

Children's Lessons for Life Groups

All-In-One lessons for kids ages 4-12

from

All-In-One Sunday School, Volumes 2 & 3

Lesson 4



What a Catch!

4

LESSON AIM

To help kids understand that ★ Jesus helps us when we're discouraged.

Teacher Tip

This lesson works well with an intergenerational class. You may wish to invite whole families to join you for this session.



OBJECTIVES

Kids or families will

- ✓ brainstorm situations in which they feel discouraged,
- ✓ learn that the risen Jesus helped his discouraged disciples,
- ✓ discover that Jesus always has the power to help, and
- ✓ commit to trusting God in every situation.

YOU'LL NEED

- a rope
 - fish-shaped crackers*
 - a Bible
 - markers
 - scissors
 - transparent tape
 - newsprint
 - balloons
 - photocopies of the "Sailing Through Discouragement" hand-out (p. 97)
 - photocopies of the "Folded Fish-Basket" handout (p. 98)
- *Always check for allergies before serving snacks.*

BIBLE BASIS

John 21:1-14

In Jesus' third post-resurrection appearance to a group of his disciples, he appeared on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after several of the disciples had spent a long night fishing without success. The disciples saw a stranger on the shore who advised them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. When the

wearily accommodated the stranger, their net immediately bulged with a catch so large they couldn't haul it back into the boat. Taking a closer look at the helpful stranger, John said, "It is the Lord!" After struggling to bring their boat and miraculous catch of fish to shore, the disciples found that Jesus had made a fire and prepared a welcome breakfast of warm bread and grilled fish.

I'm always intrigued by the fact that the disciples made that one last toss of the net. Had I been in the boat, I probably would have sneered, "Yeah, right!" and rowed away. Jesus always helps us, but always in his time, in his way, and often after a great deal of effort on our part. Compare a night of fruitless fishing to a math concept that can't be conquered, an enemy who won't become a friend, or a hoped-for job that just doesn't materialize. Perseverance and faith are the qualities God nurtures in us as we hang on and keep trying, believing that God will make all things beautiful in his time.

Ephesians 4:29

Have you ever noticed how certain individuals generate a strong "personal atmosphere"? Some people radiate enthusiasm, good humor, sympathy, or a sense of calm. Others reflect pessimism, skepticism, or tension. This Scripture challenges us to be encouragers—positive people who consciously do and say what will build up others in the body of Christ.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS

How many times have you seen an art project that started with enthusiasm but ended up crumpled in a wastebasket? a hiker who couldn't wait to start up the trail but before long wanted to give up and turn back? a new school year marked by fresh determination that soured by the end of September? a long-saved-for purchase given up in favor of a lesser item that granted more immediate gratification? Ah, the frustrations of childhood!

Children lack the benefit of experience and the perspective it offers. That's why adults who are willing to offer help and encouragement are so crucial to kids' early successes. What a difference one compassionate, caring adult can make to a child who feels utterly hopeless when faced with taking a math test, making friends in a new place, or performing in a recital. As a teacher, that's just the kind of difference you're making in kids' lives each week. Congratulations and bless you! Children who've learned that they can count on help and encouragement from adults find it easy to put that same kind of trust in God. Use this lesson to help kids understand that Jesus is always there for them, and that unlike ordinary encouragers, he has unlimited power to help.

The Lesson

ATTENTION GRABBER

Poor Kitty

As kids arrive, have them help you place chairs in a circle. You'll need one less chair than there are people in class.

Say: **We're going to begin today with a really funny game called Poor Kitty. The person who's "It" has to kneel in front of someone who's sitting in a chair and meow. The person in the chair has to keep a perfectly straight face; pat It on the head; and say, "Poor Kitty." If the person in the chair cracks a smile or laughs, he or she is It. If the person doesn't smile, It goes to someone else and meows.**

Choose someone who's funny and outgoing to be It first. It may purr, make funny faces, meow several times, or rub his or her head on a player's knee. If you have time, play until everyone has had a chance to be It. Give a round of applause to the people who best resisted the impulse to smile. Then ask:

◆ **In real life, what makes you laugh and smile?** (Jokes; when something good happens; when I see something funny on TV.)

