into quarters.
- For the **Center of Attention** reflection time, print multiple copies of the handout provided in your Week 1 folder and cut it into quarters.
- Prepare copies of **The Focus Journal** for each of your students.

WEEK 2:

- For the **+/-** object lesson, use duct tape to create a large plus sign on one bucket and a minus sign on the other.
- For the **+/- Mosaic** response time, use duct tape to create a large plus sign on one mirror and a minus sign on the other.
- Prepare extra copies of **The Focus Journal**.

WEEK 3:

- Prepare extra copies of **The Focus Journal**.

WEEK 4:

- Ask a few volunteers or students to join you in sharing some personal stories about **the ways you rest**.

WHAT TO CUSTOMIZE

You know your students better than we do, so there are probably some things you'd like to change about this series before you start teaching. Here's what you'll need to update if you make changes . . .

- **TEACHING:** Add your own stories, jokes, and any pop culture references that make sense for your group. You can edit each message using the Word documents provided or the [Grow Message Builder](#).
- **DISCUSSIONS:** If you make any changes to your teaching, make sure your discussion questions reflect those changes. You can edit these using the Word documents provided.
- **GRAPHICS:** We've provided graphics in your [Graphics & Video](#) folder already, but we've also provided blank slides in case you need to make your own.
- **PRESENTATION:** Customize your weekly presentations in [SLIDR](#) and use it to show images and videos during your weekly program. Each week of Grow Curriculum comes pre-loaded with content to get you started.
- **EMAILS & HUBS:** Customize and send the [volunteer and parent emails](#) as well as the [Volunteer and Parent Hubs](#) content we've provided for this series to keep everyone's grown-ups in the loop.

WHAT TO COMMUNICATE

To make sure your students, volunteers, and parents are in the loop, follow along with the Marketing Checklist we've provided for this series to make sure you've got everything covered, like . . .

- **STUDENTS:** Throughout the month, post the [Graphics & Video](#) we've provided on social media, like the Big Idea images and Bumper Video. Post the [One-Minute Sermon Videos](#) we've provided or use the **One-Minute Sermon Scripts [JUMP]** to film a recap video each week and post it on social media.
- **FAMILIES:** Before you begin teaching this series, send parents the [Parent Email](#) we've provided (after you've customized it for your ministry, of course). After each week of the series, post the Big Idea images wherever you talk to parents online. And don't forget to update your [Parent Hub](#) with the information they need for this series!
- **VOLUNTEERS:** Before you teach each week of this series, send volunteers the weekly [Volunteer Emails](#) we've provided (after you've customized it for your ministry, of course). Before each week of the series, post the Big Idea images wherever you talk to volunteers online and make sure they have their Discussion Guides in advance! And don't forget to update your [Volunteer Hub](#) with the information they need for this series!

And hey! When you post on social media, **don't forget to use the #growcurriculum hashtag and tag us @stuffyoucanuse** to share your ideas and stories with our team and with other churches who are using Grow!

HOW TO HACK THIS SERIES

Every ministry is different. Whether you're teaching middle schoolers, high schoolers, teenagers with special needs, or all three, here's how to hack this series to fit your unique and diverse audience.

HACKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for middle schoolers, here's what to adjust . . .

In Week 1, provide extra support during the Center of Attention reflection time. Considering their shorter attention span, you may need an extra dose of patience with your middle schoolers during this experience. To help your middle schoolers stay focused, give clear instructions, shorten the overall time of the activity, keep your background music quiet and soothing, dim the lights to minimize distractions, and ask a few volunteers to look for kids who might feel lost or distracted.

In Week 2, adjust the question "What have you heard about fasting?" There's a good chance hardly any of your middle schoolers are familiar with fasting, which means they might respond to this question with off-topic remarks or silly comments. To keep things under control, try asking a yes or no question, like "Have you ever heard of fasting?" Then look for any students who responded affirmatively and ask them specifically what they've heard about fasting.

In Week 4, help your middle schoolers differentiate between rest and laziness. It's not exactly easy to motivate a middle schooler, is it? Whether you're trying to get them to shower, do the dishes, clean their room, or finish their homework, middle schoolers tend to struggle with motivation. With that in mind, it's possible your middle schoolers might use the "I need rest" excuse to get out of chores they need to complete at home or at school. So go ahead and address that in your teaching time! Remind your students Jesus and his disciples rested after they had completed their work for the day and so they could have the energy to do it again the next day. They didn't rest to avoid doing any work at all!

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

In all four weeks, replace some of the story prompts with stories from high school students. Instead of telling your own personal stories (or asking volunteers to tell theirs), invite high schoolers to share their stories, ideas, and perspectives with your middle schoolers. Your younger students will love hearing from your older students and their examples of practicing these spiritual disciplines might feel more attainable than an adult's examples. Just be sure to work with your high schoolers in advance to make sure their stories are clear and concise!

REMEMBER

Keep in mind, abstaining from food is dangerous for the health of a middle schooler's growing body and brain, so it's important to discourage them from fasting from food. While your high schoolers might be capable of fasting from certain foods (like sugar, caffeine, or junk food), your middle schoolers likely lack the maturity and discretion to make wise choices about the food they put into (or don't put into) their bodies. To keep your middle schoolers safe, direct them to fast from something that is not food.

HACKS FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for high schoolers, here's what to adjust . . .

In all four weeks, adjust the Fast Focus activities that open your teaching time by either making these upfront games (rather than all-play games) if your high schoolers aren't the biggest fans of playing group games. Or, if your high schoolers are the game-playing types, try increasing the difficulty level each week by increasing the pace of the game or adding distractions like loud sounds, squirt guns, or on-the-spot changes in the rules.

In Week 1, be prepared for questions about the devil. Since the devil is mentioned in the Scripture for this week, your high schoolers may have questions about who the devil is and how he works. If you're eager to journey down that trail with your interested high schoolers, go for it! But if you're trying to stick to the teaching outline, you might want to redirect their questions to a bonus conversation after your teaching time.

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

In all four weeks, replace the opening activities with an extended discussion time at the end of your teaching if you'd like this series to have a more serious or reflective tone for your high schoolers.

In all four weeks, replace the story prompts with stories from students. Instead of telling your own personal stories (or asking volunteers to tell theirs), invite high schoolers to share their stories, ideas, and perspectives. Just be sure to work with your students in advance to make sure their stories are clear and concise!

REMEMBER

As you teach teenagers about fasting, keep in mind your high schoolers are at a particularly vulnerable age when it comes to disordered eating. Make sure your teaching isn't encouraging dieting, restricting sugar, or equating fasting only with abstaining from food, since all of these approaches could lead teenagers to adopt unhealthy attitudes and habits toward food during these vulnerable years.

HACKS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for students with special needs, here's what to adjust . . .

In all four weeks, adjust the Fast Focus activities to accommodate students who struggle with their fine motor skills. To make these activities more accessible, you might have some shapes partially cut or perforated in Week 1, provide a simpler paper maze for Week 2, give them a sorting buddy in Week 3, or let them look for hidden objects while a teammate circles them in Week 4.

In Weeks 1 and 2, provide students with a buddy during the times of reflection and response. Anytime there is an opportunity for students to write down something they're reflecting on or want to do in response to what they've learned, it's helpful to provide a buddy to any student who might be struggling. For students who have a difficult time writing, communicating, or processing, a buddy can help by explaining, writing, or adjusting the activity for each individual student.

In Week 3, avoid describing prayer primarily as "hearing" or "hearing from" God. This is a phrase we commonly use, but for students who are deaf or hearing impaired, it can be alienating when it's the primary way prayer is taught. For example, in the context of prayer, sign language uses the sign for "receive" or "understand" in place of "hear," since detecting sound is not the only way a person can listen to God.

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

Every week, provide alternative activities for the large group activities. Rather than expecting every student to participate in the large group games, create a quiet or calming space with different sensory bins for students who might feel overstimulated by the large group activities.

REMEMBER

Most of the time, your students with special needs probably don't get a chance to hear stories or Bible teaching from people with disabilities as often as they learn from people without disabilities. When you have an opportunity to tell personal stories in your teaching (and this series has plenty!) look for ways to give those teaching moments to people with disabilities. This will give your students practical examples they can relate to, and it will help them feel seen and valued too!



WRITTEN & DEVELOPED WITH . . .

Phillip Lewis serves as the High School Director at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle. He is passionate about seeing students in the Seattle area come to know Jesus! Phillip is currently working towards his master's degree in Theology with a focus in Reconciliation and Intercultural Studies at Seattle Pacific Seminary. Phillip is always excited to drink coffee, read new books, and meet new people in the area or around the world! He is an avid hiker and loves to get outside with his wife whenever he can. Phillip loves dogs and with any chance he gets finds himself dog-sitting friends' dogs in the neighborhood.

Areli Ortiz has been a youth pastor for six years at Bethel Pharr, a bilingual church deep on the southern border of Texas. She has traveled to 10 countries and is now in the process of becoming a missionary to Spain, where she will also focus on leading teenagers. There's never a time in which she doesn't have a future flight booked. In her free time, she likes trying out the best authentic taco spots in town with her friends.

