

# Framing Life Biblically: Where is God? God is “with us”!

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## **PRE-LESSON INFORMATION:**

### **SESSION DESCRIPTION:**

The biblical narrative is a powerful story of pilgrimage, a journey from creation, through death and into new life. This session will explore how this powerful narrative becomes a framework for how we view the world and our lives and how we invite children, youth and families into this powerfully transformative story.

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

1. Understand the Biblical God With Us or Incarnational Frame for practicing Christian discipleship.
2. Connect biblical examples of this Frame with their own faith journey's/pilgrimages.
3. Help young people make this connection to see how God is with them to shape and guide their lives.
4. (optional) Use this frame to imagine/explore 6 important themes/subframes: vocation, hospitality, forgiveness, community, discernment, and ministry (addressed in coming sessions)

### **MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Bible
- Dry Erase Board/Newsprint
- Projector/Laptop (video)
- Handout: List of PD2014 Sessions/Descriptions (Optional)
- Synod Practice Discipleship Promotional Materials (Optional)

## STORIES FRAME OUR LIVES: (5-15 minutes, depending on activity used)

### INTRODUCTION:

Young people live with lots of pressure and stresses. Often this arises from wondering and wrestling with what their future might be. Society, school, and parents all ask teenagers “What are you going to do after high school or when you ‘grow up’?” This *future focus* can keep us from embracing life as a journey with many adventures along the way accompanied by a loving God who doesn’t give a report card but grades with grace!

With all the problems in the world (violence, addiction, hunger, poverty, loneliness, etc) we may wonder, where is God? Or even, is there a God? A central message of the bible is that God is “with us” in all the challenges and struggles of life as well as in its joys and opportunities.

Today we will explore biblical examples of God “with us” to lead, redeem and save.

### ACTIVITY:

Our lives are a pilgrimage or journey. The stories of our life form a frame for who we are and how we view the world. Through the telling of our stories we can often see how God was “with us” even when we may not have been aware of God’s presence in the moment.

*(Leaders: Choose one of the options below – Dave’s Story, Leader’s Story or Video Clips - to have participants experience how telling our stories helps us see and understand how God is “with us” in our lives. This sets them up for the most important part of this section: Participant Journey, Pilgrimage Stories.*

**Dave’s Story:** Play the DVD of Dave’s story of his paddle pilgrimage down the Mississippi which illustrates how the God With Us/Incarnational frame helped me make sense of and experience God in the people, places, critters, and weather he encountered. Or you might read this example from his recently-published book, *Paddle Pilgrim, An adventure of learning and spirit, kayaking the Mississippi River.*

#### Letter to the River

Dear Miss,

I hope you are not offended by my familiar or even intimate form of address, but after nearly a month together I feel we have grown quite close. Each day as I begin my paddle you greet me and I discover something new about your personality. While I am only a beginner, you have been greeting others for thousands of years. You have become my teacher. I have learned many lessons. Some I have welcomed, others have been hard and painful. You have taught me with

the rich diversity of your path from marshes to pine forests, across large lakes, through farmland, along majestic bluffs, through maze-like bayous, by small towns, suburbs, and cities, over wing dams and through locks and dams. I have studied with eagles, trumpeter swans, geese, ducks, deer, otter, beaver, pelican, and, yes, mosquito. I have been humbled by your twists and turns, eddies, sweepers and whirlpools and exhilarated by your rapids, tail-winds, and strong flow after a rain. My sore hands, aching back, stiff knees, flagging frame, and frequently struggling spirit all remind me of my limits, my age, and my mortality.

But that is good, because you teach with a clarity and truth that I need to hear and embrace. And while I may curse you with some regularity I praise you for the “wisdom” you invite me into each morning as I set out from your shores.

Roll on, mighty waters!

*Your humble “Paddle Pilgrim”*



**Leader’s Story:** The session trainer/leader can briefly describe their journey/pilgrimage highlighting a significant God With Us/Incarnational event/person which has shaped their faith. (5 minutes)

**Possible video clips: (pick one)** (10-12 minutes including discussion)

***“Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban”***

Harry is saved from death by a magical stag and thinks it is his father.

RT: 1:42:25 – 1:45:45

Scripture: Psalm 54: 1-5

Possible Reflection Questions:

Have you ever seen God in a special way like Harry saw his father in the stag?

In the Bible what special forms did God take when He appeared to His people?

***“The Hunger Games”***

Katniss is injured and receives help (medical aid) from her sponsor.

RT: 1:18:00 – 1:21:10

*NOTE: There isn't much dialogue in this sequence, so you might want to simply explain the plot as to what's happened.*

Scripture: Psalm 121

Possible Reflection Questions:

What do you think would have happened to Katniss if she hadn't received the gel from her sponsor?

Has God ever done something for you when you were in great need of help?

***“The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers”***

The “Three Hunters” encounter Gandalf – whom they thought to have been dead – in Fangorn Forest. Gandalf reveals himself to be a new entity altogether, no longer Gandalf the Grey but Gandalf the White.

RT: 52:07 --55:36

Scripture: Matthew 17: 1-8 or Luke 24: 13-35

Possible Reflection Questions:

Who did the Three Hunters think Gandalf was and why were they confused?

Has God ever appeared to you in a way you didn't expect or understand and perhaps later realized was God?

