I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.
—Genesis 28:15

And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.
—Genesis 28:15 (KJV)
USING THIS GUIDE

At Deep Sea Discovery VBS, kids of all ages will be diving deep into God’s Word to learn how God is with us wherever we go. Understanding the presence of God in our lives can seem mysterious, like the murky waters at the bottom of the sea. But when we stop to consider all the ways God makes himself known to us each day, we can see clearly that He is with us—no matter what situation we are in, or what the circumstances are. God walks alongside us: knowing us, hearing us, strengthening us, loving us, and ultimately sending us out to tell others what He has done and is doing even now for and through us.

This guide is designed to help adults participate in a Bible study that coordinates with the learning objectives of each VBS session. After all, VBS isn’t just for kids! This study guide can be helpful to adults in many circumstances:

- for leaders and volunteers in children’s ministry.
- for parents of children attending VBS.
- for adults who are new to Bible study.
- for adults who want to make connections with other Christians.
- for anyone wanting to understand more about God’s presence.

Your group may be meeting before VBS, after VBS, or during VBS. Or maybe you want to use this guide as part of a Sunday school class or other small group gathering. Each session is designed to take roughly an hour, but there are parts you may wish to extend or shorten to suit your group’s needs. It may be helpful during the first session to take some time to discuss the plan for your group’s meetings.

One way to extend your group’s time could be to include a time of fellowship over a meal or snacks. You may also wish to enjoy a time of worship together. If you are up for some fun, you could even try out some of the science experiments and other activities the kids are doing each day at VBS. Each session also includes service project ideas, though you may just want to serve together at your church’s VBS!

Here’s what each session looks like:

**OPENER STORY**
Read this on your own or as a group. The questions after the story are meant to offer some opening discussion points for the session.

**DISCOVERY ACTIVITY**
Use this activity to think about the learning objective from a different angle.

**BIBLE DISCOVERY**
Read the Bible passages together and use the provided questions to explore what God’s Word has to say to us.

**FOCUS AND PRAYER**
A Bible focus passage (which includes the Bible memory verse the kids are learning in VBS) and prayer points are provided for each session.

**DISCOVER SERVICE**
Use these ideas to serve God together. Your group may choose to serve by volunteering at VBS or by serving others in your community.

**FAMILY DISCOVERY TIME**
For those members of the group with kids at home—either those participating in VBS or not—these conversation starters and ideas are a great way to continue exploring God’s presence in your daily lives together.

Feel free to structure the sessions to suit the needs of your group. You may choose to omit sections or add in your own questions. Allow time and space for everyone to contribute. As you discuss God’s Word and get to know each other better, our hope is that you’ll gain a deeper understanding of how God is with you . . . wherever you go.
LEARNING OBJECTIVE
To understand that God knew Noah’s heart, and He knows us too. He knows everything we think and do, and yet He still wants to be with us. Because we are confident of God’s presence, we can make difficult choices and do the right things God wants us to do.

OPENER STORY
The situation was grim. It was gym class—isn’t it always? These guys were picking on one of their favorite targets: Angel Cogurt. There was something different about her—something you couldn’t put your finger on, but you knew something wasn’t quite right. Looking back now, it’s clear she had a learning disability of some kind, and she probably had a behavioral disorder as well.

I knew nothing about her—not how many brothers or sisters she had, or if her dad and mom both lived at home, or even where in town she lived. All I knew is that I wanted to stay away from her. Why? She smelled funny. She often screamed at the slightest provocation. She threatened to claw people.

In my mind the scene was clear—there was only one thing I could do. So that’s what I did. I looked away.

Nothing horrible happened after that. Angel continued to get picked on. Eventually she started attending a different school and I didn’t have to think about her anymore, but I still think about her now. I think about all the times I should have said something, and didn’t. About the times I could have made a difference, maybe just helped her not have such a terrible day. But I didn’t do it. I was afraid.

The kids in VBS today are learning about Noah and about his special relationship with God. Noah had every reason to be fearful. He was doing something no one else was doing. People thought he was crazy—and these people did not have good intentions. But God knew Noah’s heart. He knew that Noah was good—that Noah wanted to please Him.

So God gave Noah a big job to do—it was nothing less than helping to save the world. Noah didn’t save it by building an ark. He saved it by having a heart that was willing to listen and follow God.

It’s the little choices that get us there—the little ones that lead us down the path of righteousness or the path of complacency. I knew God when I ignored Angel’s plight. I knew the right thing to do. But what I didn’t understand is that God was with me. That He knew me. God knew all the fears in my heart and all the reasons I had for being afraid, and He was with me. He would have been with me if I had stood up to the mean kids, and He was with me still when I didn’t.

1. Have you ever been in a position where it felt like everyone was against you or everyone was going a different way than you were? What was that like?

