John Preaches in the Desert

Bible Story

Teacher Challenge
We humans are natural learners—when our attention is focused. So, when God had an important announcement to make, He sent someone who got people's attention—John the Baptist! John's clothes told people that he wasn't beating around the bush; he looked like an Old Testament prophet. Even his diet probably set tongues wagging! He might have taken some getting used to, but he was not boring!

What has God used this week to focus your attention?
What changes have you made due to this new focus?

Although God used John to focus people's attention, the goal of gaining that attention wasn't to get attention for himself—he was there to introduce them to the Lamb of God. Then John said, “He must increase but I must decrease.” (See John 3:30.) Invite God to give you creative ways to get your young hearers' attention—they, too, are natural learners! Use that focus as John did—to introduce them to Jesus.

Teacher's Planning
1. Choose which centers you will provide and the order in which children will participate in them. For tips on schedule planning, see page 9.
2. Plan who will lead each center, making sure to have one adult for approximately every six children. For staffing tips and ideas, see page 12.

God's Word
“Stop doing wrong and do good.”
(See Psalm 34:14.)

God's Word and Me
Jesus helps me learn to do good things.
Play to Learn

Active Game Center:
Desert Toss

Collect
Bible, Lesson 19 Desert Toss Pictures 1-4 from Growing with God CD-ROM, masking tape, beanbag.

Prepare
Place Desert Toss Pictures in a grid pattern on the floor on one side of your playing area. Place a masking-tape line 3 feet (.9 m) from the grid. (Note: Remove masking tape immediately after activity.)

Do
1. Children line up behind the masking-tape line. The first child tosses the beanbag onto the Desert Toss Pictures. The child goes up to the picture the beanbag landed on or near and names the desert object shown.
2. Repeat until each child has had one or two turns.

Talk About
In today’s Bible story, a man named John lived in the desert. Let’s play a game to find out different things we might see in a desert.

- Diego, on which picture did your beanbag land? It landed on the oasis! An oasis is an area in the desert with water and trees.
- Mackenzie, thank you for waiting your turn. You know how to do good things!
- The Bible says, “Stop doing wrong and do good.” Doing good isn’t always easy, but Jesus will help us learn to do good things. Pray briefly, Dear Jesus, please help us learn to do good things.

God’s Word
“Stop doing wrong and do good.”
(See Psalm 34:14.)

God’s Word and Me
Jesus helps me learn to do good things.

For Younger Children
Children stand around the grid and drop the beanbag onto the pictures. Name the object in the picture closest to where the beanbag landed.

For Older Children
Each round, vary the way in which children toss the beanbag: over shoulder, between legs, while standing on one leg, etc.
Play to Learn

Art Center:
Sandy Scenes

Collect
Bible, dry sand (or cornmeal or salt), several shallow disposable bowls, newspaper, glue, dark-colored construction paper, cotton swabs, plastic spoons; optional—dry tempera paints (red, green, blue, purple, etc.).

Prepare
Pour sand into bowls. (Optional: Mix sand and tempera together, each color in a separate bowl.) Cover tables with newspaper.

Do
1. Children spread glue with cotton swabs to make designs on sheets of construction paper. Then children use spoons to sprinkle sand over papers to cover glue.
2. When glue has been completely covered, assist children in carefully lifting papers and pouring sand back into bowls. Sand will adhere to glued areas.

Talk About
¬ In today’s Bible story, a man lived in the desert and told people a very important message. Deserts have a lot of sand. Let’s make pictures with sand.
¬ Andrew, thank you for handing Lauren the glue. That was a good thing to do! What is a good thing you can do at your home?
¬ The Bible says, “Stop doing wrong and do good.” Sometimes it’s hard to know what good things to do. Jesus helps us learn ways to do good things.

For Younger Children
Prepare a pie tin or flat-bottomed bowl with about a half inch of sand for each child. Instead of making pictures on papers, younger children use fingers to draw designs in damp sand.

For Older Children
Children use pencils to print “Do good” on papers. Children then trace over the letters with glue and cover with sand.
Play to Learn

Construction Center: Desert Blocks

Collect
Bible, blocks, brown paper bags, blue fabric or towel; optional—toy trees.

Do
1. Children use blocks to outline a desert. Children tear pieces of brown paper bags and crumple to represent desert sand.
2. In the middle of the desert, children make an oasis by placing blue fabric or towel to represent water, and stacking blocks around the water to represent palm trees. (Optional: Children place toy trees around water.)

Talk About

The Bible says, “Stop doing wrong and do good.” Jesus helps us learn how to do good things. Let’s practice doing good things as we build a desert.

Luis, Ashley wants to help build the desert. How can you help her? You can move over to give her room to build! That was a good thing to do.

Nicholas, your foot knocked over Olivia’s tree. How can you do good? Thanks for saying sorry. If you move over here, you won’t knock her tree down again.

For Younger Children
Younger children have difficulty building representational objects. So as children play freely with the blocks and paper bags, use conversation to connect their actions to the lesson focus of doing good things. Abigail, I see you handed Hayden a block. Thank you. Helping others is a good thing to do.

For Older Children
Provide plastic insects and bugs for children to add to their block desert.

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(See Psalm 34:14.)

God’s Word and Me
Jesus helps me learn to do good things.
Play to Learn

Dramatic Play Center: Mail Service

Collect
Bible, writing paper, pencils, envelopes, stickers; optional—an old computer keyboard.

