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Moses and the Burning Bush

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-4:17

Theme: God calls ordinary people for extraordinary purposes

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Title: "When the Way Looks Impossible, God Still Makes a Way!" (Exodus 14:1-31) Hook (Engage the Kids): "Imagine standing at the edge of a vast, dark sea, where waves crash, soldiers chase you, and everyone else screams, 'Run faster!' What would you do? That's exactly what Moses told the Israelites in Exodus 14. God often lets us see the impossible first... but His promise is always: 'I'll make a way.'" Key Truth + Real Question: God didn't just show them the way, they had to trust Him while standing in the middle of it. One junior higher might ask: "But what if I'm too scared to step out? Or what if I'm stuck like the Israelites, like, forever?" That's okay! God doesn't call us to fix our fears, He calls us to follow Him when the road is messy. Life Application: Think of a time you felt trapped, like a dead-end job, a broken friendship, or a dream you thought was out of reach. God's power isn't just about escape; it's about new paths. He'll never let you cross a dry riverbed with no water. But if you're willing to trust, He'll turn the impossible into a promise (like turning Pharaoh's army into a wall, no, not a wall of water... but a wall of chaos that gets crushed!). Closing Challenge (Encourage Boldness): "Today, ask God to show you one 'impossible' obstacle you've been carrying. Then, take one step forward, even if it's just moving toward His answer. Because the Red Sea wasn't empty before God parted it... it was waiting for them to say, 'Help!'" Why It Works for Volunteers: - Short & Honest: No fluff, focuses on their fears and God's faithfulness. - Interactive: Ends with a personal prompt (encourages prayer/volunteer discussion). - Hopeful: Ends with a win, God's power isn't just for past heroes, but today's heroes. Bonus Tip: Pair with a short video clip (e.g., 20-second footage of a river splitting) or a dramatic reenactment (with a red tarp for "water") to make it vivid!

Bible Story

Title: "God's Unshakable Promise" (A Junior High Sunday School Lesson from Exodus 14)

Pharaoh had changed his mind. After letting God's people leave Egypt, he wasn't happy. He sent more slaves to chase them, then more ships to block their escape. The Israelites were trapped between the sea on one side and Pharaoh's army on the other, their hearts pounding. They whispered among themselves: "Maybe God forgot us. Maybe this was a mistake." But Moses, standing beside them, held up his staff and said, "Don't be afraid. God is still here." The people groaned, how could God help them now? The water in front of them stretched as far as the eye could see, while waves crashed against the backs of their fleeing enemies. If God didn't act, their future would be just another dark night in slavery.

Then, something unexpected happened. The wind howled, and the sea parted, not like a river flowing freely, but like a wall of water opening up! The Israelites ran through it, their feet sinking slightly in the muddy depths. God wasn't just giving them a way out; He was proving He could do more than they dared imagine. The army that had chased them followed straight into the water, drowning as the sea closed behind them. Pharaoh's pride had been their downfall. The people gasped, clutching each other in awe. "How did this happen?" Moses didn't have an answer, only God did. But they knew: this wasn't just a rescue. It was proof that God's promises weren't just words; they were powerful.

Years later, when the Israelites were scattered and afraid again, they would look back at this moment and wonder why God allowed slavery in the first place. They would ask, "Why did He let Pharaoh's army kill them?" But Moses would remind them: God didn't abandon them at the last moment. He led them through the sea, not just around it. The Egyptians were defeated, but the Israelites still needed guidance for what came next, land, freedom, and trust. The story wasn't over; it was just the beginning of their journey home.

Why This Story Matters Today: Pharaoh's army wasn't just a battle, it was a test of trust. When life feels like we're being chased by our own fears or circumstances, we too often assume God is behind us, not with us. But God doesn't always rescue us around the hard parts, He often brings us through them. The Israelites' fear made them doubt, but their courage to follow God's leading (even when the path seemed impossible) gave them victory. The same is true for us: God's greatest plans sometimes involve obstacles, but they're never impossible. The question isn't "Will God save me?" but "Will I trust Him when the waves rise?" Let's pray today that we'll have the same faith as Moses, faith that believes God's promises are stronger than our fears.

Life Application: - When you're afraid, ask: What's God's next step for me? Sometimes the way out isn't a smooth escape. - When people doubt you, remember: God doesn't call the brave, He calls those who will run through the sea with Him. - When life feels like a trap, hold onto this truth: No enemy can defeat what God has already won.