2. In that situation, what influenced the choices you made?

3. In the above situation, what kind of positive results or changes could have occurred if the author had truly understood that the God who saved the world was with her?

4. How do you feel about the idea of God knowing you?
DISSCOVERY ACTIVITY: DID YOU KNOW?

For this activity, you'll need some scraps of paper, pencils, and a hat or bag in which to collect the papers. Make sure each person has a piece of paper and a pencil. Each person should write down three different statements about themselves to finish the question: Did you know? These statements should be things that the person has done or experienced, or that the person could have done or experienced. Two of the statements should represent true events. One of the statements should be not true. Tips: Make a rule that no relatives or spouses are allowed to give each other away. Also, in order to be tricky, especially if you are working with a group that knows each other pretty well, it can be good to pick very normal types of occurrences for the not true statements. For example: 1. Did you know that I used to mow lawns to make money as a kid? (Not true.) 2. Did you know that I used to be a fast-food cook? (True.) 3. Did you know that I once worked for a racecar driver? (True.) After everyone has written down three things, nominate someone to collect these papers in a hat and to be the reader. After each paper is read, allow people to offer guesses as to who wrote it. When people have had a chance to guess, the author of the paper should reveal himself and explain the story behind the answers, as desired. Continue until all the authors have been matched up with the correct papers.

BIBLE DISCOVERY

1. Read Genesis 6:1-7. The chapter before this passage records the births and deaths of the descendants of Adam. It also reveals it was not all that long before the human race had become wicked (the years in chapter 5 are interpreted by Bible scholars in a few different ways—if added up at face value, Noah’s story happens roughly 1,500 years after Adam is set in the garden). Consider what the Lord saw about the human race in 6:5. What hints are given in verses 1–4 that could suggest why humans became so wicked in such a relatively short span of time? (Consider, for example, that in ancient times, unmarried women were given in “marriage” to the gods—they became temple servants. The services they provided could include providing physical pleasure to the temple priests and those who came to worship there.)

2. Consider what God says in 6:7. Why do you think God wanted to get rid of the animals as well as the humans?

3. Read Genesis 6:8-22. Genesis 6:8 reveals that Noah—out of the entire human race—found favor, or grace, in the eyes of the Lord. What do we find out about Noah that shows why he found favor in God’s sight?

4. Read Genesis 7, 8, and 9:1-7. What parallels or similarities can you find between the story of what happens to the world during the flood and what happens at the beginning of creation? In what ways is Noah like a new Adam? In what ways is he different?

5. In verses 4-7 of chapter 9, what is significant about the law that God sets in place?

6. In Genesis 9:8-17, God establishes a covenant with Noah and with all life on earth. What is this covenant? Compare this covenant to the ones discussed in Hebrews 8 and 9. What does each of these covenants reveal about how God knows us? What do they say about how God is with us?

FOCUS AND PRAYER

If time allows, read Psalm 139 together. Use the verses of that psalm as prayer topics. Here are some thoughts to guide your prayers:

• God, Your knowledge of us is so comprehensive; we find it overwhelming at times. Help us to seek to know You as well as You know us.

• God, we know that no matter where we go, whether it’s high in the sky or at the bottom of the sea, You will be with us. Help us to know and find comfort in the fact that we are never beyond Your reach.

• God, search me today. Reveal my own heart to me. See where I need to be corrected, and guide me on the right path, no matter how hard it is to walk it.
Session 1 • God KNOWS Me!

DISCOVER SERVICE
Because God knows us and is with us, we can serve God by doing the right thing. Often, the right thing is not easy or all that attractive. It may even mean getting as smelly and dirty as a zookeeper on an ark full of animals. Think about some dirty, smelly job opportunities that might exist either at your church or in your community: disinfecting bathrooms, cleaning out heating vents, cleaning refrigerators and kitchen areas in local shelters, or just picking up trash in your neighborhood. Grab some plastic gloves, sponges, trash bags, and some elbow grease and encourage each other to make your world a little bit nicer to live in.

FAMILY DISCOVERY TIME
Use these conversation starters to continue this discussion at home:

• God gave Noah an almost impossibly hard job to do. Why does God sometimes give really good people hard things to manage? Have you ever felt like you had a really hard job to do? What did you do?
• How do we know that God didn’t leave Noah on his own? What parts of the story show us that God was with Noah? At what times in your own story have you known that God was with you? What made you sure of that?
• It seems kind of weird or even scary that God knows everything in our hearts and minds all the time. What is good about knowing that? How can realizing that God already knows those things help us to make good decisions?
• Think about a hard thing or a difficult choice you may have in your mind right now, or maybe something you are worried about for the future. Knowing God is with you, and that He won’t ever leave you, what is one step you can take this week to do the right thing?
LEARNING OBJECTIVE
To understand that God heard and answered Jonah when he called out to God, and He hears us and is with us too. Because we know He hears us, we can serve Him by praying for others, and we can know that He will give an answer.