## **ACTIVITY:**

### **Participant Journey/Pilgrimage Stories**

Invite participants to think silently for a few moments and then briefly share with a neighbor a journey/pilgrimage of a significant God With Us/Incarnational event/person that shaped their faith. (5 minutes)

<b>THE BIBLICAL STORY FRAME:</b>
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## **BIBLICAL STORIES:**

As we come to understand our lives framed by the stories of our journey in which God is “with us” every step of the way, we also come to understand that we live within a larger frame – the biblical frame. The whole biblical narrative could be described as God’s being with God’s people on their pilgrimage/journey. Let’s take some time to identify some of the “God With Us/Incarnational” biblical pilgrimages/journeys.

List biblical examples that participants come up with on dry-erase board, chalk-board, news print, screen. If the group being trained is large, use small groups to compile lists to encourage greater participation and then share with the larger group. (10 minutes)

### **Examples you might share to “prime the pump” (give 2-3):**

Creation Story: God intimately relating to all the elements being created (Genesis 1)

Noah/Flood: God restoring creation (Genesis 6-9)

Abraham/Sarah: God bringing hope/child in old age (Genesis 18)

Burning Bush: God calling Moses (Exodus 3)

Exodus: God delivering from bondage (Exodus)

Ruth/Naomi: God providing a new family (Ruth)

Isaiah: God as “suffering servant” (Isaiah 53)

Jonah: God uses a fish. (Jonah)

Elijah: God as “still, small voice” (I Kings 19)

Jesus in Temple: God as a teenager (Luke 2)

Jesus in the wilderness: God being tempted (Matthew 4)

Jesus among the people: God bringing healing (Matthew 14)

Jesus on the cross: Suffering God (Matthew 27)

Jesus after resurrection: Conquering death (John 11)

Paul’s missionary journeys (various epistles)

## **SUGGEST “FRAME”-WORKS:**

The biblical narrative shares stories of vocation, hospitality, forgiveness, community, discernment, sacrifice, love for neighbor, ministry and many more. These stories become frameworks for how we view the world and our lives and how we invite children, youth and families into this powerfully transformative story.

- What “frame”-works can you identify in the biblical stories listed earlier? (List these for all to see. Include those listed above.)

For example:

The Burning Bush story of the call of Moses is an example of Vocation.

The story of Elijah and the “still, small voice” is an example of Discernment.

The story of Ruth and Naomi is an illustration of Hospitality.

The story of Jesus “on the cross” is a story of Forgiveness.

The stories of Jesus’ healing are examples of Ministry. (5 minutes)

### **Small Group (15 minutes):**

Break in to groups of 3-5 people. Ask participants to choose one of the Frames just discussed with which they identify and invite each person to:

Share (briefly) which biblical story they identify with and which frame it exemplifies (forgiveness, community, discernment, ministry, vocation, hospitality, etc.) In other words describe their own experience using the bible as a frame of how God was present/incarnate with them.

### **Large Group (10 minutes):**

Have each small group select one person to briefly share the biblical story/frame they identified and how God was present/incarnate with them. Write down insights/questions that emerge. (10 minutes)

### **Conclusion (5 minutes):**

Summarize the discussion drawing attention to the key learnings/insights shared and the wide variety of ways God has been “with us”!

## **Looking ahead (Optional - 10 minutes):**

*(Use this section or appropriate parts if other PD2014 lessons will be shared)*

Describe the pilgrimage/journey ahead for PD2014, with the themes/lessons to be explored. Share the handout with full list and descriptions of PD2014 “Frame” sessions and any other publicity material you may have. I have listed a biblical story which might illustrate that future frame. (10 minutes)

### **Framing Youth** (Young Jesus in Temple)

Society’s views and stereotypes of youth are based primarily on myths. Unfortunately, many of our ministry practices are influenced by these myths. This session will uncover some of the myths that cause us to frame our young people negatively and will offer practical ways to help you and your congregation to begin framing youth as children of God who have gifts to share and calls to live.

### **Framing Failure with Forgiveness** (Jesus on the Cross)

Life and ministry tend to place many demands upon us all. We often feel like failures in one or more areas of our lives. The world seems to frame us with expectations of perfection and success but God’s grace frames us with forgiveness. This session will remind you of this truth and give you practical ways to live into that forgiveness and share it with others.

### **Framing Community** (Paul and Timothy)

This lesson will present a way of walking alongside individual young people, communities and families as we help them frame their lives by learning through relationships with surrounding community, learning from an intentional community and learning about yourself through community. We will explore practices of faith that help us frame our lives in solitude and in community.

### **Framing the Vision: Seeing Things New** (Acts: Dreams/Visions of Young and Old)

“Where there is no vision, the people will perish . . .” (Proverbs 29:18). That sounds great, but how do you figure out what that vision is and get people to buy into it? This session will explore the various ways ministry with children, youth and families fit within a congregation and will introduce you to some steps you can take and some tools you can use to guide your congregation through a process of discerning its mission for ministry with children, youth and families.

### **Framing the Path: Practicing Things New** (7 Faith Practices)

You have come to realize that the culture is shifting. Church is not as important in peoples’ lives as it once was. You are also probably convinced that your congregation’s approach to ministry with children, youth and families needs to change. Maybe you even have some ideas! This session will help you frame a path towards change in your congregation. We will help one another identify and plan the steps we need to take to create the change we need to see in our congregations’ ministry with children, youth and families.

## CLOSING PRAYER:

In a circle symbolizing a journey which has no beginning and no end, encourage participants to pray by using the sentence, "Thank you God for being with me on my journey by \_\_\_\_\_."

All join together with the following:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Evening Prayer, Lutheran Book of Worship)



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