. . . AND THE REST OF THE TEAM!



SERIES DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW: Elle Campbell, Brooklyn Lindsey, David Magallanes, Crystal Quintero, Stephen Switzer, Linda Moon, Areli Ortiz, Matty McCage, Stefany Bremer, Tim Synan, Bianca Quezada

HACKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL, AND SPECIAL NEEDS: Shala Graham, Ty Combs, Amanda Keener, Travis Bannon, Sunny Brown, Stephanie Newland

MENTAL HEALTH REVIEW: David Perez

STUDENT DEVOTIONALS: Emily Buchanan, Crystal Quintero

GAMES: Jeremiah Herring, Tyler Grant

ONE-MINUTE SERMON VIDEOS: David Magallanes, Elle Campbell, Jose Rodriguez, Erica Rodriguez, Vanessa Serrano Cruz, Damean Easter, and the Rescue a Generation team

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VOLUNTEER DEVOTIONAL

focus

STUDY

Life can seem like a series of attempts to break or develop habits. Think about the habits you see forming in your own routine. Whether you like them or not, they form because of repetition and sometimes because we aren't paying very close attention. Then, there are those that require more intention. It wasn't an "oops" that you woke up being able to run a 5K, speak another language, or complete a project. All of these things took a habit-forming and a habit-repeating to exist.

In this series, you'll get to guide students to a place of focus — where they can begin to develop spiritual habits worth repeating. As you prepare, think about the places where God may be inviting you to focus more. Spending time with God, spending time with others, using your gifts, and telling your story are all habits that we tend to over a lifetime. Use this chance, while you're helping teenagers see what's possible, to consider what might also be possible for you.

To get ready for this series, **spend a few minutes reading the stories we'll be teaching students this month.** As you do, think about what God has taught you (and is still teaching you) about spiritual habits through these passages, and how these Big Ideas have been true in your life.

WEEK 1: Focus on what God has said. Matthew 4:1-11

WEEK 2: Focus on giving something up. Matthew 6:16-18; Psalm 121:1-8

WEEK 3: Focus on talking to God. John 4:5-30; Psalm 18:6 & 28

WEEK 4: Focus on rest. Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 23:1-6

PRAY

There are so many things we can focus on when we are trying to grow spiritually, but having some specific goals in mind will give you a bigger opportunity to grow. Prayer is one of those things you can focus on as a habit to help you grow closer to God. Talking to God can feel intimidating or like you may not be doing it right, but if you shift your focus to why God wants to communicate with us, you may be inspired to do it more often! Focus on the thing God has said — or maybe give something up — to help you focus more during the duration of this series. Write down what it is you want to do and how long you'll do it, then try it out as you encourage your students to grow in the same way.

Which passage of Scripture or Big Idea from this month is most relevant to you right now? Spend a few minutes asking God to show you how you've already grown in this area, plus the next step you need to take in order to keep growing.

GROW

So what's your next step? Do you need to open your Bible app and listen to what God has said? Do you need to give something up to be intentional with an area of growth that's important to you? It could be anything — from having a conversation with God to simply focusing on rest.

Whatever your next step is right now, take it. Then help students do the same.

WEEK 1 TEACHING GUIDE

focus

BIG IDEA

Focus on what
God has said.

BIBLE

Matthew 4:1-11,
Psalm 119:9, 33-37

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Fast Focus

- Welcome to our new series, *Focus!* For the next few weeks, we're going to be talking about a few important things we should all be focusing on. It might seem simple, but the truth is, focusing isn't that hard — until it is.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, print multiple copies of the handout provided in your Week 1 folder and cut it into quarters. To play, give every student a quarter-page handout and set a timer for 30 seconds. On your signal, have everyone carefully tear along the outline of the star using only their hands. The person with the most accurate star wins. If you'd like to play multiple rounds, try playing tournament-style with additional shapes, where students are paired with an opponent each round and only one student from each pair can advance to the next round. Keep playing until you have a winner.*
- Some of you really "tore it up" under pressure, but some of you seem like you struggled to focus.

ACTIVITY | Staring Contest

- For those of you who feel like focus wasn't your problem on that last challenge (maybe you're just bad at tearing paper), you have a chance to redeem yourself.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Split students into pairs and play an upbeat song. When the song begins, students must stare into each other's eyes without blinking. The first person to lose focus and blink loses, while the other gets paired with a new partner. Keep playing until you have a winner.*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **What's one thing you could focus on for hours?**
 - **When is it most difficult for you to focus? Why do you think that is?**

QUESTION | How do you focus?

- So many things compete for our attention, not just during a staring contest, but in our real lives too. Sometimes there's so much competing for our attention that it can be tough to get anything done.
- Did you know . . .

- There are over 3.2 billion images are shared on the internet every day?
- The average teenager might view between 6,000 to 10,000 ads every day?
- TikTok users spend close to an hour a day watching videos?
- With all of that going on, it's not surprising that many of us struggle to focus. **How do you focus when you need to get something done?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this question, you'll need a board with sticky notes or index cards and thumb tacks. As students respond to your question, write down any helpful hacks you or students come up with and add them to the board, like:
 - Turning off notifications.
 - Listening to your favorite playlist.
 - Chewing on a handful of Skittles.
 - Setting a timer.
 - Locking yourself in a library.
 - Building a fort in the woods where there's no phone service or Wi-Fi.
- It's a good thing we have so many hacks to work with here because focusing can be a challenge. Sometimes we need all the help we can get, like when we really need to . . .
 - Finish that school project.
 - Pay attention to what our friend is saying.
 - Stop losing our keys.
 - Stay committed to training for that new thing we're learning.
- And for some of us, one of the things we struggle most to focus on are the things that are supposed to help us grow closer to God.

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

STORY | Talk about a time you struggled to focus on the Bible.

- Have you ever struggled to stay focused when you were spending time with God? If you've ever tried reading the Bible or talking to God on your own, I'm guessing the answer is yes.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you struggled to focus on the Bible. Share why it was so difficult for you to stay focused on what you were reading or trying to apply, what challenges you faced, and how your inability to focus made you feel about your relationship with God.
- If there's one thing I know, some things require some attention and practice. Like some of the all-time greatest athletes, musicians, or thinkers, who put in days, weeks, months, and years of practice for the thing that mattered most to them, we can grow in our ability to focus on the things that matter too.

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 are some ways a lack of focus might make it difficult to grow closer to God?**
 - **Have you ever tried to read the Bible but struggled to focus? What made it so difficult?**

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 4:1-11

- Look, reading and studying the Bible isn't always the easiest thing to focus on. I get it! But why does it matter if we focus on things like the Bible?
 - There's a fascinating story in Scripture that talks about Jesus, someone who was fully God and fully human, needing to focus to survive a big challenge.
 - Even though he had all of the ability in the world, Jesus still experienced the same emotions, thoughts, and feelings that we do. In this moment, Jesus had to choose what to focus on and what to ignore.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 4:1-11.*
- In this story, Scripture says the devil tries repeatedly to distract Jesus from the mission Jesus had come to earth to accomplish. But instead of letting himself be distracted, Jesus chose to do what would prepare him for the future — and overcome temptation in the present too.
 - This experience occurs before Jesus' preaching ministry began, before he invited the first disciples to follow him, and before he ever healed anyone.
 - It's clear Jesus knew the kind of strength his future would require and how important his focus would be — not just in this moment, but in the moments to come.
 - What's even more incredible is that Jesus was fasting during this exchange. I don't know about you, but when I'm hungry, focusing definitely doesn't come naturally. Jesus' hunger was a temptation that could have easily lured him to lose focus, but Jesus had another way to stick with his fast.
- Jesus fought the temptation to lose focus by doing something simple but so important: in the midst of temptation, he chose to focus on the true things God had said.
 - When the devil questioned his identity as the son of God, Jesus focused on the words he learned from the ancient Scriptures when he was growing up. The devil tried to tempt him with food, but Jesus said God's words were more important than bread.
 - When the devil told him to put his life at risk in order to test God's power, Jesus quoted yet another passage from those ancient Scriptures, telling the devil to stop testing God.
 - When the devil tried to tempt Jesus with power in exchange for worshiping him, Jesus focused on Scripture one more time. He reminded both himself and the devil that only God is meant to be worshiped and served.
- Jesus was in the habit of focusing on God's words, especially when he faced difficulties. But in those moments, Jesus didn't have quick access to the Bible app on his phone. Instead, he stored the truth of God's words in his heart and mind so they'd always be available when he needed them.

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 119:33-37

- Check out how this works in Psalm 119, a famous chapter in the Bible. It's the longest longest chapter in the whole Bible, and it has a lot to say about the value of God's words.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 119:33-37.*
- This psalm is over 2,000 years old but these folks are basically asking God for the same thing we are. They were asking for the ability to focus.
 - We may not know exactly what the writer was going through when they wrote this, but we know the help they needed is probably the help we need too.
 - This song is written by someone asking God to teach them, give them understanding, direct, refocus, and save them from anything that might tempt them to lose focus.