OPENER STORY
He had made his feelings clear. He wasn’t happy with the way things were going—at all. There were many specific issues, but overall the main problem was something that could not be easily overcome.

So . . . without further warning, he left.

With little else than the clothes on his back and whatever he could shove in his pockets, he headed off down the street. No note. No forwarding address. No looking back.

And he would have probably gotten a lot farther, except for one small detail. He wasn’t allowed to cross the street by himself.

The boy was only three years old when he decided he didn’t want to live at his home anymore. His parents heard his complaints—his sister wouldn’t let him play his games, he didn’t get to do the things he had been begging to do, and he wasn’t getting the toy he had asked for. In short, he couldn’t have everything his way. So he ran away.

His mother followed along behind him at a distance until he rounded the corner of the block and got to the end of an often-walked path. It was then he looked back, wondering if anyone cared where he was. And of course she did. His mother scooped him up and had a nice chat with him all the way back home—a chat about obedience, but also about how much he was loved.

1. Have you ever run away—whether it was from home, from a challenge, from a difficult relationship, or something else? What was it that made you run?

2. If you have run away from something, did you ever come back? What made you come back? If you’ve never run away, what has made you stay?

3. What was the message the little boy was sending when he ran away? Who heard that message?

4. What messages are we sending when we run away? Who hears those messages?
DISCOVERY ACTIVITY: WHISPER CHARADES
For this activity you will need a music-playing device, a pair of good headphones, two chairs spaced several feet apart, two hats, and a list of common phrases or titles (of movies, TV shows, or songs) written on separate pieces of paper. If you want, you can divide your group into two groups and have each group come up with a list of phrases or titles that the other group will then use. You will want to have a list of at least three phrases for each pair of people. Collect the pieces of paper from each group in separate hats. Then give each group’s hat to the opposing group. Each group should divide into pairs. Turn up the volume on the music-playing device (but not so loud it hurts anyone’s ears!), turn on some good music (like VBS songs from Yancy!), and plug in the headphones. Then have a pair from one group come forward and sit in the chairs, facing one another. One person should hold the music player and wear the headphones. The other person must pull a piece of paper out of the hat given to that group and then whisper the phrase or title on that piece of paper while the other person tries to guess the correct answer. Rule 1: The person doing the whispering cannot make any gestures or motions as clues. Rule 2: The person whispering can only try the phrase three times before they must move on. Rule 3: The person with the headphones on must make all the guesses out loud. Rule 4: The pair can try three phrases before they must give up their seats to a pair from the opposing group, who will repeat these actions. Continue alternating sides. If you want, suggest everyone bring some delicious treats—the group that gets the most answers correct, once every pair has had a turn, gets to choose their treats first!

BIBLE DISCOVERY
1. Read Jonah 1–4. As you read, take note of the actions and words of Jonah. Jonah and Jesus were both prophets from Galilee. Compare the two prophets based on what we read about Jonah and what you know of Jesus’ character.

2. Read Jonah 1:3. Two other times in the Bible there are people who leave or try to hide from the presence of the Lord (there are other instances of those who were cast out from the presence of the Lord). Look at Genesis 3:7, 8 and Genesis 4:8-16. In what ways are these circumstances similar to or different from that of Jonah?

3. Why do you think Jonah thought he could get away from the Lord? Some scholars point to the common beliefs of ancient peoples that gods controlled certain geographic regions. Perhaps Jonah believed that the Lord would not have so much power over him in a different region. Other scholars have suggested that Jonah simply thought if he got far enough away, God might send a different prophet instead. As you read in Jonah, what reasons do you see that explain why he did not want to go to Nineveh? Can you relate at all to Jonah’s situation? Why or why not?

4. It is helpful to consider that Nineveh was one of the most important cities (later the capital city) of the Assyrians, who were enemies of Israel. (You can read more about the Assyrians in 2 Kings and Isaiah to see the relationship between Israel and Assyria.) In Jonah 4, how does God get Jonah to see why He wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh?

