

On Track Map

Topical Lesson: When Tragedy Happens

Elementary

Know Right:	God is our refuge and help in times of trouble.
Think Right:	"The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." Psalm 46:11
Do Right:	I will go to God in times of trouble.
Feel Right:	I can feel comforted when I go to God.

Tragedy and loss are heartbreaking and confusing. We don't understand why horrible things take place in our world, and we want God to make things right. When our world is dark and fills us with grief, we can find comfort knowing that God is near. Psalm 46:1 reminds us that, at all times, we can count on God as our refuge, strength, and help. This week we will be sharing this hope with our students. As you prepare, pray for God's perfect peace to fill you and your students. Ask Him to work in each of you through His Word. We know that our world is broken by sin; that means our hearts will continue to be broken by tragedy. During those times, may we find comfort in our God who is always with us.

Discover Time: Our Refuge

Goal: To introduce students to the concept of God being our **refuge**.

Note: These Discover Time activities can take place before or after the lesson.

Option 1: Art Station

Supplies:

- Cardstock posters with the Know Right point written in bubble letters (see appendix)
- Crayons
- Watercolor paints
- Paint brushes
- Water cups
- Music

Instructions for the DT Leader:

1. Before handing out posters, ask students, "Have you ever heard of the word **refuge**?" Invite students to explain what it means.
2. Explain: The purpose of a place of **refuge** is to keep people safe and protected from dangerous things. Today, we'll be learning about how God is our **refuge**.
3. Hand out posters and supplies. Explain that students should outline the bubble letters with their crayons, then paint watercolor inside the crayon outlines. The crayons will protect the paint from going outside of the letters and onto the rest of the paper. The crayon is like a refuge for the paint. It is protecting it.

4. Have music playing in the background as students work on their posters.
5. As students work, ask the following questions:
 - a. What kinds of things make you feel afraid?
 - b. What kinds of things make you feel sad?
 - c. When do you think it'd be helpful to see this poster?
 - d. Where will you put your poster?
 - e. What do you want to remember about God when you are afraid or sad?
6. At the end of Discover Time, leave students' posters laying flat so they can dry. Students should pick up their posters after class and take them home.

Option 2: Large open area

Supplies:

- Supplies for making forts (sheets, pillows, chairs, boxes, etc.)
- Painter's tape (divide the area into 2-3 regions so teams can have their own space to build)
- Tracker Tickets
- For older students:
 - Dividing line
 - Dodgeballs

Instructions for the DT Leader:

1. Quickly divide students into 2-3 teams, having them stand in their assigned team space.
2. Before explaining the activity, ask students, "Have you ever heard of the word **refuge**?" Invite students to explain what it means.
3. Explain: The purpose of a place of **refuge** is to keep people safe and protected from dangerous things. Today, we'll be learning about how God is our **refuge**. To help us start thinking about the idea of "refuge", we'll be having a fort-building competition! The team with the strongest fort will earn two Tracker Tickets each. (For older students, these forts will be put to the test at the end of our time with a quick game of dodgeball! The team with the strongest fort will earn two Tracker Tickets each.)
4. Give teams approximately 10 minutes to build their fort. After time is up, the classroom leaders should judge the forts based on the fort's durability and strength and give the winning team members two Tracker Tickets each. (Older students can have a three-minute dodgeball game. The goal for this game is to test the forts' strength. The winning team members will earn two Tracker Tickets each.)

Preparation for the Classroom

Pray: Pray that your students will truly feel the depth of God's love for them this week. Pray that they will seek Him as their ultimate source of comfort and strength when they encounter challenges in their lives. Pray also for the unsaved students in your classroom. Before we can go to God as our source of comfort and strength during hard times, we need to have a relationship with Him. That means we need to surrender to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Pray that the unsaved students in your classroom will have soft hearts and a clear understanding of the Gospel message and invitation, and they will respond to God's call on their lives.

Read: Psalm 46

Know Right: God is our refuge and help in times of trouble.

Lead Teacher's Notes:

- Please refer to the Children's Ministry Resource Bible: page 1544-1545 (Problems Children Face); page 1504 (Teaching Children from Troubled Homes).
- As you prepare to explain a difficult subject:
 - Spend a significant amount of time in prayer. Pray that God will make you sensitive to the students' needs and that the Holy Spirit will speak through you. Pray for peace that surpasses understanding (Philippians 4:7).
 - Be sensitive to the age of your students. Do not share anything that is not age appropriate; do not be specific about types of tragedy (unless you are using this lesson because your community has gone through a specific, recent tragedy). The focus of this lesson is on God's strength, presence, and comfort during difficult times, and it is not meant to scare children.
 - Read through the parent letter included with this lesson.
- During your lesson:
 - If your community is navigating a recent loss or tragic event, reassure students that it is normal to experience fear, anger, or sadness. These feelings are natural and appropriate in these circumstances. Model how to bring these feelings to God. Model how to express these feelings to loved ones. Do not shame kids for these feelings or minimize them. Kids need to be given places to process painful emotions; the church should be one of those places.
 - When teaching younger students: When young children experience difficult circumstances, they may feel (or literally be) unsafe. Make sure that you prioritize creating an environment that feels safe. Throughout the lesson, emphasize that they are safe during this conversation, and they are safe in this room.
 - When teaching older students: Make your classroom a space where students feel comfortable voicing their feelings. Listen intentionally to their worries and fears, and don't be afraid of not having an answer. If you don't have an answer for something, these statements may be helpful:
 - "I don't know, but this verse might help us find peace."
 - "Would you like me to do some research on this question? I can come back next week with some more information."