◆ **When is it hard to make people smile?** (When bad things happen; when they're sick or tired.)

Say: **Turn to a partner and tell about a time you were really discouraged and didn't smile much at all.** Allow a couple of minutes for partners to share.

Then say: **Our Bible story today is about a bunch of really discouraged fishermen. Raise your hand if you've ever gone fishing and gotten discouraged.** Pause to let kids briefly share their experiences. **The fishermen we're going to hear about just happened to be Jesus' disciples. They discovered in quite a unique way that ★ Jesus helps us when we're discouraged.**

BIBLE STUDY

What a Catch! (John 21:1-14)

Say: **To get ready for our story, we need a fishing boat, a big net, fishermen, and some fish.**

Using a length of rope, have kids help you outline the shape of a boat in the middle of the floor. The outline should be large enough to hold several kids. Recruit a third of your kids to be the "fishermen," Jesus' disciples. Have the fishermen stand near the boat. Have another third of your kids be the "net." Instruct that group to join hands and sit on the floor near the boat. Have the remaining kids be the "fish" and huddle on the opposite side of the

boat from the net.

When everyone is in place, say: **We need to do one more thing before we begin the story. Fish and net groups, your part goes like this: "Ain't no fish, ain't no fish, ain't no fish here in this sea."** Have the fish and net groups use a rap beat and lots of enthusiasm as they repeat their line.

Fishermen, your part goes like this: "Baaad luck, baaad luck, sure seems like bad luck to me." Have the fishermen repeat their line. **Listen carefully and act out your part in the story. When I point to you, be ready to say your line. Here we go!**

One night, not long after Jesus had been crucified, a somber Peter said, "I'm going out to fish." Several other disciples said, "We'll go, too." So they all got aboard their fishing boat. Cue the fishermen to get into the boat. They pulled a big net into the boat, too, because they planned to catch a lot of fish. Signal the fishermen to "pull" the net group into the boat.

At 11 o'clock, they threw their net into the water. Signal the net group to jump out of the boat. But when they dragged the net back toward the boat, it was empty.

Signal the net group to jump into the boat and then shout along with the fish, "Ain't no fish, ain't no fish, ain't no fish here in this sea." Have the fishermen shake their heads and say, "Baaad luck, baaad luck, sure seems like bad luck to me."

At midnight, the fishermen threw their net into the water again. Signal the net group to jump out of the boat. But when they dragged the net back toward the boat, it was empty. Signal the net group to jump into the boat. Have the fish and net groups repeat their line; then have the fishermen repeat theirs.

Repeat this sequence for 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock, and 5 o'clock.

At 6 o'clock the fishermen were tired and discouraged. But then a stranger hailed them from the shore. "Friends," he called, "have you caught any fish?"

"No!" the discouraged fishermen called back.

"Throw your net on the other side of the boat!" the stranger shouted.

So the fishermen tossed the net on the other side of the boat. Have the net group scamper into the boat and then jump out the other side. Suddenly the net bulged with fish! Have the fish group "swim" over and jump into the net.

Say: **Fish and net, say, "Check out the fish, check out the fish, check out the fish here in this sea!"** Pause for the fish and net groups to say their new line. **Fishermen, say, "Good luck, good luck, sure seems like good luck to me."** Pause for the fishermen to say their line.

The net was so full of fish that the fishermen couldn't even pull it back into the boat. Have the fishermen struggle to "pull" the net and fish, and then give up. Then one of the fishermen pointed

at the stranger on the shore. "That's no stranger," he shouted excitedly. "It's the Lord!"

Sure enough, it was Jesus. And he had built a fire and had a hot, tasty breakfast ready for his tired, hungry disciples. And I have a tasty treat ready for you for doing such a good job with the Bible story.

Pour fish-shaped crackers into each child's cupped hands. Have the fishermen, net, and fish groups form separate circles and discuss these questions.

◆ **What do you think the disciples thought after fishing all night and catching nothing?** (They were tired; discouraged.)