5. Even though Jonah did not want to do what God commanded, God heard Jonah’s call and provided a fish to rescue him (see Jonah 1:17–2). Read Jonah’s prayer of thanks in chapter 2 together out loud (or use this as part of your prayer time later). Jonah was grateful for the mercy of God—for grace given him in the presence of God, for his spiritual and physical rescue—even after he had disobeyed God directly. We know that discussion of God’s saving grace can be found throughout the New Testament as well. What other overall themes or imagery in the book of Jonah foreshadow themes later to be found in the New Testament?
FOCUS AND PRAYER
Read 1 John 5:14, 15. Take some time before praying together to think of specific needs in your community that you can pray about. Here are some thoughts to guide your prayers:

• God, help us to remember that we can have confidence in You. Remind us every day that You are with us, and You want to hear our prayers.
• God, You have heard the names and issues we have mentioned here. Please let the people involved in these situations know of Your presence. Use us to show them You are with them.
• God, we praise You and thank You for Your mercy. Thank You for listening to us. Thank You for hearing us even when we don’t think we’re talking to You.
• God, thank You for pursuing us in our disobedience and offering us answers we don’t deserve. Help us to show our gratitude by loving and serving You.

DISCOVER SERVICE
Have a progressive prayer walk. Travel (carpool) together to each person’s neighborhood. In each neighborhood, ask the person(s) in the group who lives there what problems or needs or opportunities exist in that neighborhood. Then walk together in the area (or split up into smaller groups) and pray for those challenges and chances. Alternatively, if some members of your group have physical challenges, consider doing a virtual neighborhood walk instead. Open up a big map of your city or community. As you pray together for each relevant area, invite members to lay their hands on that area of the map. Cut up the map and make copies as needed so that you can give a piece of the map to each person as you close the session.

FAMILY DISCOVERY TIME
Use these conversation starters to continue this discussion at home:

• God had given Jonah a special job, but he didn’t want to do it. Have you ever been given a special responsibility that you did not want to have? What did you do?
• Jonah had a great gift—he had God speaking directly to him! Why didn’t he just do what God wanted him to do in the first place? What do you think about Jonah’s reasons for running away from God?
• We read in Jonah’s book that God sent a fish to swallow up Jonah after he was tossed into the sea. Then Jonah actually prays and thanks God while he’s still inside the fish! Sometimes it’s hard to see that strange or hard things that happen to us are actually part of God’s plan. Have you ever had something surprising or funny or strange happen to you that actually turned out to be a really good thing?
• Praying for others is an act of service—it’s one way we can help them and it’s also a way for us to learn to love others. Sometimes it’s hard to remember to pray for others. What’s something you can do this week to help you remember to pray?
LEARNING OBJECTIVE
To understand that Peter was strengthened by Jesus, both through Jesus’ physical presence and through Jesus’ encouragement. Just as Jesus strengthened Peter on the sea, He strengthens us too, and challenges us to encourage others.

OPENER STORY
You’ve memorized the words. You’ve got your notes down to the letter. You’ve practiced your pacing. You are ready to take the stage. You take a deep breath and a few big steps and find yourself in the bright, hot spotlight.

Blinking, squinting, you realize all of a sudden you probably look like a helpless, blind rat caught in a trap. Sweat beads form on your forehead and you pray they won’t roll into your eyes. Your face is on fire and yet your hands are shivering. You look down at the words on the page in front of you.

Words? . . . Words! Speak! Open your mouth! Open it! Speak those words—the ones down there on that page! Hurry up!

But the words won’t come. You try to command your tongue to move. You attempt to swallow. Big mistake. Now you start to remember everything you had for breakfast.

As the contents of your breakfast swirl in your mind and your stomach, you feel sure of only one thing. You can’t do this. This thing that you trained for—this moment you were ready for. These words you believed in. Fear has stolen it all from you.

Fear can do that. It can deprive us of special moments, it can wipe away our joy, and it can smother our hope. When we stop trusting in what God can do and instead start counting what we can’t do, we will almost always fall. Sometimes fast and hard—sometimes a slow sinking. But we will fall.

But you hold your head up and look out past the bright lights, past the edge of the stage, and there in the first row is a familiar face. A friendly pair of eyes looks back at you. And a mouth that has voiced words of encouragement and truth and love to you a thousand times before forms the silent words, “You can do it!”

The swirling stops. You straighten up your spine, wipe your forehead, open your mouth, and . . . speak.

1. Think about some times when you’ve been afraid or nervous. In what ways did that fear hold you back?

2. People cope with fear and anxiety in many different ways. Some get bolder and louder. Some hide. Some get angry. Some feel sad. Talk about the various reactions different people have to fear and doubt—use your own stories, if you feel you can. Is there a right or wrong way to respond to fear? Explain your answers.

3. What does faith mean? Take turns giving your definition of faith. You can also use Bible verses to explain what faith means. Is faith the opposite of doubt? Why or why not?

4. You may have often heard this sentiment before: “You gotta have faith in yourself.” What do you think about that statement? How might it be helpful to someone? How might it not?
DISCOVERY ACTIVITY: WHO’S THE STRONGEST?
You’ll need at least two pieces of paper, some pens or pencils, and a timer. Divide the group into two teams. Set a timer for five minutes. Make sure at least one person on each team has a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Instruct each group to come up with as many examples of people who are known for their strength as they can in five minutes. Tell the groups that the people can be from the past or the present, and can be fictional or real characters.

