



PRETEEN

MAY 2024

FOR LEADERS ONLY

GOD VIEW: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN COMMITMENT AND GOD'S CHARACTER, AS SHOWN THROUGH GOD'S BIG STORY

Growing in faith is not something that happens by simply cramming more information about the Bible into a child's brain. All of that knowledge in their head means nothing if we don't help them experience how that knowledge can transform their heart. To experience faith, we want kids to practice their faith, and that takes commitment.

Commitment is part of God's nature and how God interacts with us, keeping promises and putting plans into action. God's commitment to us is just one of the many reasons we can trust God no matter what. Because God's promises and plans came true in Jesus, we can be with God forever. We reflect God's character when we make a plan and stick to it.

This month, we'll help kids discover that one of the best plans they can make is to commit to an ongoing relationship with Jesus. We hope they commit to practicing their faith by reading God's Word, praying to God honestly and consistently, talking about God with others, and living for God in how they show love throughout the everyday moments of their life.

CORE INSIGHT: The theological foundation for COMMITMENT

Connection because of God's love, I live in pursuit of an infinite God who desires an eternal relationship with me.

From the very beginning, God's plan was to have a meaningful relationship with creation. Even when people chose to live life apart from God, God continued to pursue them with unending love. God's ultimate demonstration of love was sending Jesus to make an eternal relationship with God possible for everyone.

Because God loved us first, we can respond in faith and put our trust in Jesus to live forever with God. However, just because we put our faith in Jesus, this doesn't mean we are finished in our faith journey. We can continue to show our commitment to God as we practice our faith and pursue a growing relationship with Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

COMMITMENT is making a plan and putting it into practice.

HEADS UP: IDEAS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU TALK ABOUT COMMITMENT WITH KIDS

As you talk about faith skills this month, it's important to have realistic expectations for how kids will put these ideas into practice. We all want kids to prioritize time spent growing in their faith, but it's good to keep in mind that every kid is on a unique faith journey, with their own individual life experiences that impact how they'll connect with God. Be sure to create an atmosphere of grace that doesn't unintentionally shame kids for not spending time working on these faith skills. Some kids may not have chosen to put their faith in Jesus yet. Other kids might experience special needs or developmental diversity that prevents them from being able to practice these faith skills on their own. Not to mention that much of the way elementary kids spend their time is beyond their control. However you find kids in your ministry, meet them where they are and provide attainable next steps for their journey of faith.

This is also a great month for leaders in your ministry to model what it looks like to practice their faith. Be sure to encourage your leaders to share the ways they connect with God through these faith skills. Kids can learn a lot about practicing their own faith from watching and hearing about the diverse ways the adults in their lives practice theirs. We think this could be a powerful month for everyone in your ministry environment to renew their commitment to growing in faith as they head into summer.



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FOR LEADERS ONLY (CONTINUED)

WEEK 1

Key Question: How can you hear from God? When kids are taught that they should learn to hear from God, they might have some big questions. As concrete thinkers, they still process what they learn about the world quite literally. And while they might not audibly hear God speak, they might wonder if hearing from God is even possible. Thankfully, we can point them to the Bible—or other people who can read and understand the Bible to help them discern how God might be speaking to them. We hope this question gives kids a chance to wrestle with what it means to hear from God and discover that hearing from God might not be as difficult as they might have thought.

We start the month with **Psalms 119:105**, where David wrote, *“Your word is like a lamp that shows me the way. It is like a light that guides me.”* When we read what the authors of the Bible wrote, we can find out how God wants us to live. It’s like we’re listening to God. God offers us wisdom throughout the pages of the Bible that can guide us to not only discover more about ourselves, but also how to love God, trust Jesus, and treat others well.

Bottom Line: Practice hearing from God. Part of growing in our faith includes learning about what God has planned for our lives. In order to do that, we need to take time to listen to what God is telling us through the Bible, and through those who’ve read the Bible who can help us understand what it means for our life. While kids might not be able to read and understand everything they encounter in the Bible, we still pray that, through this lesson, they’ll get the foundation they need to navigate and personalize the Bible. On top of that, we hope they will eventually make reading the Bible a regular part of their faith journey as they grow in their relationship with Jesus.

WEEK 2

Key Question: How do you pray to God? Kids in your ministry will have varied experiences with prayer. Many might just be starting to discover that they can pray more than before meals and at bedtime. Others might never have prayed out loud on their own. Whatever their experience with prayer, we hope all kids can learn that they can talk to God through prayer whenever they feel like praying, with whatever words come to mind. God is always there to listen and cares about what we have to say.

In **Matthew 6:9-13** we find Jesus talking about prayer during His Sermon on the Mount. Jesus shared a model for prayer that helps us understand more about how we can talk to God. We can pray with gratitude and honesty, pray for our needs, and ask for forgiveness. It’s comforting to know that we can pray while remembering that God knows us and wants to hear from us.

Bottom Line: Practice praying to God. Even if kids have grown up in a home where practicing faith is a priority, they might still think prayer is something they do before they eat dinner or get tucked into bed for the night. Of course, prayer is so much more than that. And, as kids learn about Jesus’ model prayer, we want them to understand that they can pray anytime, anywhere, and about anything—because God is always listening and wants to hear from us. We hope kids will understand more about prayer and find that talking to God can be an important part of growing in their faith.



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FOR LEADERS ONLY (CONTINUED)

WEEK 3

Key Question: Who do you talk to about God? If you want to grow in your faith, it's important to talk about what God is doing in your life. However, for kids, this can feel overwhelming, especially if they've never really chatted about their faith with anyone before. This week, let's help kids understand that talking about God with others can be helpful as they grow in their relationship with Jesus. We hope they'll figure out some of the trusted people in their lives who can be a sounding board to help them process their questions and listen to their faith stories.

For week 3, we head to **Matthew 16:13-20**, where Jesus asked his disciples: *"Who do you say I am?"* After everything they'd seen Jesus do and heard Jesus say, what did they really think about Jesus? This gave Peter the perfect moment to declare what he believed: that Jesus truly is the Son of God.

Bottom Line: Practice talking about God. God is continually working in our lives. When we talk about those moments with others, we can actually end up growing in our relationship with God. As kids process their growing faith, they will have questions and doubts. We want them to know that no question is off-limits when it comes to their faith. We hope that as they practice talking about God, they'll discover that sharing about their faith isn't so daunting. We pray that kids will find trusted adults who believe in Jesus who will help them talk through their questions about God.

WEEK 4

Key Question: How can you live for God? Kids might think that they only practice their faith when they come to church, go to Small Group, or sing worship songs during Large Group. But when you practice living for God, you discover that whatever you do—work, play, read, sing, listen, whatever—can be a way you worship God with your life.

We finish the month in **Mark 12:41-44**. Jesus noticed how wealthy people were giving lots of money at the temple. Then a poor widow walked up to the offering box and gave just two small coins. While this seemed like a small gift, Jesus told His disciples that this woman actually gave more than the rich people did—because she gave everything she had.

Bottom Line: Practice living for God. We know that many kids love to sing and worship God. But worship isn't just something we do when we sing at church. Worship is really how we honor God with our whole lives—how we love others and serve them, how we give our time and talents, how we follow and praise God, and even how we rest. We want kids to practice living for God and understand what it means to worship God with every part of their life.