

Grapple Unit: Big, Big God

Grapple Question 3: What About When God Feels Far Away?

May 13th, 2018

Key Faith Foundation: Relying on Faith Rather Than Feelings

Key Scriptures: Psalms 9:10; 42:6-11; 89:19-26; Matthew 27:45-50; Acts 13:22

Bible basis for teachers

Psalms 9:10; 42:6-11; 89:19-26; Matthew 27:45-50; Acts 13:22

Grapple Question: What About When God Feels Far Away?

Key Faith Foundation: Relying on Faith Rather Than Feelings

Think about your relationship with God. Has it ever seemed that even when you're trying to be close to him, God moves away from you? Or have you ever felt as if it's hard to hear God? As preteens grow closer to God, one of the hardest things they'll have to learn is to trust that God is always with them, even when they don't feel him. Use this lesson to assure kids that God never leaves us. When God seems far away, it's an opportunity to seek God, pray, and dig into the Bible.

Psalms 89:19-26 and Acts 13:22 describe David as a man after God's own heart. God replaced Saul with David because he knew David would obey him. God promised to always be with and love David. Encourage kids to consider their relationships with God and how their actions and attitudes make them like or unlike David.

Psalms 42:6-11 seems to be a startling contrast to Psalm 89. The "man after [God's] own heart" cries out to God in discouragement. David asks why God has forgotten him and is almost overwhelmed with grief. But he concludes that he'll put his hope in God and praise him again. Remind kids that God keeps his promises and never leaves us. When God feels far away and we're discouraged, our response should be like David's: He continued to pray and praise God because he trusted God.

In Matthew 27:45-50, we see that even Jesus, before his death, cried out: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" When Jesus hung on the cross, God felt far away. Yet God didn't abandon Jesus. God was just waiting for the right time to raise Jesus and provide a way for us to live forever. Encourage kids to talk about God's perfect timing and how he'll never abandon us.

Psalms 9:10 says God doesn't abandon those who search for him. Talk about what it means to search for God. Remind kids they can trust that God will be there when they seek him through prayer and reading the Bible. God never leaves us or forsakes us!

understanding preteens

Kids this age face many discouragements, disappointments, and failures. They may wonder where God is and why he isn't helping them. Use this lesson to remind preteens that God is faithful, even when hope seems far away.

the lesson at a glance

LESSON SEQUENCE		WHAT KIDS WILL DO	SUPPLIES
1	grapple community (5 minutes)	Build relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DVD player • Christian music • music player • snacks
2	grapple games (10-15 minutes)	Choose two games to play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 white paper wads • 2 different-colored paper wads • a 32-gallon trash bag • packing tape • a quarter • large classroom items to create an obstacle course • 2 rolls of crepe-paper streamers • a ball
3	grapple time (10 minutes)	Kids will listen to a story that's hard to hear.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Amazing Story" (at the end of this lesson)
4	grapple team time (15 minutes)	Discover Bible verses that offer encouragement for when God seems far away.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bibles • pencils • copy of the Grapple Team Guide for each person
5	grapple team reports (10 minutes)	Report what they learned from the Bible passage they studied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paper • pencils
6	grapple prayer (5 minutes)	Choose a prayer option.	
7	grapple dare	Hear the Grapple dare.	

1 grapple community

Play Christian music as kids enjoy snacks and friendship. Give kids this discussion starter as they eat. Say: **Find out if anyone in our group has ever gotten lost or separated from their parents.** Play one of the three-minute countdowns (included on your *Grapple* DVD) to let kids know how much time remains.

2 grapple games

Say: **We're going to play a game, but you'll get to choose. Would you rather play Roundabout Relay** (see Games Guide), **where you race to pass paper wads back and forth? Or would you like to play Upkeep** (see Games Guide), **which involves batting around a giant trash bag?** Have kids vote on the game they'd like to play. Then lead kids in playing the game.

Say: **Now we'll play another game. Would you rather play Chain-Gang Relay** (see Games Guide), **where you go through an obstacle course while connected to another person? Or would you like to play Human Jacks** (see Games Guide), **where you must separate into groups quickly?** Have kids vote on the game they'd like to play. Then lead kids in playing the game.

3 grapple time

Lead the entire group in the following:

Tell kids an amazing, dramatic true story that will capture their interest. Read the "Amazing Story" (at the end of this lesson) about a mother who fought off a vicious dog—or choose a story of your own. In the middle of your story, move away as far as possible from kids and whisper the rest of the story. Speak in the same hushed tone no matter what kids say. Some will move closer to you, and others will complain. That's okay. Keep whispering.

What's your reaction to that true story?

In Pairs: **What emotions were you feeling as I told this story? What did you do while I told the story from far away? Why did you do that?**

Tell All: **What did you talk about with your partner?**

It's interesting to me that even though I was far away from you and you could barely hear me, you did different things. Some of you moved closer to me, some of you complained to others, some of you probably got mad or frustrated. But you know what? None of you left the room! That's amazing!

If kids still want to hear the last part of your story, tell it to them now.

I was far away, and you couldn't hear me. Think about your relationship with God. Have you ever felt like even when you're trying to be close to him, God moves away from you? Or have you ever felt that it's hard to hear God? It's pretty normal for people to feel that way sometimes. (Tell about a time you felt like God was far away and what you did during that time.)