◆ **If you had been in that boat, would you have wanted to toss the net out once more? Why or why not?** (Yes, because I don't like to give up; no, because I would've been sick of trying.)

◆ **Why do you think Jesus helped his disciples make this miraculous catch of fish?** (So they would still have faith in his power; because he loved them and didn't want them to be discouraged.)

Say: ★ **Jesus helps us when we're discouraged, just as he helped his disciples long ago. Let's find out what's discouraging to you and how Jesus can help us get through discouraging times.**

LIFE APPLICATION

Balloon Fish

Have kids remain in their three groups. Give each group markers, scissors, transparent tape, and a sheet of newsprint. Give a balloon to each child. Have kids blow up and tie off their balloons and then draw fish faces on them.

Say: **Now set your balloon fish behind you for a moment. Choose a recorder for your group—someone who can write quickly. You'll also need a Bible reader and a reporter. Pause for groups to choose people for those roles. In just a moment I'll ask you to brainstorm with your group all the discouraging things you can think of—things such as getting the measles or getting cut from a team. At the end of two minutes, we'll share our lists of discouragements. Go!**

After two minutes, ask reporters to share their groups' lists.

Say: **Wow! That was terrible to listen to. I think we should stop and sob for a few seconds. Lead the group in making loud sobbing sounds. That's better. Now take your fish balloon and a marker. Write on your fish the three things you heard that would be the most discouraging to you. You may write things that have actually happened to you or things you hope never will happen to you. Some of you may need to help the younger kids write on their balloons. After you've all written on your balloons, tell your**

Teacher Tip

If you have adults in your class, encourage groups to list things that are discouraging to adults as well as to children.



group what you wrote and why.

Allow three or four minutes for sharing. Then say: **Enough of this doom and gloom! Now it's time to hear the good news straight from the Bible.**

Distribute photocopies of the "Sailing Through Discouragement" handout. Have the readers in each group read aloud the three verses on the handout.

Then say: **These promises from the Bible can help us sail right through discouraging times. You'll notice that these verses are printed on fish tails and fins. I'd like you to cut them out and carefully tape them to your balloon fish. They'll help you remember that ★ Jesus helps us when we're discouraged.**

Demonstrate how to cut through the × in the fish tail and slip the tied end of the balloon through the cut. Kids may want to curl the strips of the tail and fin pieces around a pencil. Then show kids how to use tape to attach the fins.

Say: **It's great to know that ★ Jesus helps us when we're discouraged. We can count on other people in God's family to encourage us, too. Let's see how that works.**

Have kids hold their balloons and form a circle. Say: **When I call out "fish," toss your balloons in the air if you were in that group. Then all of us will make sure those balloons stay in the air. We'll keep bopping them and try not to let any balloons fall to the ground. When I call out "nets," the members of that group will toss their balloons in the air. Finally I'll call out "fishermen," and the fishermen will toss their balloons in the air. Remember: We want to keep all the balloons in the air, so bee-bop-balloon-bop for all you're worth!**

Call out "fish," then "nets," then "fishermen" at 15-second intervals. Keep the balloon bop going for about a minute and a half. Then call time and have kids retrieve their own balloons, sit down, and take three deep breaths. Have a volunteer read Ephesians 4:29. Then ask:

◆ **What does this Bible verse tell us to do?** (Encourage each other; build each other up.)

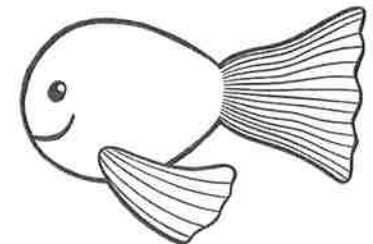
◆ **Why do you think it's important to do that in God's family?** (Because we need each other; because God wants us to love each other as much as we love ourselves.)

◆ **How was what we did in this game like what this Bible verse tells us to do?** (We helped each other stay "up"; we tried to keep each other's balloons from falling.)