- The words, "teach" and "give" are asking God for wisdom through the words of Scripture. This person knew how important the words of God are – especially when we are wandering, confused, tempted, or needing wisdom or direction.
- You're probably not in the middle of a forty day fast like Jesus was, but you might be in the middle of a lot of stress or change you're not sure how to manage.
 - When you're not finding any hope, facing stress, hitting an academic hurdle, going through a change in your family, battling for your mental health, or sitting with someone else who is, there is something you can do to find focus in the chaos.
 - The psalmist found direction through God's words. Jesus fought the devil's lies and distractions with God's words. In the same way, you and I can find direction and fight lies and distractions with God's truth too. That's the power of **focusing on what God has said**.

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

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.*
 - ✪ **Like Jesus was tempted to lose focus from his mission, what are some things that tempt us to lose focus on God? Are any of those true for you?**
 - **When we focus on God's words, how does it help us grow?**
 - ✪ **Do you have any questions or hesitations about the Bible that make it difficult for you to focus on what it says? If so, what are they and how can we help?**

STORY | **Share a few tips that help you focus on what God has said.**

- In order to focus on what God has said, we may need to build a little bank of words and promises in our memories that we can draw from, like Jesus did. But where do we find them? How do we collect them?
 - **READ GOD'S WORDS:** One way to begin is by starting with the words we find in Scripture. Read them, maybe by reading a book at a time, or following a reading plan, or maybe even starting at the very beginning. The point is to get in the habit of reading what God has said through Scripture, even if it's only a few verses at a time.
 - **LEARN ABOUT GOD'S WORDS:** There are so many ways to continue learning about what God has said besides just reading it on your own. We can also about God's words with others, study what God has said with others, and listen to Scripture taught at church or through videos or podcasts.
 - **MEMORIZE GOD'S WORDS:** Just like Jesus did, we can also commit God's words to memory so we always have quick access to God's truth and promises. It doesn't mean you need to memorize the whole Bible from cover to cover. It just means you might commit to remembering verses that mean something to you or you think could help you in a time of need.
- But how do we find enough focus to actually do those things?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Refer back to the list you made earlier of tips that help people focus. Recommunicate those same tips in the context of reading and studying Scripture. Then share examples from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to share examples) of specific tips that have helped you read, study, or memorize Scripture.*

REFLECTION | Center Of Attention

- Let me give us one more habit that can help us focus on our relationships with God by focusing specifically on God's words.
 - Whether you're getting to know God for the first time, rekindling your relationship with God, or wanting to make the relationship stronger, this habit will help you focus on what God has said.
 - There's an ancient habit that has helped people focus on what God has said for centuries. It's a way to make God's words the center of attention in our minds.
 - It's called Lectio Divina, a Latin phrase meaning "divine reading." It may sound super spiritual or complicated at first, but it's not! It's simply the habit of reading the Bible while being open to what God has to say.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder. Place one under each seat, along with a pen. You'll also want to choose a passage of Scripture to practice Lectio Divina with. We recommend Psalm 119:33-37, but you can use any passage you'd like. You may want to put the verses you choose on a slide so students can read along. When you're ready, guide students through the four steps of Lectio Divina while you play some soft music. Encourage them to write down the steps:*
 1. **READ:** *Read the passage out loud to your students slowly. Read it a second time. Then read it a third time.*
 2. **MEDITATE:** *Encourage your students to write down any words or phrases that captured their attention. Why do they think these words or phrases stood out to them? Invite them to write or circle these words or phrases and journal any thoughts if they'd like.*
 3. **PRAY:** *Next, encourage your students to talk to God. While you can probably only have students pray silently at their seats, let them know prayer can happen through others expressions too, like speaking, writing, dancing, exercising, and drawing.*
 4. **CONTEMPLATE:** *Finally, it's time to simply listen. Ask your students to sit quietly and give God another chance to speak to them.*

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 are some things that might make reading or studying the Bible easier for you?**
 - **Read Psalm 119:9. If you wanted to start memorizing Scripture, where would you start? How would you choose a verse? How would you memorize it?**
 - **This week, what's one way you're going to practice focusing on what God has said?**

RESPONSE | The Focus Journal

- We're all learning to focus, right? None of us have mastered the habit of spending time with God. Yet, we make little steps every day. One of those steps is simply saying "yes" to a little bit of focus.
- For the next four weeks, we've created a tool that's going to help you focus on your relationship with God in some new (or newly focused) ways.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, prepare copies of The Focus Journal for each of your students. The instructions and files can be found in the Spring Discipleship section of your curriculum dashboard. Place one journal under each seat, along with a pen, and have a table filled with additional markers, pens, crayons, and colored pencils nearby. Invite students to open their journals to the first page, which prompts them to fill the page with the word "yes" in response to the question, "Are you ready to give God your focus?" While students write, play a song like ["We Say Yes," by SEU Worship](#) as a teaching tool, but make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- If you decide to say "yes" to focusing on your relationship with God this month (starting with focusing on God's words), I can't wait to see how God takes what's been blurry in your life and makes them clear. That's the power of **focusing on what God has said.**

WEEK 1

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**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on what God has said.

BIBLE

Matthew 4:1-11,
Psalm 119:9, 33-37

QUESTIONS

- What's one thing you could focus on for hours?
- When is it most difficult for you to focus? Why do you think that is?
- What are some ways a lack of focus might make it difficult to grow closer to God?
- Have you ever tried to read the Bible but struggled to focus? What made it so difficult?
- Like Jesus was tempted to lose focus from his mission, what are some things that tempt us to lose focus on God? Are any of those true for you?
- When we focus on God's words, how does it help us grow?
- Do you have any questions or hesitations about the Bible that make it difficult for you to focus on what it says? If so, what are they and how can we help?
- What are some things that might make reading or studying the Bible easier for you?
- Read Psalm 119:9. If you wanted to start memorizing Scripture, where would you start? How would you choose a verse? How would you memorize it?
- This week, what's one way you're going to practice focusing on what God has said?



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 1

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

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**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on what God has said.