When five minutes is up, let each group take turns sharing the answers they came up with. Then discuss what kinds of things made those people strong. What did they have to do to become strong? What did they have to give up? As you think about each of those examples, consider what weaknesses those people or characters also displayed. From your list of people, who would you pick as the strongest? Why?

BIBLE DISCOVERY
1. First, read through Matthew 14:1-21 to provide some context for the story of Jesus walking on water. What had Jesus just been informed about before He withdrew from the area? (Read carefully—go back and look at Matthew 14:1, 2.) What does that indicate about the socio-political climate at the time? Remember that Herod the tetrarch is Herod Antipas, the son of the King Herod who sought to kill Jesus as a child (Matthew 2).

2. Jesus had withdrawn to a solitary, remote, desert place (as described in various translations—in Luke 9 we discover that this place was near Bethsaida, which would have been outside the territory of Herod). But the crowds had followed Him. When the disciples suggested that Jesus send the crowds away, Jesus instead told the disciples to give them something to eat. Taking the loaves and fish the disciples had, Jesus provided for His followers—in abundance! It would have been easier to have just sent the crowds away. What does this act tell you about Jesus? What does it tell you about how He understands people?

3. Finally in verse 23, Jesus gets some time alone. Read verses 22-36. As Jesus takes some time by himself to pray, the wind begins gathering force on the big lake. The boat that carried the disciples was already away from the land when Jesus came walking out on the water. All the disciples were terrified, but at the sound of Jesus’ voice, saying “Do not be afraid,” Peter took his Lord at His word. He took so much courage that he actually issued a challenge to the Son of God—“Tell me to come.” So Jesus did. Consider this exchange—Jesus knew His friend Peter. He knew Peter was just a man. What does Jesus’ challenge to Peter say to you about Jesus’ confidence in Peter’s faith? What does it say about His own confidence in His abilities?

4. Peter had just picked up the miraculous leftovers with his own hands a few hours ago. He didn’t have to try to believe—the evidence was all there. But something happened to him when he stepped out on that water and into the spotlight. Which part of Peter’s actions can you relate to the most—when he got out of the boat, or when he saw the wind and became afraid? Give reasons for your answer.

5. Jesus asked Peter why he doubted. Imagine what Peter’s answer would have been. Consider a time when you have faltered in your faith, even though you may have known who Jesus is and what He can do. What would your answer be to Jesus’ question? What can you do to remind yourself to find strength and courage in Jesus?

FOCUS AND PRAYER
Read Psalm 28:7-9. Notice how verse 7 is talking from a personal point of view, then verses 8 and 9 talk about what God does or will do for His people. Here are some thoughts to guide your prayers:

• God, thank You for giving me strength. Thank You for protecting me. I trust You, Lord. I trust You with my life. Right now, I trust You with ____________ (fill in the blank).

• God, You help me. I don’t understand why, but every time I need help, You are there for me. Help me to tell others about how You have saved me. Help me to tell others that You can save them too.

• God, sometimes it is hard to see how to help others. Give me Your sight—let me see others as You see them. Help me to know how to encourage others.

• God, I know You are the Great Shepherd. You help us grow. You keep us from harm. You show us the right way to go. Use us to help others. Use us to protect others. Use us to encourage others.
DISCOVER SERVICE
Sometimes just walking into a school building can be the most difficult part of the day for a student. Set up a Cheer Walk to encourage the students in a local school. You may want to pick a school where you know many students who attend, or pick one that does not have a good reputation or seems neglected. First, work with school officials to get permission for your Cheer Walk and to set up a time that works for the school and for members of your group. Make signs that display messages of encouragement. (Be sensitive to the fact that, in order to get permission to gather on public school property, you may need to keep the names of God or Jesus off of your signs. Don’t worry! God doesn’t need you to say His name in order for people to hear His message!) Make sure the signs are big and bright and easy to read at a glance. Use big thick poster markers to write out the words. Keep the messages simple. Here are some ideas for your posters: You can do it! You are AMAZING! You are beautiful! Go for it! Keep trying! Don’t give up! We love you! We’re here for you! You are VALUABLE! You are worth it! Do your best! What you do matters! You are important!

Once you have made the posters and have set up a time, meet together to pray for the students before you set up your Cheer Walk. Then line up beside the school’s main entrance for students in the morning and, as students begin to arrive and until the last tardy bell rings, cheer and hold up your signs. This is a great activity to ask other people to join as well. If someone doesn’t have a sign, they can cheer and wave and smile and shout words of encouragement. Aim to make every student feel like the football star walking onto the field of the biggest game of the year!