Creative Ideas for the Lesson:

1. Give students a blank sheet of paper to color as you teach. Invite them to illustrate the passage you are reading to them.
2. Frequently refer to the Feel Right poster throughout the lesson.
3. Create a "fortress/refuge" (a fort) inside your classroom, and have students sit in the fort as you teach.
4. For older students: Print out Psalm 46 in advance (one copy per student) and invite students to highlight, underline, and circle words that stick out to them as you study this passage together.
5. Creative ideas for specific portions of the lesson:
 - Use creative props in Wordless Book colors when sharing the Gospel.
 - Use snaps, stomps, and other sounds to create a storm in your classroom as you read verses 2-3.
 - During the Conclusion, as you discuss what you can know about God from these verses, create a banner to hang in your classroom as a reminder.
 - At the end of your lesson, listen to "Psalm 46 (Lord of Hosts)" by Shane & Shane.

Special Note for Directors and Lead Teachers: With this lesson, we recommend including a letter to send home to parents. Explain what was covered in this lesson, include Scripture references and book suggestions, and encourage parents to keep this letter somewhere safe so they can bring it out if their family or community ever encounters a tragedy. We've provided an example in the appendix.

Lesson Introduction for the Classroom

Lead Teachers ~ Connecting the DT to the Lesson: During Discover Time today, we learned about the word **refuge**. A refuge is a place where we can find safety and protection. God is our refuge!

Option 1: Today, we're going to discover some verses from the Bible that teach us that God is our refuge. This is something we really want to know and remember: God is always with us and is our place of protection. That's why we made those posters... to help us remember!

Option 2: You made some creative forts today. A fort is a place we go for protection. Another word for that is "refuge"! When we experience something scary or sad, we can go to God because He is our safe refuge.

Note: If students have experienced places of refuge that ended up being unsafe, remind them that, since sin can show up anywhere in our world, God is our only perfect refuge.

Pray: Have a student open your class in prayer. Remind students that when we pray we are talking to God. He always hears our prayers, and He loves it when we come to Him in prayer.

Find It: Have you heard of the book of Psalms? This Old Testament book is full of poems, worship songs, and prayers written by different people at different times. Some Psalms are joyful worship songs, some are written by someone who is scared and crying out to God, and some are remembering God's promises and how He rescues us from sin. The book of Psalms is in the Old Testament, right between Job and Proverbs.

Older students: The book of Psalms is part of what we call the 'Poetic Books' in the Bible. These books - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon - are full of wise teachings, songs, and poetry that help us learn about God and the world He created.

Timeline: We aren't learning about a specific event on our timeline today, but we are going to read verses written by people who lived during the Old Testament period. Which part of our timeline shows the Old Testament? *Have students point at the timeline.* Today we are going to be reading from Psalm 46.

Older students: Psalm 46 was written by the sons of Korah. These men were descendants of Levi, one of the sons of Jacob. Do you see Jacob and his twelve sons on our timeline? *Have students point at the timeline.*

Introduction to the Bible Lesson:

Let's look at the beginning of our timeline. In Genesis 1, God created the world. And the world was perfect! It was filled with beautiful, good things. But that didn't last long because sin entered the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. What is sin? (Anything we think, say, or do that is against God)

What is the consequence for sin? (Death) *See Romans 6:23.* That doesn't just mean that we will all eventually die; it also means that our world is broken. Sometimes people get sick, sometimes people do mean things to others, sometimes our favorite toy or game breaks, and, yes, sometimes people that we care about die. These things can be sad or scary. All the bad things in our world exist because of sin.

But there is hope. Jesus is God's rescue plan! He came to save us from sin. He is our Savior. *See 1 John 4:14; John 3:16; John 14:6.*

Every good thing in the world is from Jesus. Once Jesus saves us, we can trust Him to be with us and to comfort us. How do you know if you have been saved by Jesus? *Invite students to answer; use this opportunity to share the Gospel and give an invitation for salvation.*

Eventually, Jesus will come back and destroy sin and death. They will no longer exist! I want to read something to you. This is a promise from God's Word about when Jesus will destroy sin and death. **Read Revelation 21:4.** Someday there will be no more tears, scary things, or death. Everything will be perfect again, just like it was at the beginning when God created the world!