BIBLE

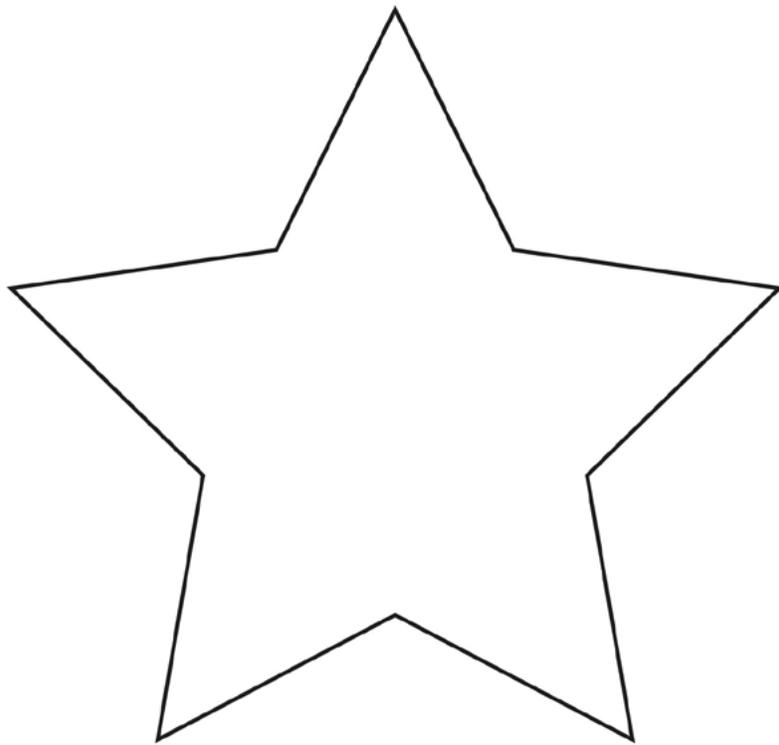
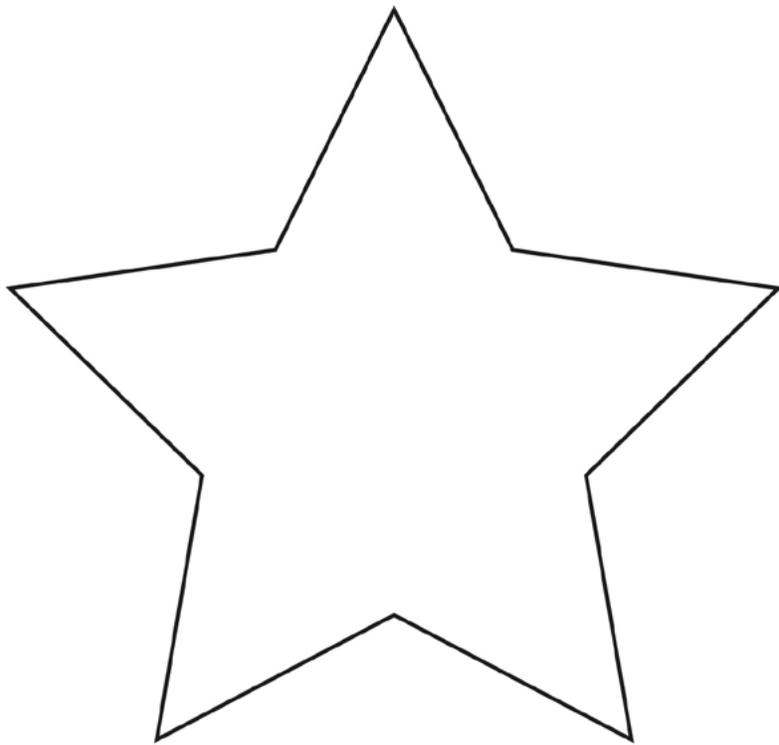
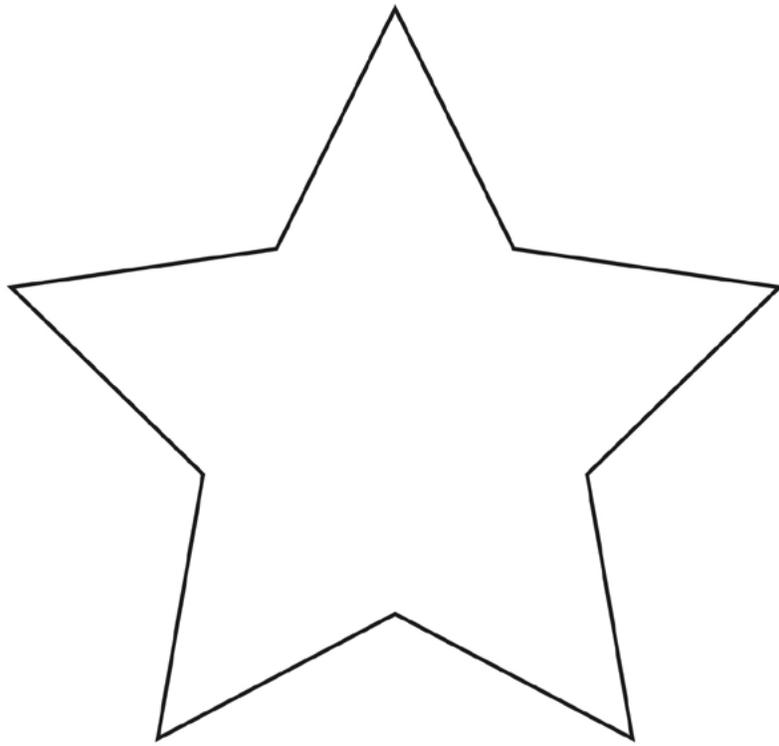
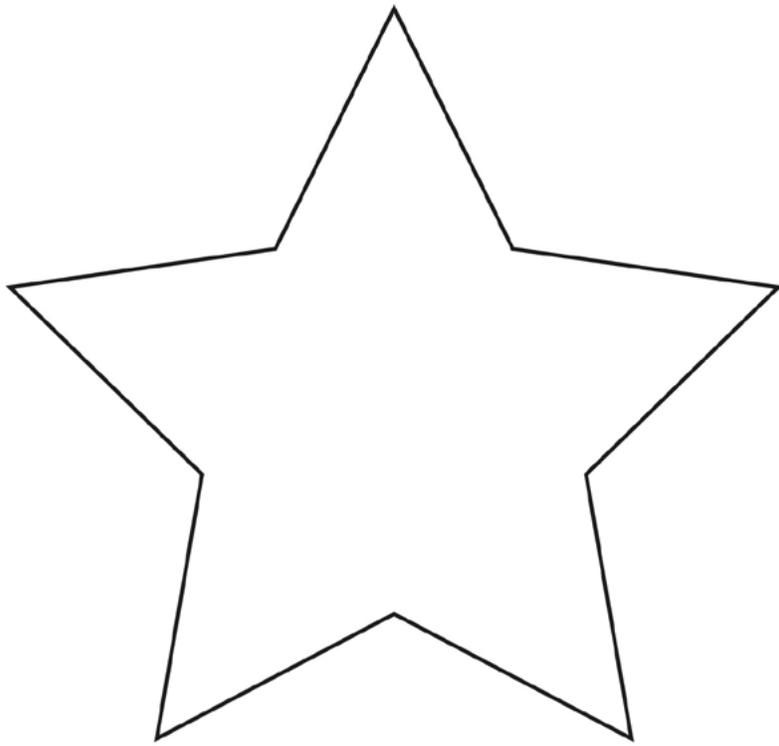
Matthew 4:1-11,
Psalm 119:9, 33-37

QUESTIONS

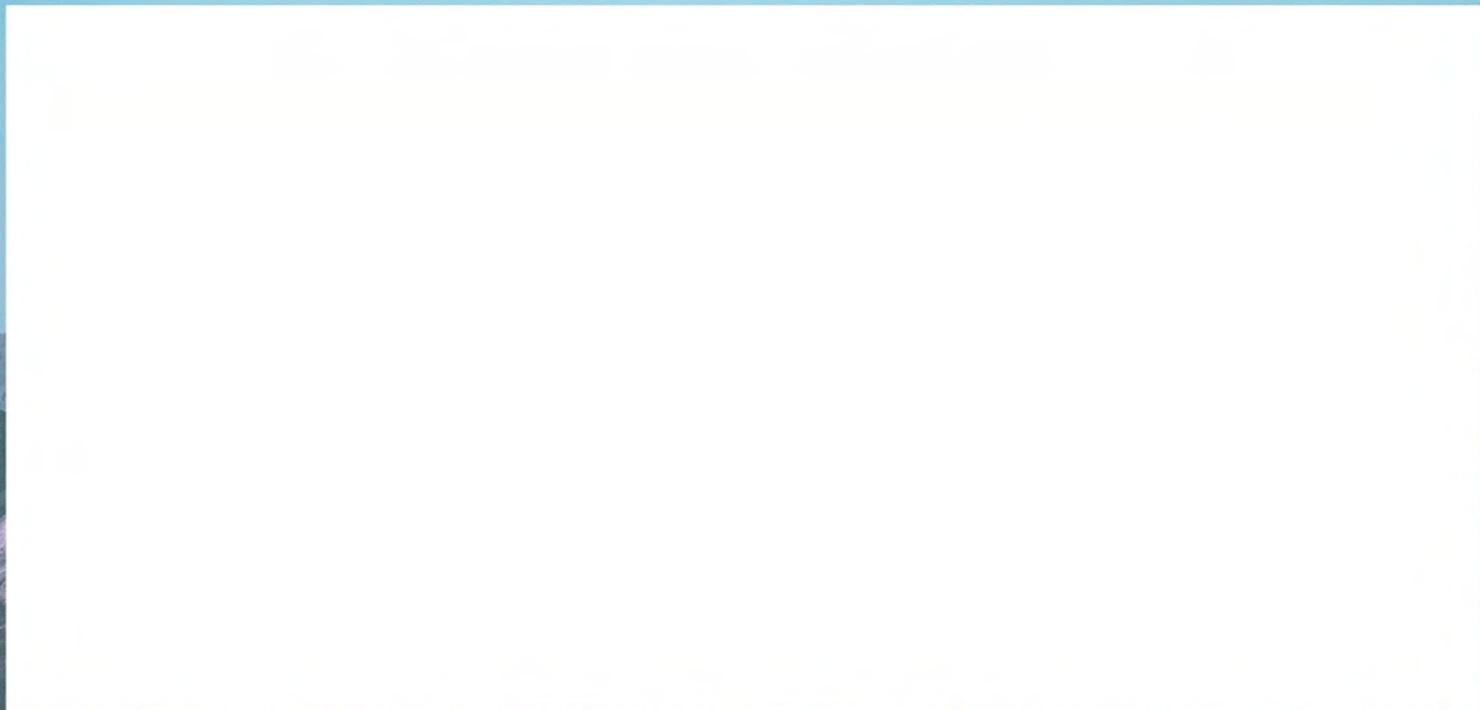
- **What's one thing you could focus on for hours?**
- **When is it most difficult for you to focus? Why do you think that is?**
- **Have you ever tried to read the Bible but struggled to focus? What made it so difficult?**
- **When we focus on God's words, how does it help us grow?**
- **Read Psalm 119:9. If you wanted to start memorizing Scripture, where would you start? How would you choose a verse? How would you memorize it?**
- **This week, what's one way you're going to practice focusing on what God has said?**



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.