FAMILY DISCOVERY TIME
Use these conversation starters to continue this discussion at home:

• When Jesus walked out to His friends on the water, they were scared of Him at first. They didn’t know who He was! Have you ever been afraid because you thought something was happening that really wasn’t? How did you feel when you found out the truth?
• When Jesus told Peter to come, Peter got out of the boat. Imagine that you are Peter in this situation. Do you think you would have gotten out of the boat? Why or why not?
• Peter was so encouraged by Jesus calling, he started to walk out to Jesus on the water. He did something he never would have done if Jesus hadn’t been there. What is something that Jesus has helped you to feel like you could do?
• Being afraid isn’t always a bad thing. Sometimes fear helps you to stay safe. What are some examples of when that can be true? But there are times when fear can stop you from being who you are or keep you from doing something that would be good to do. Has fear ever stopped you from doing a good thing?
• Often there are reasons behind someone’s bad behavior. A kid who is mean to others might be afraid of being picked on. A person who is always disobeying the rules might be seeking attention because she isn’t cared for properly at home. They may be living in a storm that could rival the one that made Peter start sinking. Think of a person you see a lot who has trouble getting along with others or who gets left out of a lot of things. What is one thing you can do this week to be an encouragement for that person?
LEARNING OBJECTIVE
To understand that Jesus loved and took care of His friends—He spent time with them and provided for them. Jesus loves us and wants to spend time with us too. Because Jesus loves us and has made it possible for us to live forever with Him, we can serve Him by sharing God’s love with others.

OPENER STORY
They stepped on the sands where they had walked before. They smelled the same air, tasted the same saltiness—then she sat on the stone wall where he had proposed to her so many years ago.

You could tell the couple was trying to recapture or recreate certain special moments of their lives. You could also tell it wasn’t quite working. Things had changed. Perhaps too much.

As the waves crept closer to their feet and ran out to the sea again, they traced the curves left behind in the wet sand. The woman remarked how amazing it was to think that some of these grains of sand could have been made from the fragments of creatures living at the bottom of the sea. Or of ship captains drowned in the depths, thought the man, but he chose not to say that to her just now. Instead he swallowed a yawn and said, “Where to now?”

She bent down, perhaps to write her answer in the sand. But as she pushed into the sand with her index finger, a frothy wave came rushing in again, wiping her slate clean. She smiled to herself, as if someone had just delivered the punchline.

“Never mind,” she said. “Let’s go someplace new.” And they awkwardly scaled the sand dune—now leaning against each other, now falling apart—until their heads dipped below the horizon.

1. Fill in the blank: Loving someone for a long time can be ______________.

2. “Love will save the day.” This is a saying we have heard before. Do you think this statement by itself is true in every case? Why or why not?

3. The couple in this story seems at first to be trying to move backwards in time—to start their relationship over by going back and reliving important moments. What might be good about that strategy? What are the problems with doing that?

4. There are moments in this story when the man and woman seem to be really with each other, and moments when they seem to be standing apart from each other—both physically and mentally. What does it mean to be with someone?
DISCOVERY ACTIVITY: FILLING OUR NETS
You’ll need a large paper or plastic cup for each person in the group, masking tape, paper, permanent markers, and pens or pencils. Give each person a cup. Let them write their names on their cups with the permanent marker. Then have each person tape the cup to the back of his chair so that the cup opening is pointed up. (If you aren’t using chairs, the cup could be taped to the person’s back.)

Pass out the paper and pencils or pens. Each person should write one positive or encouraging thing about each person in the room. If you don’t know each other all that well, you may look up an encouraging Bible verse and write that on the paper. Write the comments down in lines so that you can tear off one strip for each person. When everyone is finished writing, get up and deliver your messages into the appropriate person’s cup or “net.”

Talk about the different ways people can be filled—physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally. What are some ways we can fill each other up and provide for each other? End the activity by letting people look at what they caught in their “nets.”

BIBLE DISCOVERY
1. The story of the miraculous catch of fish and Jesus’ appearance to His disciples on the shore of Galilee takes place after Jesus had already made several appearances to His disciples after his death and resurrection. We are not told exactly where in the sequence of events this story falls, however we can guess that it must have been a time of high emotions and some fear, due to the precarious position for the followers of Jesus—the man who was just crucified as the King of the Jews. Read John 21:1-14. Given prior events, why do you think these men chose this particular time to go fishing?

2. They caught nothing, but then Jesus appeared. As usual, the presence of Jesus changed everything. In this case, what happened?

3. Jesus already had a fire and food ready for His friends. What does this tell you about Jesus? What does it tell you about the significance of having a meal together at this time? Why might it have been important for the disciples to see (and for the author to record) Jesus eating with them?