Do
1. Children pretend to write letters to friends or family.
2. Children place letters in envelopes and address the envelopes. Children place stickers on envelopes as if they were stamps.
3. Children take turns pretending to type on the computer keyboard.

Talk About
- In today’s Bible story, John told people important messages from God. Let’s pretend to write messages to our friends and family.
- Gabrielle, who are you writing to? What do you want to tell that person?
- The Bible says, “Stop doing wrong and do good.” Jesus wants us to do good things, and Jesus will help us. What are some ways to learn to do good things? (Pray and ask Jesus. Talk to parents and teachers. Listen to the Bible.)

For Younger Children
Bring junk mail and one or more shoulder bags. Children take turns pretending to be mail carriers, and distribute mail to other children.

For Older Children
Print one or two sentences on a large sheet of paper ("I love you." “God loves you.”). Children choose a sentence to copy on their paper. Children take the message home to give to a friend or family member.

God’s Word
“Stop doing wrong and do good.” (See Psalm 34:14.)

God’s Word and Me
Jesus helps me learn to do good things.
Listen to Learn

Collect
Bible, Bible Story 32 pictures from God’s Story for Me Poster Pack #2, Preschool Music #2 DVD or CD and player, ball, colored paper, scissors, brown paper bag.

Greet Each Other
Children sit in a circle. Hand a child the ball. As you clap your hands, children pass the rock around the circle. When you stop clapping, the child holding the ball says “Hello, everyone!” Repeat several times.

Tell the Story
Open your Bible to Matthew 3. Tell the story using the pictured motions (keywords in bold) or show Bible Story 32 pictures.

What are the names of your cousins? Listen to hear about a man whose cousin was Jesus!

Jesus had a cousin named John. John lived in the desert all by himself. John wore clothes made of scratchy camel hair and he wore a leather belt.

John ate food he found in the desert: insects like grasshoppers, and sweet honey.

God had a special job for John. God wanted John to tell people that Jesus is God’s Son.

John stayed near the Jordan River. He told people to get ready for Jesus.

John told people, “God will forgive you for doing wrong things. But stop doing wrong things. Do good things.”

People wanted to know good things to do. They asked John, “What should we do?”

John answered, “If you have two coats, give one coat to a person who has no coat. If you have extra food, give some to hungry people.”

John told some other people more ways to do what is right. “Don’t take money that doesn’t belong to you,” he said.

He told some soldiers, “Don’t say someone did wrong when you know that person did NOT do anything wrong. Tell only what is true.”

Many people listened to John. They stopped doing wrong things. They promised to do what is right. Then John baptized them. He used water to show that God forgives people for the wrong things they do. John helped people learn to do good things.

God’s Word
“Stop doing wrong and do good.”
(See Psalm 34:14.)

God’s Word and Me
Jesus helps me learn to do good things.
Talk About the Story

What is one of the things John told people? (Stop doing wrong things. Give to people who need help.) John told people very important messages from God. God wanted people to know that they needed to stop doing wrong things and start doing good things. Jesus came to help us do good things. Jesus helps us learn to do good things. What can we do when we need Jesus’ help to do good things? (Talk to parents and teachers. Pray. Listen to Bible stories and verses to learn about good things to do.)

Sing to God

Let’s sing a song about how Jesus loves us. Lead children in singing “Jesus Loves Me” (on DVD or track 7 on CD). Jesus loves us. He will help us learn to do good things.

Hear and Say God’s Word

Holding your Bible open to Psalm 34:14, say verse aloud. It isn’t always easy to do good things. Sometimes we don’t know what good things to do. Jesus will help us learn to do good things for others. Children form a large circle. Lead children in repeating the verse several times. When saying the words “Stop doing wrong,” children stand still. When saying the words “and do good,” children walk in a circle.

Pray to God

Pray, Dear God, we want to do good things because we love You. Thank You for sending Jesus to help us learn good things to do. Thank You for loving us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Option: On a large sheet of paper, print the words “Jesus helps us learn to do good things.” Ask children to name good things Jesus helps them to do (Share with others. Be kind.). Print children’s responses on paper; place paper where parents can read it when class is dismissed.

Praise to God

Make two identical sets of color-paper strips using a variety of colors, two strips for each child. Repeat colors if needed. Put one set of strips into a paper bag. Distribute other set of strips to children. Invite children to pass the bag as you play “How Good It Is” (track 17 on CD). When you stop the music, the child holding the bag removes a strip. Child holding strip of the same color tells a good thing to do (take turns, tell the truth, share, say kind words, etc.). Repeat as time and interest allow.
Talk to Learn

Bible Story Activity Pages Center

Collect
A copy of Activity 32 from The Big Book of Bible Story Activity Pages #2 for yourself and each child, scissors, crayons or markers; optional—small pieces of blue tissue paper, glue.

Do
Lead children to complete pages following the instructions. (Optional: Children glue tissue paper to river.) Use the conversation suggestions as children complete their pages and retell the story.

Preschool Puzzle Center

Collect
Copies of Bible Story Puzzle 19, Bible Verse Puzzle 19 and/or Challenge Puzzle 19 from The Big Book of Preschool Puzzles #2 for each child; pencils, crayons or markers.

Do
Children complete the puzzles and color pages. Use the conversation suggestions on the pages.

Read-Aloud Story Center

Collect
A copy of Story Picture 19 from The Big Book of Read-Aloud Stories #2 for yourself and each child, crayons or markers.

Do
Read the story and distribute pictures. Use the conversation suggestions as children complete their pages.