


LESSON 9: PSALM 23: DARK VALLEYS

Leader Guide for Grades 3 & 4

Classroom: Grades 3 & 4 Classroom

 Psalm 23:4; Exodus 13:17-22

04/29/2020

Teachers Dig In

Dig In to the Bible

- Read: Psalm 23:4; Exodus 13:17-22
- In This Passage: In this section of Psalm 23, things take a dark turn...into dark valleys. But God, our shepherd, is still there with us! One example of that in the Bible is when the Israelites escape from slavery in Egypt and wander through a desert. Though it's a hard time, God shows he's with them through a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire.
- Bible Point: God is with us in hard times.
- Summary Verse: "The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need" (Psalm 23:1).

Dig Deeper

- You'll Be Teaching: *God is with us in hard times.* Kids in your class probably have experienced a range of difficulties. You may have kids who've dealt with really hard things like poverty, homelessness, abuse, or the loss of a parent. Other kids may not have had such traumatic struggles in life, but they'll think of hard times such as being excluded at lunch or getting in a fight with their friends. The fact is, no one—not even kids—is exempt from hard times, so they all need to hear that God is with them!
- Think About: What's the hardest thing you've ever gone through? Looking back, how can you see God was with you?

Dig In to Prayer

- Talk to God about any specific hard times you know the kids in your group are facing.

Quick Tip

- Sometimes when talking about hardship, if a child shares something especially difficult, other kids are hesitant to share. They may feel like their struggles aren't worth talking about in comparison with what someone else has shared. Set an environment where everyone's stories are welcome. Make sure you don't make any comments—even as a joke—that minimize a child's hard time. If you're noticing kids are having a hard time speaking up, give examples like "Has anyone ever had a hard test in school?" to get the conversation flowing again.

This Lesson at a Glance



CORE BIBLE DISCOVERY

Kids go through a dark valley full of hard times.

Supplies

- Bible
- chairs (at least 10)
- black trash bags (at least 10)
- white mailing labels (any size, 3-5 per child)
- pens
- craft sticks (4-6 per child)
- duct tape
- flashlight
- orange, red, and yellow streamers
- plain white paper

Easy Prep

- Cover any windows with black trash bags or dark bulletin-board paper so you can make your room really dark. You'll need a dark room for several activities.
- Tape streamers to the end of a flashlight.
- Cut a large cloud out of paper.



TALK-ABOUT VIDEO

Kids watch a video and discuss the Bible Point.

Supplies

- "Bryan's Story" teaching video (watch or download [here](#))



CRAFT

Kids make cups that glow to remind them of God's presence in dark times.

Supplies

- 16-ounce plastic cups (1 per child)
- permanent markers
- glow-in-the-dark duct tape (one 4- to 6-inch strip per child)
- paper
- pens

Easy Prep

- You'll need your windows covered (from Core Bible Discovery) so you can make your room very dark.
- Make a sample craft to show kids.



TAKE-HOME

Kids receive a take-home page about the lesson.

Supplies

- this week's "Dig In @ Home" handout (1 per child) (download [here](#))

Easy Prep

- Add your church announcements to the "Dig In @ Home" handout.

**Marked supplies can be reused from Core Bible Discovery*

Let's keep kids safe! You can help by using supplies as instructed for only ages 3+, purchasing child-safe items, and being aware of allergy concerns.



Supplies

- Bible
- chairs (at least 10)
- black trash bags (at least 10)
- white mailing labels (any size, 3-5 per child)
- pens
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- duct tape
- flashlight
- orange, red, and yellow streamers
- plain white paper

Easy Prep

- Cover any windows with black trash bags or dark bulletin-board paper so you can make your room really dark. You'll need a dark room for several activities.
- Tape streamers to the end of a flashlight.
- Cut a large cloud out of paper.

Set Up Valleys

Say: **Today we're learning that God is with us in hard times. Sometimes in the Bible, hard times are compared to valleys. Let's make valleys in our room.**

Have kids arrange chairs in two parallel rows, leaving a gap between the rows for kids to walk between them. You'll want at least five chairs per row, but set up as many as you can to make a long valley for kids to walk through.

Kids can slip a trash bag over each chair to complete the "dark valley" effect.

Add Hard Times

Say: **We've been learning about Psalm 23, which talks about how God is like a shepherd. Having a shepherd doesn't mean we'll never face hard times, but it does mean he's with us, leading us through those hard times. Listen to this.**

Read Psalm 23:4.

Say: **Since dark valleys are a way of picturing going through hard times, let's write hard times kids like you might go through and stick them on our valley. They might be your own hard times or things you know a friend is going through.**

Have kids write hard times on mailing labels and stick them all over the inside of the valley.

Say: **Now let's walk through this darkest valley. As we walk, we'll stop to pray for people who are going through these hard times, because God is with us in hard times. And since our verse from Psalm 23 used a shepherd's staff as a reminder that God is with us, we'll bring some shepherd's staffs along.**

Give each child three to five craft sticks. Have kids walk into the valley and spread out all the way down the valley. Then have them pray for kids going through the hard times they see in the valley. Walk around tearing pieces of duct tape and handing them to kids. When kids pray for a hard time, they'll tape a craft stick over the label to show that God is with anyone facing that hard time.