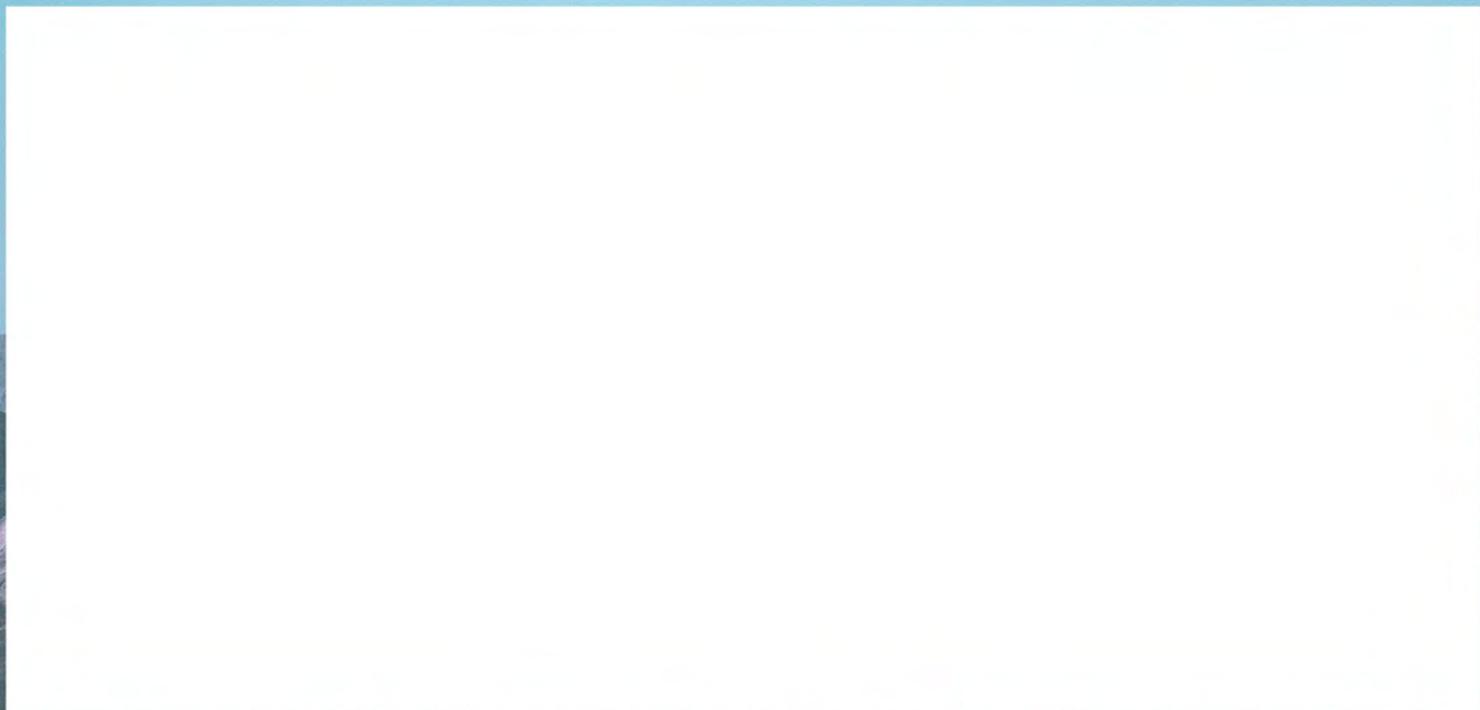


Focus on what God has said.



focus

Focus on what God has said.



focus

WEEK 2 TEACHING GUIDE

focus

BIG IDEA

Focus on giving something up.

BIBLE

Matthew 6:16-18; Psalm 121:1-2;
Romans 12:9-11

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Fast Focus

- Welcome back to *Focus*, where we're talking about four things it's really important to focus on. Let's see if your focusing skills have improved at all from last week.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give every student a [handheld maze party favor](#). To play, have students stand and put one minute on the clock. At the end of one minute, anyone who didn't complete their maze must sit down. At the end of each round, have students shake their mazes to reset them, remove ten seconds from the clock to shorten the next round, and repeat. Keep playing until everyone is eliminated and declare the students who made it to the final round the winners.

POLL | Would you rather give up . . .

- Focusing isn't easy. Whether you're struggling to focus on school work, the book you're trying to read, or the new skill you're trying to learn, here's what I'm wondering – if you could give something up in exchange for becoming a better focuser, would you?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this poll, have students stand in the center of the room. For each poll, have them run to the left side of the room for the first option or the right side of the room for the second option.
- In exchange for better focus, would you rather give up . . .
 - Cereal or pizza?
 - Data or WiFi?
 - Your phone or your bed?
 - All cats or all dogs?
 - TikTok or YouTube?
 - Haircuts or manicures?
 - Soda and sports drinks or fast food?
 - Social media or phone calls?
- Well, I'm really glad we don't actually have to choose between any of those things. Honestly, they all seem pretty impossible to give up.

QUESTION | Which three things would you take with you?

- Okay, let's think about this another way. Let's pretend we're all about to be stranded on a deserted island. Usually, when people get stranded, they usually don't have time to plan. But somehow, in our special universe, we get just enough time to grab three important things. **Which three things would you take with you?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond.
- Pretty interesting responses, don't you think?
 - Some of you focused on your vital needs and chose an endless supply of water.
 - Others focused on more handy things like bug repellent, a Swiss army knife, or a first aid kit.
 - And a few of you focused on simply being happy with a book or your fully-charged phone until your rescue came.
- The things we choose to hang onto say a lot about what we value, don't they? But so do the things we're willing to let go of.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!
 - **What's one thing you couldn't go a day without?**
 - **Have you ever given up something you really liked for a good reason? What happened?**

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

QUESTION | What have you heard about fasting?

- Has anyone here ever heard of "fasting" before? "Fasting" isn't actually about being fast. It has nothing to do with how quickly you can rap, chug a soda, or ride your hoverboard down the street. So what is it? **What have you heard about fasting?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond.
- Fasting is a spiritual discipline that's been around for a long time and is practiced by just about every faith tradition. Fasting simply means giving up one thing, for a set period of time, in order to gain something else.
- Fasting often involves giving up food, but giving up food is not safe, healthy, or wise for a lot of people. Fasting can also mean a period of giving up . . .
 - Social media.
 - Candy.
 - Caffeine.
 - Streaming shows and movies.
 - Or whatever it is that's distracting you from focusing on God.
- Fasting is when you give up something you like, but can live without, in order to focus on something so much more important.

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.
 - ☆ **Why do you think fasting is such a popular way for people to get close to God?**
 - ☆ **Have you ever tried fasting from something before? If so, what was the most difficult part?**
 - ☆ **What are some of the ways you think fasting could be misused?**

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 6:16-18

- Fasting has been a strategy people have used for centuries to grow their faith. When Jesus was here on earth, fasting was a pretty common way for people to try and get closer to God.
- But not everyone used fasting the way it was intended to be used. Instead of fasting in order to get closer to God or grow their faith, people sometimes fasted to . . .
 - Get attention or sympathy.
 - Earn other people's respect or praise.
 - Impress God.
 - Show off how "holy" they were.
- In the book of Matthew, we find a story where Jesus addresses this with some of his earliest followers. In one sermon in particular (called The Sermon on the Mount) Jesus encouraged them to see fasting differently — not as a routine of religion, but a relationship beyond it.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 6:16-18.*
- The people Jesus was speaking to had a good amount of experience with religious practices like fasting. They fasted on their own and they saw the religious leaders they looked up to fasting too. So Jesus didn't need to teach them what fasting was — he needed to help them see fasting differently, because they had lost focus.
 - Instead of focusing on fasting as a way to get close to God, some people used fasting as a way to put the focus on themselves.
 - First, Jesus gives a big thumbs up to fasting in general. He wanted people to know they should fast — but for the right reasons. Next, Jesus helps them see what fasting should look like, and what it shouldn't.
- Jesus wanted to help them reset their focus when it came to fasting. The whole point of fasting is to remind us that God can be our source of strength, regardless of what we lack. But it's not something we do to seem super holy or spiritual.

STORY | Talk about a time you wanted to seem holy.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you did something spiritual to impress someone or seem holy. Maybe you sat in the front row at church, made a show of throwing money in the offering bucket, volunteered to pray out loud, or made sure everyone knew you were fasting during a weekend retreat. What motivated you to do that? What were you hoping to gain (or afraid to lose)? How did you lose focus on what really mattered and what could you have done differently?*
- Don't get me wrong, the things I did were good things that help people get closer to God. But just like the people Jesus spoke to about fasting, I got a little lost. My focus was on trying to look religious rather than truly growing closer to God.