Say: **It's great to have brothers and sisters in Christ who we can count on to encourage us. It doesn't matter if you're older or younger or somewhere in the middle; a kind word of encouragement from you can really help someone get through a tough time. Let's have fun making an encouraging gift.**

Teacher Tip

You may want to photocopy the "Sailing Through Discouragement" handout on neon yellow or orange paper. If you use white paper, encourage students to use colored pencils or markers to add colorful swirls or gradations of color to the fins and tails before they add them to the balloon fish.



Teacher Tip

Be sure to collect and discard all broken balloon pieces promptly to prevent choking hazards.



COMMITMENT

Teacher Tip

Teach a helper or two how to make the fish basket before the rest of the students arrive. Then your helpers can coach other students who feel hesitant about doing origami.



A Basket of Encouragement

Before class make a sample fish basket from the “Folded Fish-Basket” handout to show the kids.

Have kids re-form their three groups. Distribute photocopies of the handout. Display your finished basket, and then help kids cut out and fold their own. You’ll enjoy the “oohs” and “ahs” when kids discover that pulling on the pointed ends of the folded pattern makes a basket suddenly appear!

Circulate among kids as they work. Pour fish-shaped crackers into the baskets as kids complete them. Ask:

◆ **How do you think a cheerful heart can be like good medicine?** (A happy outlook makes me feel better; smiles help, no matter what goes wrong.)

◆ **Why do you think God wants us to depend on him when we’re discouraged?** (Because he knows the bigger plan; because it keeps me close to him.)

◆ **What does it mean to you that God is on your side?** (That I don’t need to be afraid; that God will help me; that things will turn out for the best.)

◆ **How will the fish-shaped crackers in your basket remind you that ★ Jesus helps us when we’re discouraged?** (I’ll remember how he helped the disciples after their long night of fishing; I’ll remember that Jesus can do anything and that he loves me just as he loved his disciples.)

Say: ★ **Jesus helps us when we’re discouraged. Sometimes we find encouragement in God’s Word, as with the verses printed on your baskets. Sometimes we find encouragement in prayer or in the way God makes things happen. And sometimes we find encouragement in each other.**