Have you ever felt like God is close to some people in our group or church—but God is far away from you? Today we're going to grapple with that in our Grapple Team Time. What about when God feels far away?

4 grapple team time

Break into Grapple Teams. Encourage Grapple Team leaders to check in with kids about their week. Grapple Team leaders will facilitate discussion, using the Grapple Team Guide on at the end of this lesson.

5 grapple team reports

At the end of Grapple Team Time, have kids work with their team to choose one of the options below to report what they discovered.

Option 1: *Sample Prayers*

Come up with sample prayers that kids can pray when they feel like God is far away. Share these with everyone.

Option 2: *Poetry*

Share what you learned about what David did when God felt far away by writing a four-line poem.

Match Grapple Teams that chose Option 1 with Grapple Teams that chose Option 2. Have teams present their reports. (*Do this one team at a time if you have only two Grapple Teams.*)

6 grapple prayer

Read the Grapple Prayer options. Have the group choose one prayer option that everyone will do. Allow kids time to pray about what they discovered. Then close in prayer.

Option 1: *Not Alone Prayers*

Take the hand of a person on your Grapple Team. Close your eyes. Feel the warmth of the hand you hold. You're not alone. As a pair, thank God for never leaving you alone.

Option 2: *Seeing Prayers*

Look around your meeting space for things that remind you of God. For each thing you spot, talk to God about times he's felt far away and thank God for never leaving you and for giving you reminders of his presence.

7 grapple dare

Say: Sometimes in your relationship with God, you'll feel like God is far away. If you haven't already felt like that, you will. When that happens, remember what you did when I moved far away. You might have gotten mad and complained loudly. You might have moved closer. But you didn't leave the room. If you're a Christian, you're still a Christian when God feels far away. I dare you to speak up, talk to God, complain in prayer, tell a friend, and move closer to God. Don't give up on God—stay in the room with God by continuing to seek him! Remember the promise that God will never, ever, no matter what, abandon you if you search for him!

(Find the Parent Page for this lesson on the enhanced DVD. Have each child give a copy to his or her parents. Alternatively, send the file to parents via email.)

grapple team guide

3. What About When God Feels Far Away?

In your Grapple Team, use this guide to grapple with today's question.

One of the reasons God can feel far away is because we've sinned and need to restore our relationship with God by confessing that sin. Today, we're going to look at other times that God can feel far away.

In Pairs: Describe Christians you know who have a strong, growing relationship with God.

Read Psalm 89:19-26 and Acts 13:22.

What stands out about God's description of David? How would you describe David's relationship with God? How is your relationship like or unlike David's relationship with God?

Read Psalm 42:6-11.

How can this be the same David you read about above—what do you think happened? Have you ever felt as if God were far away? Explain. What evidence do you see in this Scripture that David hasn't given up on his relationship with God?

In Pairs: Why do you think that even strong Christians sometimes feel as if God is far away?

Read Matthew 27:45-50.

In what ways had God abandoned—or not abandoned—Jesus? How was Jesus' role as the Son of God affected by his feeling that God was far away? Explain.

Think back to the story your leader told in Grapple Time. On the next page, beside each thing that people may have done when your leader was far away, write something you could do in your relationship with God when you feel like God is far away.

When the leader was far away, kids...	When God feels far away, I can...
got mad and complained loudly.	tell God exactly how I feel.
waited for the leader to move closer.	
talked to a friend about their frustration.	
moved closer to the leader.	
Other:	
Other:	

Read Psalm 9:10.

What encouragement does this verse offer for when you feel as if God is far away?

grapple team reports

With your team, choose one of the options below to report what you discovered.

Option 1: *Sample Prayers*

Come up with sample prayers that kids can pray when they feel like God is far away. Share these with everyone.

Option 2: *Poetry*

Share what you learned about what David did when God felt far away by writing a four-line poem.

Amazing Story

I have the most amazing story for you. You're not going to want to miss it! It's about a vicious dog that attacked a mother as she held her 4-month-old baby.

Angela Silva stepped into her garage with her baby, Tom, in her arms. Suddenly an angry dog from next door charged them and lunged for the baby. The dog tried desperately to get the baby out of his mother's arms. He jumped up, leaning against Angela and pressing his chest against hers as he tried to reach the baby. The mother couldn't get away, and the dog was after her baby, but she thought quickly. She spotted a trash can with a garbage bag in it. She quickly put her baby on top of the garbage bag in the trash can and put the lid on it to keep the attacking dog away. Then she pushed the "panic" button on her keys.

That didn't stop the dog from trying to get the baby, though! You're not going to believe what happened next.

[Pause and move away as far as possible from the kids. Whisper the rest of the story. Speak in the same hushed tone no matter what kids say.]

This amazing mother got down on her knees between the dog and the trash can. She put her arms in front of her and swatted at the dog's snapping jaws. The dog bit her repeatedly. She screamed, but she kept her body between her baby and the dog.

Workers from across the street heard her screaming. They came running to help and used their power tools to chase the dog off. The mother had to have 50 staples and countless stitches in her arms, but her baby was unharmed. That's amazing!