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.*
 - **Have you ever been tempted to do something because it would make you seem more "holy"? What happened and how do you feel about it now?**
 - ★ **How can you tell if you're fasting for good reasons or selfish reasons? How easy do you think it is to tell the difference?**

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 121:1-2

- So let's say we do want to try fasting. After all, Jesus didn't say "if you fast." He said, "when you fast," like he was expecting us to fast at least once in a while! What does good fasting look like? How can we fast in a way that actually helps us get closer to God?
 - Remember, fasting is when you give up something you like, but can live without, in order to focus on something so much more important.
 - Whether you're giving up candy, caffeine, video games, screen time, or something else you really like, it's not enough to stop focusing on that thing — you have to choose something else to focus on instead.
- But here's the thing about fasting (or anything else you do to grow closer to God): life doesn't shift into "easy mode" when we try something challenging for Jesus. During your fast . . .
 - You might start noticing someone's needs more clearly.
 - God may speak to you about restoring a relationship or offering mercy to someone who has hurt you.
 - You might feel compelled to help solve a big problem or join a movement of people in a way that scares you.
 - You may see something in your own life standing out in a way you didn't notice before.
 - You might see where you need to grow but you've been distracted from seeing it —until now.
 - And you'll probably be tempted (often!) to break your fast. Giving something up isn't easy or fun for very long.
- But no matter how difficult fasting can be at times, it's worth it and there's help available. God promises to be there through all of it.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 121:1-2.*
- When you focus on giving something up, God doesn't give up on you. God does the opposite. God shows up for you. So when you're fasting . . .
 - Keep looking for God while you read the Bible, listen to people teach about Jesus, or have conversations with others about what God is doing in your life.
 - Notice God giving you strength when you are outside or in a place that makes you feel safe or inspired.
 - Talk to God and ask for help during your fast and through everything that you go through.
- Just like this psalmist, you too can always turn to God for strength, help, and protection. When we choose to fast from something in order to grow, God will help us **focus on giving something up**.

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

OBJECT LESSON | +/-

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, get two large buckets, boxes, or jars, plenty of scrap paper, and duct tape. Use duct tape to create a large plus sign on one bucket and a minus sign on the other. During your teaching time, ask students to share their ideas of what they could give up (-) and what they could add (+) during their fast.*
- Now it's time to put what we've learned to the test. It's not actually a test though. It's more of a challenge to help us imagine all of the different ways a fast can go. I have two buckets that represent some choices we have to make!

- The "minus" bucket is going to be full of things we could give up on a fast. **What are some things you might be able to give up for a day, a week, or even a month?** (Maybe video games, candy, listening to music in the car, or texting late at night?)
- The "plus" bucket is going to be full of opportunities for us to grow while we are focused on giving something up. Once you've removed something from your life, **what kinds of things could you add to your life that would help you grow closer to God?** (Maybe reading a book of the Bible, having a conversation about God with a friend, serving others, journaling your questions about faith, or taking a walk to pray?)
- This week, practice focusing on fasting by choosing at least one thing to subtract from your life for a day, or even for the whole week. But don't forget to choose at least one thing to add to your life too. Remember the point isn't the ritual, it's your sincere desire to know and grow closer to God.
 - **START SMALL:** You'll hear about people fasting from something for a month, or 40 days, or sometimes even longer, but it might be better to select a shorter amount of time to begin with. This may mean giving up something for a week, a few days, or even a few hours. You don't get bonus holiness points for longer fasts. The point is simply focus on how Jesus can fill you up while you practice the habit of fasting.
 - **FOCUS WITH A FRIEND:** Fasting with a friend will give you someone to check in with. Share what you'll be giving up and how you hope to connect with God and others during that time. Exchange ideas, check in with each other and offer support.
 - **WONDER WHY:** When you start to feel stressed or begin to wonder if you can stick with your commitment, wonder about your "why." Remember what your goal was in the first place: to grow closer to God! Your "why" will help you stay on track.

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.*
 - **How do you think giving something up could help you grow closer to God?**
 - **Read Romans 12:9-11. How do you think we could apply this passage to fasting?**
 - **This week, what's one thing you're going to give up to help you better focus on God?**

RESPONSE | +/- Mosaic (and the Focus Journal)

- We've been talking about what the focus of a fast should be. Even though we know it's more than a performance it's tempting to make it about us when we're thinking about how challenging giving something up may be. To help us remember the focus shouldn't be on ourselves, we're going to cover these mirrors with the commitments we're making to God this week.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, find and display two household mirrors or get an [inexpensive set of mirrors](#). Use duct tape to create a large plus sign on one mirror and a minus sign on the other. During your teaching time, provide sticky notes and markers to students. Invite them to commit to one "subtraction" and one "addition" this week, write them down on two different sticky notes, and place the sticky notes on the mirrors. While students write, play a song like "[Shall Not Want](#)," by Elevation Worship and Maverick City Music as a teaching tool, but make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#) Before your teaching time, prepare extra copies of The Focus Journal for any students who didn't already receive one. The instructions and files can be found in the Spring Discipleship section of your curriculum dashboard. Place one journal under each seat, along with a pen.*

- It might not seem like spending less time on your phone or not eating chocolate could change your life, but it can (and will) help you grow closer to God – if you fast with the right focus.
- Healthy things grow and Jesus was super clear about what growth looks like. It looks like loving God and others instead of being self-focused.
 - No matter what you decide to "subtract" from your life this week, one of the things you can "add" is a daily time spent with God, maybe through this Focus journal we've created for you.
 - Whether we decide to temporarily give up pizza, ice cream, video games, or so much time looking at our phones, the point of fasting is to grow our closeness with God. That's the power of **focusing on giving something up**.

WEEK 2

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**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on giving something up.

BIBLE

Matthew 6:16-18; Psalm 121:1-8;
Romans 12:9-11

QUESTIONS

- What's one thing you couldn't go a day without?
- Have you ever given up something you really liked for a good reason? What happened?
- Why do you think fasting is such a popular way for people to get close to God?
- Have you ever tried fasting from something before? If so, what was the most difficult part?
- What are some of the ways you think fasting could be misused?
- Have you ever been tempted to do something because it would make you seem more "holy"? What happened and how do you feel about it now?
- How can you tell if you're fasting for good reasons or selfish reasons? How easy do you think it is to tell the difference?
- How do you think giving something up could help you grow closer to God?
- Read Romans 12:9-11. How do you think we could apply this passage to fasting?
- This week, what's one thing you're going to give up to help you better focus on God?



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 2

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

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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Focus on giving something up.

BIBLE

Matthew 6:16-18; Psalm 121:1-8;
Romans 12:9-11

QUESTIONS

- What's one thing you couldn't go a day without?
- Have you ever given up something you really liked for a good reason? What happened?
- Have you ever been tempted to do something because it would make you seem more "holy"? What happened and how do you feel about it now?
- How do you think giving something up could help you grow closer to God?
- Read Romans 12:9-11. How do you think we could apply this passage to fasting?
- This week, what's one thing you're going to give up to help you better focus on God?



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 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

- **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.
 - **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.**

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 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

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THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on talking to God.

BIBLE

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

QUESTIONS

- **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?**
- **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?**
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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?**
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WEEK 3

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

focus

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- **This week, what's one way you want to focus on talking to God and how can we help?**



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WEEK 4 TEACHING GUIDE

focus

BIG IDEA

Focus on rest.

BIBLE

Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 23:1-6;
Exodus 33:14

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Fast Focus

- We're almost finished with our series *Focus*, so let's kick things off with one final focused competition.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you'll need [an "eye spy" book](#) and a marker for each team. Divide your students into teams and give each team their book and marker. Give teams one minute to find and circle as many items as possible on a page of their choice. At the end of one minute, count each team's objects and declare a winner. If you'd like to play multiple rounds, eliminate half of the teams each round, until only one team remains.*
- If you're competitive, your heart might be pumping after that last competition. Some people consider puzzles like that to be a nice, relaxing way to take a break! But when it's a competition, it's not exactly restful, is it?

QUESTION | What's your favorite way to rest?

- Maybe "eye spy" puzzles are your favorite way to rest, or maybe you prefer a nice nap, Netflix binge, or hike in the woods. **What's your favorite way to rest?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond. Then share your own answer.*

POLL | Stressed or Rested?

- We all have our favorite ways to take a break when we're tired, stressed, or busy. Not everyone rests the same way, but what we all have in common is that we all need rest!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Ask students to stand or raise their hands if they can answer "yes" to the following questions:*
 - **Do you still feel tired even after you've slept?**
 - **Do you feel like you never stop going?** School, work, sports, extra-curricular activities, hanging out with friends, spending time with your family . . .
 - **Do you catch yourself falling asleep at times when you are supposed to be awake?**
 - **Do you ever catch yourself thinking, "I wish I could catch a break"?**
 - **Do you ever feel stressed, angry, sad, or anxious but you aren't sure why?**
 - **Have you recently experienced something really stressful or painful?** Maybe a loss,
- If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, chances are, you might need to rest.

QUESTION | What's stressing you out or keeping you too busy?

- The reason you need rest might be unique to you, or it might be something a lot of people share. There's only one way to find out! **What's stressing you out or keeping you too busy?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to respond. Then share your own answer.
- Some people say the world has never been more anxious and stressed out than it is today. Whether that's because of technology, overcommitment, our access to so much heavy breaking news, or something else, we could all use a little help learning to rest from the things that are causing us stress.

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.
 - **If you could spend a whole day however you wanted, what would you do?**
 - ★ **On a scale of 1-10, how stressed do you think you are right now? On a scale of 1-10, how rested do you think you are right now?**

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

STORY | Talk about a time you were exhausted and needed rest.