Walk Through the Wilderness

Say: **You know, kids today aren't the only ones to walk through hard times. In the Bible God's people, the Israelites, had to wander through a wilderness. They'd *just* gotten out of slavery, and they knew they were headed to an exciting, awesome land. But they had a long journey to get there. And God knew if it got too hard, they might turn back around, even if it meant becoming slaves again! So here's what happened.**

Have kids line up at one end of the valley, just outside the valley. Tell kids that end of the valley is Egypt, where the Israelites were slaves.

Read Exodus 13:17-18, and then lead kids halfway through the valley.

Say: **God is with us in hard times. He was with the Israelites when they left Egypt, and he even led them in a way that was longer to help them avoid battle.**

And here's another way God was with them.

Read Exodus 13:21-22.

Hold up the cloud, and lead kids the rest of the way through the valley.

Turn off the lights, and lead kids through the valley again, this time using a lit flashlight to lead them. (If you have a large group, have kids place their hands on the shoulders of the kids in front of them to keep kids moving safely.)

Walk Through the Valley Again

Turn the lights back on. Give each child a craft stick and a pen, and have kids write the Bible Point, God is with us in hard times, on their craft sticks.

Say: **God was with the Israelites for 40 years as they wandered through the desert. There were definitely times it felt like a dark valley for them! Let's go through our valley one more time. Bring your shepherd's staff along as a reminder that God is with us in hard times. As you walk, talk to God silently about hard times you're going through. You can keep your eyes open while you pray so you can see where you're going!**

When all the kids have walked through the valley, pray: **God, thank you that you're with us in hard times. Help us feel you with us and feel your rod and staff comforting us. In Jesus' name, amen.**

Leave your windows covered—you'll need a dark room for the Craft, Object Lesson, and Life Application Wrap-Up blocks.



Supplies

- "Bryan's Story" teaching video (watch or download [here](#))

Tip

- Don't have internet in your classroom? That's okay! You can download the videos before class using the "download" button at the link provided, or just purchase this quarter's DVD [here](#).

Discuss and Watch "Bryan's Story"

Say: **God is with us in hard times**. Sometimes it can be hard to remember God is there when things get really scary or sad. Let's see how a boy named Bryan saw God during hard times.

Watch "Bryan's Story."

Ask: • **What do you think is the hardest thing Bryan had to go through?**

• **How did you see God at work even though Bryan had a hard time?**

• **Tell about a story of your own that Bryan's story reminded you of.** Share your own story first.

Say: **Bryan lost his home and all his stuff. He had to move far away. He was really scared of the storm! But God kept Bryan and his family safe from the storm and even helped Bryan's friends remake the picture he lost. God is with us in hard times, so let's remember to look for him!**



CRAFT

Dark Valley Cups

[20 min]

Supplies

- 16-ounce plastic cups (1 per child)
- permanent markers
- glow-in-the-dark duct tape (one 4- to 6-inch strip per child)
- paper
- pens

Easy Prep

- You'll need your windows covered (from Core Bible Discovery) so you can make your room very dark.
- Make a sample craft to show kids.



Make a Prayer Cup

Show kids the sample craft you made. Give each child a cup. Set out the permanent markers to share,

and have kids follow these directions to make dark valley prayer cups.

- Get a 4- to 6-inch strip of glow-in-the-dark duct tape from your leader. (Leaders: Since this is much more expensive than regular duct tape, we suggest you disperse it to avoid kids taking too much.)
- Wrap the tape around your cup.
- On the tape, write "God is with me."
- On the parts of the cup that are *not* covered with tape, write or draw things in your life that can be hard at times. This could include things you worry about or other struggles.

Add Prayers

Set out paper and pens.

- Have kids spend several minutes writing a prayer to God about something that feels like a dark valley.
- Kids can crumple the prayers and put them in their cups.
- Turn off the lights so kids can see their cups glow.

Talk About It

With the lights still off, lead kids in these discussions.

Ask: • **Share about some of the hard times you wrote on the cup.**

- **What words can you read on your cups now, in the dark?**
- **How does this craft remind you of how God is with you, glowing in your dark times?**
- **How have you seen God with you even in the middle of a dark time in life?**

Turn the lights back on. Say: **With the lights on, we can see all our worries and problems on our cups. But in the darkness, all we could read was "God is with me." Sometimes our dark valleys can be the best opportunity for us to look for God at work. God is with us in hard times.**

Have kids take their cups home and put them in their bedrooms where they'll see them glow at night. Kids can continue to put prayers in the cups.



TAKE-HOME

Dig In @ Home

[0 min]

Supplies

- this week's "Dig In @ Home" handout (1 per child) (download [here](#))

Easy Prep

- Add your church announcements to the "Dig In @ Home" handout.

Distribute a copy of the "Dig In @ Home" handout to kids as they leave, or email it to parents during the week.

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