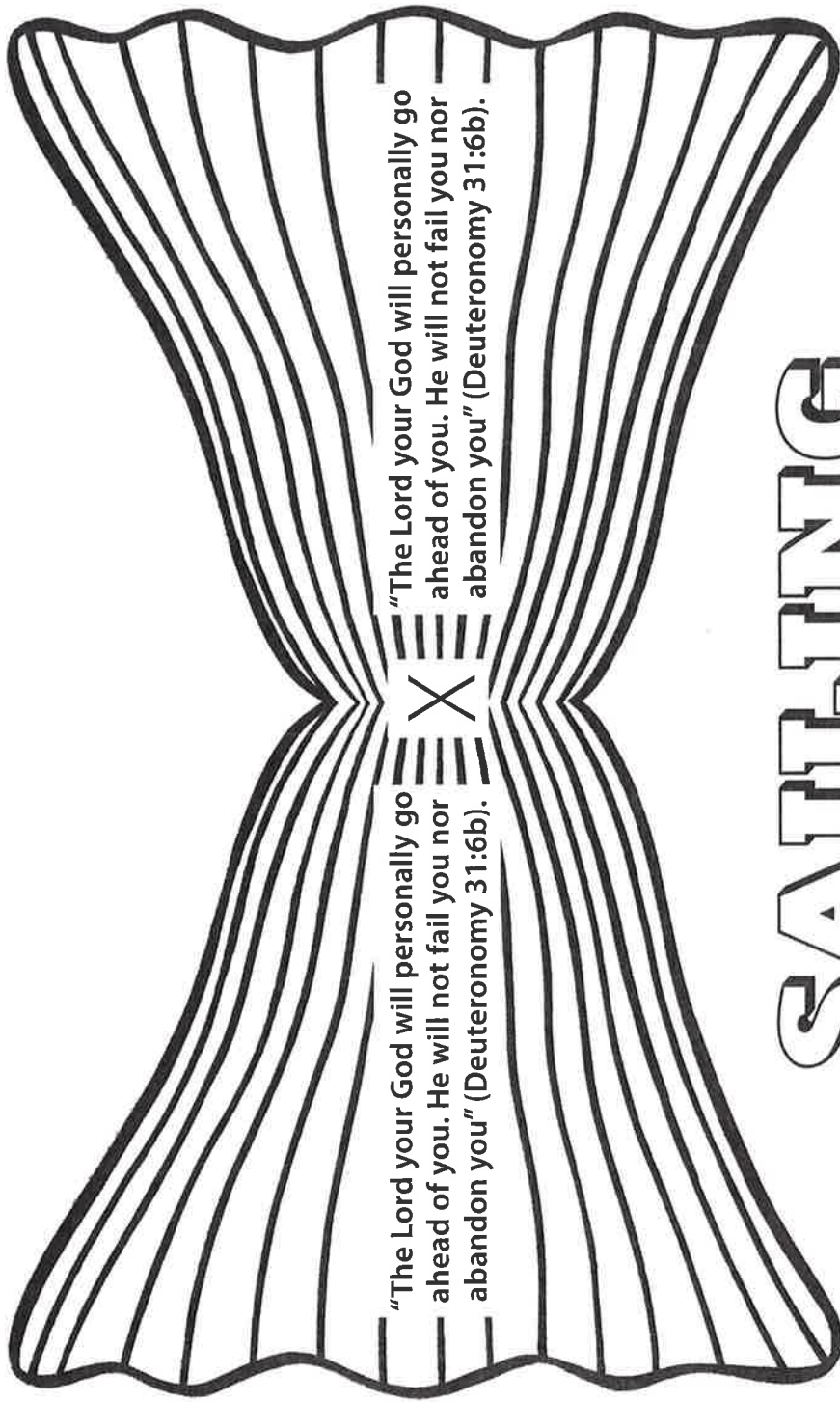
CLOSING

Baskets of Prayer

Have kids gather in a circle with their completed baskets. Say: **Let’s be silent for a moment. I’d like you to decide if you’re going to keep your basket because you need encouragement or if you’re going to give it away. Then I’ll close with a prayer.**

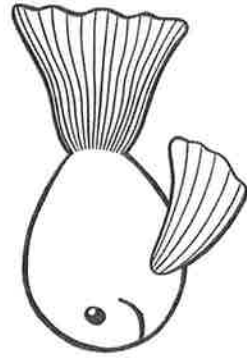
Pause for a few moments. Then pray: **Dear Jesus, thank you for the many ways ★ you help us when we’re discouraged. Help us to have cheerful hearts and to encourage each other, too. Amen.**

Remind kids to take their baskets and balloon fish with them. You may want to set out extra “Folded Fish-Basket” handouts for kids who want to make extra baskets to give away.



SAILLING

THROUGH DISCOURAGEMENT



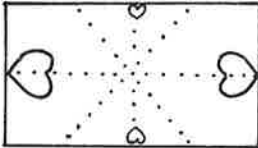
FOLDED FISH BASKET

1. Cut out the fish basket on the heavy lines. With the pattern facing you, fold it in half the long way; then open.

2. Fold forward from A to B; then open.

3. Fold forward from C to D; then open.

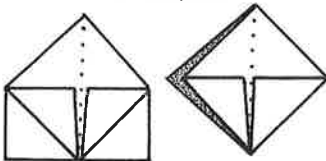
4. Fold the pattern in half backward between the two small hearts; then open.



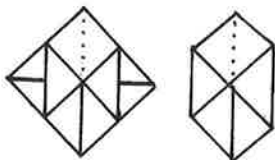
5. Push the two small hearts together; then push the two large hearts together.



6. Fold the two bottom corners to the middle, creating a diamond. Turn the pattern over and repeat.

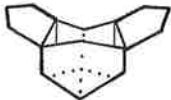


7. Fold both side points to the center. Turn the pattern over and repeat.



8. Fold the pattern in half both ways to crease.

9. Gently pull the points of the open end apart to form a box with flaps.



10. Crease the bottom edges of the box to flatten the bottom and fill the box with fish-shaped crackers.