Key Verse

Exodus 3:10

The Story Behind the Verse: Imagine you're standing at the edge of a huge, scary river, like the Nile in Egypt, with your whole family. The Pharaoh's army is coming after you, chasing you down, and it feels like you've lost control. That's how the Israelites must've felt as they fled Egypt. God didn't give them an easy way out, He made them choose to keep going, even when it looked impossible. But here's the truth: God doesn't just let you win, He fights for you! The verse says: "The Lord will fight for you; you just need to stay calm and trust Him." **Real Questions, Real Answers:** "What if I'm scared? How do I 'be still' when things are crazy?" God understands. Being "still" isn't about ignoring fear, it's about leaning into Him when you're overwhelmed. Imagine holding a heavy backpack: you don't throw it away because it's heavy; you trust that someone stronger will carry it for you. For you, that's God. Even when your knees feel weak, He's already on the battlefield, fighting for you. "Does this mean I never have to work hard? What if I mess up?" No! This isn't about laziness. It's about prioritizing God when things get tough. Think of it like training for a race: You don't run all the time, you rest, trust your coach, and know the race will be won when you're ready. God's work isn't in your exhaustion; it's in your obedience. **Life Application:** The "Stillness" Test Next time you're stressed, maybe about school, friends, or even a big decision, ask: "Am I trusting God, or am I trying to fix everything myself?" His answer isn't in your hands, but in His. Choose to be still. Let Him fight. And when you do? You'll find something amazing: peace, not perfection. **Final Thought:** God doesn't ask us to be brave, He asks us to believe. And when we do? The impossible becomes possible.

Activities

Activity 1:

Students design and navigate a mini obstacle course representing the challenges Moses faced in leading Israel through the Red Sea, testing how God's promises sustain them in difficult times.

1. Set the Scene (2 min)
2. Read Exodus 14:13, 14 aloud: "Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid! Stand still, and see the victory of the Lord today...'"
3. Ask: "When have you felt stuck like the Israelites? How did God help you 'cross the hard place'?"
4. Create Obstacles (3 min per team of 3, 5)
5. Divide students into small groups. Each group picks one challenge from the Red Sea scene (e.g., "crossing dry land" = stepping on paper, "water level drops" = climbing over plates, "enemy attack" = dodging a cardboard "Pharaoh's army").
6. Write the challenge on a card and draw a simple picture.
7. Race Through the "Wilderness" (5 min)
8. Line up teams at the starting point. Give them 2 minutes to solve one obstacle before moving on.
9. Discuss afterward: "How did God guide Moses? How can we trust Him in our 'Red Seas'?"
10. Reflect & Apply (3 min)
11. Write down a time God helped you "cross a hard place" on a slip of paper. Share with a partner or the group.
- 2.

Activity 2:

Students decorate a "faith jar" to symbolize God's unwavering promise to deliver, then share how they've relied on Him in tough moments.

1. Read the Promise (3 min)
2. Read Exodus 14:21: "The Lord drove the sea back... and turned it into dry land." Ask: "What's a 'promise' you trust in God for?"
3. Decorate Your Bottle (5 min)
4. Each student decorates their bottle to represent God's deliverance. Ideas:
5. Draw waves + dry land.
6. Write: "God's promise is stronger than my fear!"
7. Include a "red sea" symbol (e.g., a sunset or sunburst).
8. Share Your "Faith Bottle" (5 min)
9. Students take turns holding up their bottle and sharing:
10. "This bottle reminds me of when..." (e.g., "I prayed through a test, and God gave me wisdom.")
11. Discuss: "How does God's promise change your perspective when things feel impossible?"
12. Pray Together (2 min)
13. Close by praying for each other to trust God in their "Red Seas."
14. Why These Work:
15. Obstacle Course: Teaches teamwork and problem-solving like Israel's journey.
16. Faith Jar: Visualizes God's promises as tangible, empowering reminders.
17. Both activities use simple supplies, spark dialogue, and tie back to real-life faith challenges. Adjust timing based on group energy! Would you like adaptations for larger groups or quieter classes?