- Too often, we sacrifice the rest we need and find ourselves in trouble.
 - Maybe that's because we give priority to other tasks, or we try to please everyone else and lose focus on our needs, or we just don't notice we're tired until it's too late.
 - It's funny how this happens. It doesn't just happen all at once. It seems like exhaustion slowly creeps upon us, then one day we stop to take a breath and realize how tired we are.
- Sometimes we need rest from a situation we got ourselves into (like overcommitting, procrastinating, or failing to manage our time well). But other times, we need rest from a situation beyond our control, like . . .
 - A big loss or disappointment.
 - A busy or stressful time.
 - Other people demanding a lot of things from us.
 - Something difficult or painful that happened to us.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you were exhausted and needed rest. Share what was causing your stress or busyness, why you weren't resting, and how your lack of rest impacted you. How did you feel and act as a result? How did it impact your relationship with others and with God?
- The truth is, when we find ourselves in this kind of exhausted state, it's no good for us, no good for those around us, and no good for our relationship with God.

SCRIPTURE | Mark 6:30-32

- We can't exactly avoid the stressfulness of life, right? There's homework, projects, chores, sports, friends, jobs, family, church, plus everything else we're trying to juggle. It's no wonder we sometimes pull all-nighters to get it all done — or just go to sleep and leave it unfinished.
- Our culture might tell us to keep going, push harder, and do all the things, but Scripture tells us a different story. In the Gospels, Jesus prioritized rest for himself and his disciples, knowing rest would keep them all healthy and prepared for the mission ahead of them.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Mark 6:30-32.

- Jesus and his friends spent the entire day teaching and serving those around them. On this particular day they barely had time to eat. It was one of those non-stop days like I'm sure many of you have had before.
- On this day, there was an endless amount of opportunity to serve, teach, help, and heal. But instead of forcing one more hour or pushing past the tired or hunger pains, Jesus chose to pause.
 - Why? If Jesus, being God, knew that his time and ministry with the disciples was limited, why would he cut things short? Why would he press pause? Why wouldn't he just keep pushing?
 - Maybe it's because Jesus knew he and his followers would need energy for what was next. He knew that, in the not-so-distant future, God would use them to do something miraculous. Together, with the lunch from a kid in the crowd, they would feed over 5,000 people.
- Jesus knew something that we often forget. He knew rest was built into creation just like work was.
 - If you read the story of how God created the world, you'll notice that the seventh day of creation was a day God set aside to simply rest. That's where the idea of "Sabbath" came from — a day of rest that most Jesus-followers now practice on Sundays.
 - Just like God modeled during the creation of the world, Jesus knew humans are built to need rest too. From the very beginning, God placed a priority of rest for all creation. Jesus, being of the same nature, also made rest a priority.
- Because Jesus made resting a priority, he and his disciples were able to do some helpful things. They could . . .
 - **REFLECT:** Reflection was a way they could learn from what they were experiencing. When Jesus pulled the disciples away, it tended to be a learning experience. Rest gives us time to talk to God and to each other.
 - **RECHARGE:** Humans don't have an unlimited supply of energy. Resting gave them an opportunity to eat, nap, and emotionally and physically recover. Rest gives us an ability to regain the energy we lost when we were busy or stressed.
 - **REENGAGE:** To reengage in the work Jesus was inviting them to do, Jesus' disciples needed to rest. Rest gives us an opportunity to stick with things longer and gain a fresh perspective when we're worn out.
- Rest may sometimes seem like an enemy that prevents us from connecting with friends, getting things done, or doing all the things, Jesus shows rest isn't something we should skip.

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 23:1-6

- Don't we all wish there were less things to do, fewer places to be, or a different universe where time ticked a little more slowly? Maybe you've . . .
 - Begged your parents to skip something, or you've overslept and missed an activity, because you were exhausted.
 - Wished someone could just take care of you because you run out of energy to take care of yourself.
 - Acted out of character or made a poor choice because you were at the end of your energy or patience.
- If that's true for you, there's a story in the Bible about a king named David that you might be able to relate to.
 - Before David was the King of Israel, he was a shepherd. He played the harp too. It might not have seemed like a lot but managing a pack of animals might rank up there with being in charge of a preschool. And toting a harp around might have been a challenge too.
 - Anyway, after David's triumph with a slingshot over Goliath, he was suddenly handed a lot more responsibility. Some of it he handled well, and some of it he didn't. As king, he did a lot of good. As king, he did a lot of harm too.

- We don't know if it was a lack of rest that caused some of his biggest failures and mistakes. But I think it's safe to assume, if he'd been taking more time to rest, reflect, and hear from God, he probably wouldn't have made the terrible choices he made.
- If he had been letting God renew him on a regular basis, he might have remembered the words God had said, might have remembered to give some things up, might have remembered to talk to God when he was tempted, and might have remembered the important role of rest.
- Perhaps David did eventually learn that lesson though, because he later wrote this song of worship to God . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 23:1-6.*
- David, in a healthy rested place, remembered God in a word picture that was familiar to him. He remembered the care he once had for his sheep, the guidance he gave them, and their bond of trust in the fields and valleys.
- When David took time to rest and reflect, he was able to see God was always there for him, guiding him toward rest. In the same way David says God led him to a place of rest, God welcomes you to **focus on rest** too.

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

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.*
 - ⦿ **When you're stressed or tired, how does it usually impact you and the people around you? What about your relationship with God?**
 - **If you were more focused on practicing rest, how do you think it could help your relationship with God grow?**

OBJECT LESSON | Comfort Objects

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, create a collection of what could be comfort objects, like small blankets, stuffed animals, pillows, or cozy sweatshirts.*
- When you were a kid, did you have a security blanket? Or maybe a favorite stuffed animal? Maybe these days you have a favorite hoodie – something that helps you feel comfortable and safe.
 - Most of us had (or still have) comfort objects like these because we all need to feel safe and secure sometimes.
 - When I think about rest, I think about the feelings these kinds of objects can create: warmth, peace, comfort, safety, and security.
- For some of us, the kind of rest we need is literally just sleep! But for others, the rest we need is deeper than a physical need – it's also a need for peace, comfort, safety, or security.
- So what does it mean for us to let God lead us toward rest? And how does that help our relationship with God grow? Well that might depend on what kind of rest you need.
 - In the Gospels, Jesus prioritized rest for himself and his disciples, knowing rest would keep them healthy and prepared for the mission ahead of them. So in that way, rest is a habit we can practice.
 - But Scripture also tells us God is a shepherd who guides us to a place of rest when we're feeling tired, grieving, or hopeless because of the difficulties life has thrown at us. In that way, rest is a gift we can receive.

- So what kind of rest do you need? Rest from meaningless busyness so you can focus on what God has for you? Rest from what's causing you pain or fear? Whatever it is, God's offering it to you.

STORY | Share the ways you rest.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your teaching time, ask a few volunteers or students to join you in sharing some of the ways you rest and how your rest habits have helped your relationship with God grow. Connect with each person in advance to make sure the stories you're sharing give students a diverse view of what it looks like to rest and how rest helps us grow.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!
 - **How can we tell the difference between times we really need to rest and times we're resting to avoid something we don't want to do?**
 - **In the last week, what are some things that have made you feel stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed?**
 - **When you're feeling stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed, what helps you feel rested again?**

REFLECTION | Rest Time

- When we focus on rest, it means we set aside time on purpose to reflect, recharge, and reengage, just like Jesus, his disciples, and King David demonstrated.
- For you, rest might mean . . .
 - Taking a peaceful walk.
 - Listening to music.
 - Spending time making something just for fun.
 - Cleaning up a space that has felt chaotic.
 - Giving yourself time to decompress.
 - Asking for some quiet time if you live in a loud or busy house.
- When you take time to focus on rest, you give God space to . . .
 - Speak to you more clearly.
 - Give you the comfort, reassurance, or peace you've been craving.
 - Fill your heart, mind, and body with renewed energy and focus.
 - Help you reengage with your mission and purpose.
- But rest doesn't just happen. You have to choose it. You have to focus on making it a priority.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Create a restful atmosphere by darkening the room, play soothing music, and inviting everyone to find a spot in the room to sit quietly for a few moments. Have assorted scrap paper and pens available, but invite students to use the silence to rest in whatever way they'd like. They might read the Bible, journal, walk, draw, daydream, or close their eyes. At the end of your rest time, you might close in prayer, spend time in worship, or take communion together.
- This week, I wonder what one habit might be that could help you rest? It could look like drawing, painting, spending time outside, reading, walking, checking in with a friend about how you're feeling, or just sleeping!
- Whatever kind of rest you need right now, I hope you'll give God the chance to take care of you this week as you **focus on rest.**

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.*
 - ✪ **How do you think you could find the rest you need right now? Do you need to make some changes to your routine, do you need God to intervene, or both?**
 - ✪ **Has God ever helped you rest by giving you peace, comfort, or hope when you really needed it? What happened?**
 - **Read Exodus 33:14. This week, what's one way you plan to focus on rest?**

WEEK 4

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**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on rest.