4. Read John 21:15-19. In this passage, Jesus asks Simon Peter if he loves Him. What is the significance of Him asking Peter this three times? (See John 18.)

5. Jesus referred to himself as the good shepherd. What is the significance of Jesus asking Peter to take care of His sheep? If you had been in Jesus’ position as a leader of disciples—would you have asked Peter to be the one in charge? Why or why not? What does this responsibility given by Jesus say about Jesus’ relationship to Peter? What does it say about Peter?
FOCUS AND PRAYER
Read 1 John 4:9. Here are some thoughts to guide your prayers:
• God, thank You for your love and for giving us Your Son so that we might live through Him.
• God, I do want to live through You. Show me how to do that each day. Show me how to love others the way You love me.
• God, I don’t understand Your grace. I know I don’t deserve it. Sometimes it’s hard for me to find the words to explain what You’ve done for me. Help me to find the right way to communicate Your love to others.
• God, I’m so thankful for Your forgiveness. Show me when I need to forgive others and help me be able to forgive quickly.

DISCOVER SERVICE
Jesus provided breakfast for His friends. Consider participating in an act of provision as a service opportunity for your group. You could bake cookies (instead of bread), wrap them in plastic wrap, and tie them with a ribbon and tag that says: “Jesus loves you.” Get permission to pass the cookies out to the children’s ministry kids at your church. Or, consider an energy snack drop for ministry volunteers (or for teachers at a local school). Fill a large basket with protein bars, fruit, and other snacks. Include some energy drinks or gift certificates to a local coffee shop. Include a card that says: “Jesus provided for His friends. We want to share His love by providing for you.”

FAMILY DISCOVERY TIME
Use these conversation starters to continue this discussion at home:
• Jesus called to His friends on the water—but they didn’t recognize Him. Why do you think they would have been surprised to see Jesus there that morning?
• On their own, the fishermen caught nothing. When Jesus guided them, they had a net so full, they couldn’t haul it in. What does that tell you about the difference Jesus can make in your life?
• Jesus had a meal with His friends. Taking time to prepare and participate in a meal together is just one way to say you care about others. What are some ways you communicate how much you care about others?
• Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times, and He gave Peter a command three times. Do you think Jesus forgave Peter for denying he was a friend of Jesus three times? Is there anyone who has hurt you? If so, think about how you can be like Jesus in that friendship.
• Brainstorm some other ways you can show Jesus’ love this week.
LEARNING OBJECTIVE
To understand that God is with us as He sends us out to tell others His story.

OPENER STORY
Scraping. Scratching. Shifting sand. And then, a tiny, pointed face pokes out into a huge, new world.
The baby sea turtle’s life has just hit a major milestone.

As it makes its way clumsily across the sand at night, it has little knowledge of the potential hazards in its path. Predators await—crabs, birds, dogs, and raccoons. It might lose its way, getting distracted by a bright artificial light. Or it might just not be strong enough to move fast. But the tiny turtle isn’t aware of any of those facts. It is on one mission—to get to the sea.

The sea holds life—food, water, safety, places to hide. It’s a place to grow and swim. A place to stretch and move and communicate with other sea turtles.

For years it travels the seas—eating and growing and resting and growing some more. About ten to fifteen years after it scrambled out of its shell, the female sea turtle finds a mate. Then she makes a nest on the beach. But not just any beach. Often it is the very same beach from whence she first came. God designed her to find her way home—home to a good, safe nesting spot. God designed her to fulfill a particular purpose—to continue the life of the sea turtle family.

1. The sea turtle has one purpose in its life—to survive and produce offspring. What life goals do you have?

2. The sea turtle spends almost all of its energy in the fulfillment of its goal of survival. Think about how you spent time this last week, or in the last month. Where did you spend most of your energy?

3. The female sea turtle can travel miles and miles away from the spot where she was born and stay away for years until she finds a mate. But then, even after all the time and distance, she manages to find her way back again. Many people travel far away from beliefs they had when they were younger. Have you ever felt distance growing between you and God? When does that seem to happen?

4. Imagine if the sea turtle had a motto or slogan. What would it be? (For example: “We’re gonna make it!” or “Home is where home always was.”) If you had to create a motto or slogan for yourself to describe your purpose in life, what would it be?
DISCOVERY ACTIVITY: MESSAGE SENT

Divide the group into two small, equal groups (team up participants if necessary to make an even number). One will be the Senders. One will be the Receivers. Spread out enough chairs for the Receivers to each have a seat slightly apart from each other (you may find you need a larger area for this activity) and a considerable distance from where the Senders will stand. (For example, if you are in a typical classroom, the Receivers could sit along one wall and the Senders could stand against the opposite wall.)