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to spark meaningful reflection and conversation for junior high students about Crossing the Red Sea, a story of God's power, courage, and unexpected ways of helping us. Each question is rooted in real-life struggles and invites students to explore the story in a way that feels personal and applicable.
- 1. The Pharaoh's Pursuit vs. Moses' Fear
 - "Moses and the Israelites were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the sea, and they were terrified. They cried out to God, 'What if we die?' (Exodus 14:11). But God told Moses, 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart so he'll give chase.' Then, at the last second, He parted the water!
 - What if you were stuck in a tough situation, like a big test, a messy fight with a friend, or even a fear of failing, and someone told you, 'This will get worse before it gets better'? How would you respond? Why do you think God sometimes makes things seem impossible before He opens the way?"
 - Why this works:
 - This question invites students to connect their own fears (real or imagined) to the Israelites' panic. It also introduces the idea of divine timing and God's use of unexpected obstacles to get our attention.
- 2. Trusting When the Path Doesn't Look Clear
 - "The Israelites crossed on dry land, but when they looked back, Pharaoh's army was right behind them. They were supposed to be celebrating God's victory, until they saw the enemy closing in! What do you think they felt like?
 - Later, when they arrived at the promised land, they still had to trust God to provide food, water, and protection. Do you think some of them still doubted? Why or why not? What's a time in your life when you felt like God had to 'part the sea' for you, even if you didn't see the way yet?"
 - Why this works:
 - This question ties the story to life's "what-ifs" and encourages students to reflect on moments they almost trusted God but hesitated. It's a gentle nudge toward perseverance.
- 3. Why Does God Use Such a Big Deal for Small Things?
 - "The Israelites were running from slavery, and God didn't just send an angel to guide them, He made a miracle in front of their enemies! Pharaoh's whole army drowned in the sea. That's a huge deal. But in everyday life, miracles often look smaller, like a friend showing up at the right time, a family prayer that changes a fight, or just getting through a tough day without falling apart.
 - Do you think God's power is just for big events, or can it work in quiet, everyday ways too? Give an example from your own life (or someone you know) where something 'small' felt like a 'parting of the sea.'"
 - Why this works:
 - This question bridges the biblical miracle with life's smaller victories, helping students see God's faithfulness in both. It also invites them to share stories they might not usually talk about.
- 4. The Cost of Trusting God
 - "After crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites sang a song of praise (Exodus 15)! But was it all smooth sailing after that? Nope. They still faced challenges, drought, rebellion, and God's discipline. Sometimes, God's 'ways' aren't what we expected. He led them out of Egypt, but He also led them through the wilderness for 40 years.
 - What's one 'way' God has led you that wasn't what you hoped for? How did you respond, did you complain, trust, or maybe both? Why do you think God sometimes tests our faith with 'hard' ways?"
 - Why this works:
 - This question forces students to look at the bigger picture: God's promises aren't always about instant success but about growing us. It's a lesson in patience and perseverance.
 - How to Use These Questions:

- Pair with Scripture: Read Exodus 14:10-31 aloud before discussing.
- Encourage Sharing: Ask volunteers to share their thoughts (keep it light and supportive).
- Connect to Life: Remind students that God's power isn't just for Israelites, it's for them too!
- Would you like any adjustments to fit a specific setting (e.g., small group, classroom, family devotions)?

Prayer Focus

Teacher: "Alright, let's pause for a minute, just like Moses did when the Israelites were trapped between the sea and the Egyptians, we're going to ask God to show us how to move forward in faith. This week, we're looking at how God doesn't just help us when things look impossible, He opens the way when we trust Him. So, let's pray together like we're standing right there in the desert, hearts heavy but hands open." (The teacher pauses, looks at the class, and begins softly:) "God, we're like those kids in the Bible, stuck, scared, and wondering if You really will make a way. Some days, the 'Red Sea' feels like our problems: school stress, friend drama, or just feeling like we're stuck in a cycle we can't escape. But You, oh God, You're the One who parts the waters, not because we're perfect, but because You're bigger than our fears. Help us believe like Moses believed: that even when the path looks hopeless, You're the One who holds the oars. And when we're ready, teach us to trust You so we don't get stuck waiting, but move forward with courage. Amen." Why it works for 12, 14-year-olds: - Relatable fear: Uses "Red Sea" as a metaphor for real struggles (e.g., anxiety, peer pressure). - Humble honesty: Acknowledges their doubts ("stuck, scared") instead of pretending to be perfect. - Action step: Ends with "move forward", a call to apply faith now, not just admire it. - Bible hook: Connects to Exodus 14:10, 11 ("Why have you brought us out into this wilderness?"), a question kids know they've asked. Life app: This prayer leaves room for discussion later: "Where have you felt God 'part the waters' this week? How can we trust Him more?"

>> Missions Spotlight

The Pacific Island nations have a deep connection to the ocean. Missionaries working in Fiji and Tonga have found that the Red Sea story resonates powerfully with island peoples who understand the sea's power and God's sovereignty over it.

-> To the Cross

The Israelites were trapped, the sea before them, the army behind. God parted the water and made a way through. At the cross, God made a way for us to be free from sin when there was no other way. Baptism pictures this same truth (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).