Until Jesus comes back, there will still be darkness in our world. Sin is still here, which means bad things will happen. In fact, when Jesus lived on the earth, He experienced loss and sadness too, even though He never sinned! His close friends, John the Baptist and Lazarus, died. There were wars, and Jesus Himself was hurt, mocked, and killed. Thankfully, there is a happy ending because Jesus rose again, and He promises to bring an end to all bad things. But in the meantime, when bad things do happen, we can know that Jesus truly understands what we are feeling. *If your community has recently experienced a tragedy, this would be an appropriate time to mention that loss.*

What do we do when we encounter something horrible or scary or sad? I want to introduce you to some Bible verses that can bring you comfort during those times.

Scripture Outline for the Classroom

Psalm 46

Even in sad, dangerous, or scary situations, God is our refuge and strength

Read Psalm 46:1-3

Recap: What do you think of when you hear the word "refuge"? *Allow students to answer.* When we are in a place of refuge, the purpose is to stay safe and protected from anything that might be dangerous or scary. These verses describe God as our refuge! They also say He is our strength and our ever-present help. What do you think of when you hear those words describing God? *Allow students to answer.*

I'm going to re-read verses 2-3. I want you to close your eyes and pretend you're watching a video of what I'm reading. *Re-read verses 2-3.* What did you picture as I read these verses? *Allow students to answer.* How does that make you feel? *Use the Feel Right poster to help them describe their feelings.*

In these verses, the writer is describing some very scary things, right? The writer is trying to tell us that when it feels like everything around you is falling apart, God is still strong and safe, and He promises to be with you always. God knows how you feel, and He will never leave you! What Top 12 verse does that remind you of? (Joshua 1:9)

God brings peace and justice

Read Psalm 46:4-6

Older students: What do you think these verses mean when we read “nations are in uproar” and “kingdoms fall”? (Wars, conflict, fighting, uncertainty, etc.) Do these kinds of things happen in our world today? (Yes) *If appropriate, reference current events that older students are aware of that are similar to these verses.*

All students: Even during scary situations, like when people fight or when there are wars, where is God? *Invite students to answer; guide them to look at verses 4-5.* God is still there, and He promises to bring peace and justice! There will not always be fighting, and God will always be in control.

God has always been the same and is always with us

Read Psalm 46:7

Recap: Who is the God of Jacob? *Allow students to answer.* Let's look back at the timeline. Did Jacob worship the same God that we worship today? (Yes) God is always the same. He has always been with His people, and He promises to always be with His people. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you are one of His people!

When I read this verse, I feel protected, safe, and thankful. How do you feel when you hear this verse? *Use the Feel Right poster and invite students to answer.*

God is exalted; this means He is victorious

Read Psalm 46:8-10

Recap: These verses describe how God is victorious. What does the word victorious mean? *Invite students to answer.* When we describe God as victorious, we mean that He always defeats sin. He is the most powerful and is always in control. Isn't it amazing that we also get to know and love our victorious God? When we go to God in prayer, we can know that He has the power to hear our prayers and to answer them in the right way.

In verse 10 God says, “Be still, and know that I am God...”

Why do you think God wants us to be still and know that He is God? *Invite students to answer.* When we slow down and remember who God is, we can be filled with courage and hope. We remember that we aren't alone. God is always with us!

Older students: Let's practice that right now! I'm going to give you about a minute to be still and remember what you've learned about God. *The goal of this exercise is to give students the opportunity to peacefully meditate on Scripture. When done, ask students to describe how they feel (use the Feel Right poster to initiate this conversation).*

God promises to be with us

Read Psalm 46:11

Recap: This verse sounds familiar. Can you find where we read this before? (Verse 7). When something in the Bible is repeated, that means we need to pay very close attention. What do you think we need to learn from this verse? *Invite students to answer.* Even in the darkest, saddest, scariest places, God promises to be with us. He has always been the same, and He will always be the same.

Conclusion:

What are some true things we can know about God from these verses? (God is with us, God is powerful, God is strong, God is our fortress/shelter/refuge, etc.)

Do Right and Feel Right:

These are important things to remember, especially when the world is dark and when bad things happen. We don't usually understand why bad things happen; even if we ask questions, we may never really figure out why. But, even if we feel confused or afraid, we can remember that God promises to be with us and to comfort us.

Optional, for older students: 1 Corinthians 13:12 says that right now, while we still live here in our broken world, we only understand things a little bit. This verse says it's kind of like a foggy mirror – when you look in a foggy mirror, you can't see everything. This verse says that in the future, when we are with God, we will understand everything clearly. For now, we can trust that God knows everything and has the best plan for us.

Pray together to close.

Hand out the letter to parents as students are picked up at the end of class.

Review Questions: What did you discover today?

1. What does the word "refuge" mean? (A place of safety/protection)
2. God is our _____ and _____. (Refuge, strength)
3. From which book of the Bible did we read today? (Psalms)
4. Why is our world broken? (Because of sin)
5. What are some things we know about God from the verses we studied today? (God is with us, God is powerful, God is strong, God is our fortress/shelter/refuge, etc.)