Go ahead and have the Receivers sit down.

Give the Senders paper, pencils, and Bibles. The Senders should together choose a message they all want to send (they must not let the Receivers see or hear this message at this point). This can be a message they create or a Bible verse or a song lyric—anything. It should be at least ten words long. Then the Senders must write one word at a time of this message on separate pieces of paper. When everyone has the words written down, each Sender then must decide how to send each of these words to the Receiver they are paired with. They cannot move from their spots. The Receivers also must remain in their seats. The Senders may choose to make paper airplanes, paper wads, or any other kind of paper missiles to send the words to their Receivers. When they start sending the words, the Receiver must try to catch each one. If one falls short or out of reach, the Receiver cannot get up to retrieve it. Receivers are allowed to try to interfere with other Senders by blowing or batting away the messages.

When all the words have been sent, see which Receiver has collected the most complete message. If time allows, discuss the activity. Which messages were aimed well? Which weren’t? What would you do differently if you could do it again? How did interference play a role?

BIBLE DISCOVERY

1. Read Acts 13:1-3. Remember that Saul had previously been a Jewish leader who persecuted the followers of Christ (see Acts 9:1, 2). As such, what is significant about the way in which Saul is sent off on his first missionary journey?

2. The Holy Spirit was with Barnabas and Saul and some amazing things happened. Read Acts 13:4-12. Compare this account with the story found in Acts 9:3-19. What is interesting to you about these two stories? How are the outcomes different for the characters involved? What are the outcomes for those who witnessed these events?

3. Read Acts 13:13-52. This is the first recorded sermon by Paul. It was common at the time for a visiting rabbi to be invited to give the sermon—and Saul/Paul was a known Jewish leader. However, this audience was probably not expecting the turn at the end of Paul’s speech to talking about the forgiveness found in Jesus. It was also common at the time for Christians to speak first in the synagogue before going among the Gentiles. Why do you think they might have wanted to address the Jewish believers first?

4. What themes do you notice in Paul’s sermon at Pisidian Antioch? Which parts might have been surprising for their audience—especially for the Jews, who considered themselves the chosen people of God?

5. In verse 45, we read that the Jews became jealous of the crowds Paul and Barnabas were drawing. Some scholars have noted that this does not refer to all the Jews as a whole, since we see that in verse 43 many of the Jews followed Paul and Barnabas and wanted to hear them speak. One could assume that verse 45 refers mainly to the wealthier Jewish leaders—people who stood to lose if their audience turned to follow Paul. What might they be afraid of losing?

6. Read Acts 14:1-7, where Paul and Barnabas experience more opposition. However, study these verses for all the ways in which God was with them. What ways can you find?

7. Read on to the end of Acts 14. Make a list of all the kinds of opposition Paul and Barnabas experienced and the obstacles to delivering their message about Jesus. Then list all the ways in which God was with them or the ways they were able to use an experience for God’s glory. What stands out to you about their experiences? How can this help you to be confident in telling God’s story to others?
FOCUS AND PRAYER
Read Matthew 28:19, 20. Here are some thoughts to guide your prayers:

• God, thank You for considering me worthy of carrying Your message. Thank You for helping me to do that, and for going with me.
• God, I need help finding people who need to hear about You. Show me in my everyday life where these people are. Give me a nudge when there’s a good moment to talk about You.
• God, I am grateful for Your presence in my life, but I don’t really know how to tell others about You. Help me know that, just as You have helped me with other hard things, You are more than able to help me find the words I need.
• God, I want to make sure I am a good ambassador for You. Help me to see areas in my life where I need correction. And help me to be patient as I study Your Word and learn it, so I can be able to speak easily and humbly about it to others.

DISCOVER SERVICE
Consider a creative way to spread the Word of God. Gather cans of food to donate to a local food pantry. Spend some time together as a group writing messages on blank circle sticker labels that you can then put on top of each of the cans. Messages can simply say things like "Jesus loves you" or "Jesus forgives." Or you can write Bible verses or verse references on each of the labels. Consider making this an ongoing ministry!

FAMILY DISCOVERY TIME
Use these conversation starters to continue this discussion at home:

• Paul and Barnabas were sent out to many places to talk about Jesus. What places do you go every day? Where do you have opportunities to talk about Jesus?
• Paul and Barnabas did not have an easy time telling about God’s story. They had lots of obstacles in their way—sometimes people even wanted to hurt them! What are some problems that get in the way of you talking about Jesus to others?
• When Paul spoke, people listened to him because he knew a lot about the history of the people he was talking to. Why is it important to get to know what people care about? How can that help them to hear the message you have?
• Let’s talk about some practical ways we can get better at telling God’s story this week. What ideas do you have?
• Remember that no matter what happens, God is with you wherever you go!