BIBLE

Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 23:1-6;
Exodus 33:14

QUESTIONS

- If you could spend a whole day however you wanted, what would you do?
- On a scale of 1-10, how stressed do you think you are right now? On a scale of 1-10, how rested do you think you are right now?
- When you're stressed or tired, how does it usually impact you and the people around you? What about your relationship with God?
- If you were more focused on practicing rest, how do you think it could help your relationship with God grow?
- How can we tell the difference between times we really need to rest and times we're resting to avoid something we don't want to do?
- In the last week, what are some things that have made you feel stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed?
- When you're feeling stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed, what helps you feel rested again?
- How do you think you could find the rest you need right now? Do you need to make some changes to your routine, do you need God to intervene, or both?
- Has God ever helped you rest by giving you peace, comfort, or hope when you really needed it? What happened?
- Read Exodus 33:14. This week, what's one way you plan to focus on rest?



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 4

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

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**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

Focus on rest.

BIBLE

Mark 6:30-32; Psalm 23:1-6;
Exodus 33:14

QUESTIONS

- **If you could spend a whole day however you wanted, what would you do?**
- **If you were more focused on practicing rest, how do you think it could help your relationship with God grow?**
- **How can we tell the difference between times we really need to rest and times we're resting to avoid something we don't want to do?**
- **In the last week, what are some things that have made you feel stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed?**
- **When you're feeling stressed, exhausted, or overwhelmed, what helps you feel rested again?**
- **Read Exodus 33:14. This week, what's one way you plan to focus on rest?**



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.

ONE-MINUTE SERMON SCRIPTS

focus

ONE-MINUTE SERMONS

After you teach each week, we recommend **filming a video of yourself re-teaching your message in one minute or less**. Then post it on social media! We've written the beginnings of a script for you each week, and we've also filmed complete [One-Minute Sermon Videos](#) for you too, in partnership with [Rescue a Generation](#). Make your own or post ours – whatever you want!

WEEK 1

It's not easy to stay focused, right? 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? I'm guessing the answer is yes. Look, reading and studying the Bible isn't always the easiest thing to focus on. I get it! But why does it matter if we focus on what God tells us through Scripture? Well, in Matthew 4, we're told Jesus has a pretty interesting conversation with the devil. The devil throws distractions after distraction at Jesus, trying to get him to give up on his mission. And how did Jesus fight back? By quoting Scripture. Rather than getting distracted, he focused on the truth of God's words. And you and I can fight lies and distractions with God's truth in the same way. That's the power of **focusing on what God has said**.

WEEK 2

Question. What's something you're pretty sure you couldn't live without? Pizza? Ice cream? Video games? Your phone? If we're honest, there are probably a lot of things we act like we couldn't live without – but we totally could. In some cases, giving up those things for a little while might even be what's best for us. There's an ancient spiritual practice called "fasting." Maybe you've heard of it. It's the act of giving something up, for a specific period of time, in order to spend more time focusing on God. But in Matthew 6, Jesus confronted some religious people about the ways they misunderstood and misused fasting. Instead of making their fasts something between them and God, they used their fasts to get attention and praise. But that's not the point of fasting at all. Whether we decide to temporarily give up pizza, ice cream, video games, or so much time looking at our phones, the point of fasting is to grow our closeness with God. That's the power of **focusing on giving something up**.

WEEK 3

Have you ever zoned out in the middle of a conversation? Like, 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. And 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. In those moments, I think about a conversation Jesus had with a woman at a well, because that's exactly prayer is — a conversation. A back and forth. 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.**

WEEK 4

Life can be kind of stressful, right? There's homework, projects, exams, chores, sports, friends, jobs, family, church, plus everything else we're trying to juggle. It's no wonder we sometimes pull all-nighters to get it all done — or just go to sleep and leave it unfinished. Our culture might tell us to keep going, push harder, and do all the things, but Scripture tells us a different story. In the Gospels, Jesus prioritized rest for himself and his disciples, knowing rest would keep them healthy and prepared for the mission ahead of them. So in that way, rest is a habit we can practice. But Scripture also tells us God is a shepherd who guides us to a place of rest when we're feeling tired, grieving, or hopeless because of the difficulties life has thrown at us. So what kind of rest do you need? Rest from meaningless busyness so you can focus on what God has for you? Rest from what's causing you pain or fear? Whatever it is, God's inviting you today to **focus on rest.**

MARKETING CHECKLIST

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BEFORE THE SERIES

✓ TO DO

	Print your Series Promo Poster and Series Promo Cards and display them where families and volunteers can see them.
	Customize your Volunteer Hub and Parent Hub web pages for this series.
	Customize and send the Parent Email for this series.
	Send the Volunteer Email for Week 1 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.
	Review the suggested Social Media Posts and Captions for this series.
	Post the Bumper Video on social media with this caption: We're about to start a new series this week called . . . wait, what were we saying? Oh right. Focus. It's called Focus. See you there!

AFTER WEEK 1

✓ TO DO

	Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 1 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, this week we talked about the importance of focusing on what God says — especially when we're distracted. Here's a recap!
	Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 1 on social media and/or send with this caption: Remember, just like Jesus did, we can also commit God's words to memory so we always have quick access to God's truth and promises in a time of need.
	Send the Volunteer Email for Week 2 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.

AFTER WEEK 2

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 2 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>In case you missed it, this week we talked about what we can gain by giving up the right things (and with the right motives). Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 2 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>Remember, life doesn't shift into "easy mode" when we try something challenging for Jesus. When we choose to fast from something in order to grow, God will help us focus on giving something up.</p>
	<p>Send the Volunteer Email for Week 3 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.</p>

AFTER WEEK 3

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 3 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>In case you missed it, this week we talked about talking to God – why it can be difficult and why it can be life-changing. Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 3 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>Remember, 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.</p>
	<p>Send the Volunteer Email for Week 4 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.</p>

AFTER WEEK 4

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 4 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>In case you missed it, this week we talked about how resting can help us grow. Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 4 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>This week, what kind of rest do you need? Rest from meaningless busyness so you can focus on what God has for you? Rest from what's causing you pain or fear? Whatever it is, God's offering it to you.</p>
	<p>Get ready for the next series!</p>

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS & CAPTIONS

focus

Need some help deciding what to post on social media before and during this series? Here's our suggestion: each week, share the media we've provided in your Graphics and Videos folder using the captions below.

BEFORE THE SERIES



BUMPER VIDEO

We're about to start a new series this week called . . . wait, what were we saying? Oh right. Focus. It's called Focus. See you there!

AFTER WEEK 1



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 1)

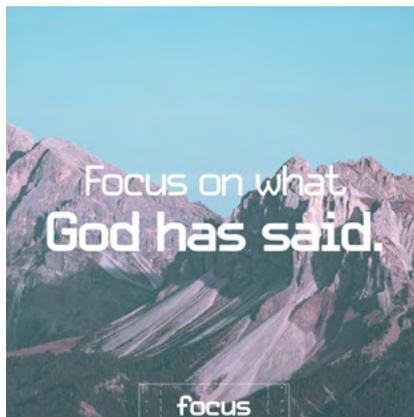
In case you missed it, this week we talked about the importance of focusing on what God says – especially when we're distracted. Here's a recap!

AFTER WEEK 2



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 2)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about what we can gain by giving up the right things (and with the right motives). Here's a recap!



BIG IDEA (WEEK 1)

Remember, just like Jesus did, we can also commit God's words to memory so we always have quick access to God's truth and promises in a time of need.



BIG IDEA (WEEK 2)

Remember, life doesn't shift into "easy mode" when we try something challenging for Jesus. When we choose to fast from something in order to grow, God will help us **focus on giving something up.**

AFTER WEEK 3



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 3)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about talking to God – why it can be difficult and why it can be life-changing. Here's a recap!



BIG IDEA (WEEK 3)

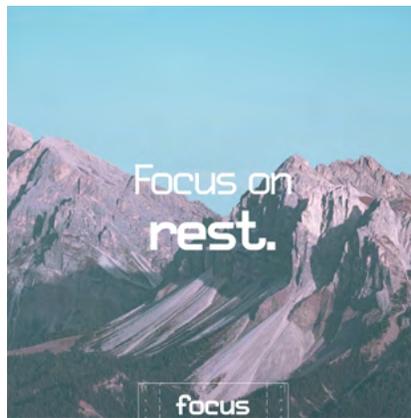
Remember, talking to God can feel intimidating, and "crying out" can feel vulnerable. But Jesus shows us God isn't out to get us. God sent Jesus to love and care for us.

AFTER WEEK 4



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 4)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about how resting can help us grow. Here's a recap!



BIG IDEA (WEEK 4)

This week, what kind of rest do you need? Rest from meaningless busyness so you can focus on what God has for you? Rest from what's causing you pain or fear? Whatever it is, God's offering it to you.

**What We're
Teaching**



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