

JESUS-CENTERED LIFE

Week 5:
Jesus and the Supernatural

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson you'll help your students explore the miraculous and supernatural acts of Jesus—the goal will be to see more clearly the heart of Jesus through the lens of the miraculous things he does. Students will learn the difference between the merely “amazing” and the truly “miraculous,” and they'll dig into some hard questions about the motivation behind Jesus' supernatural behavior.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. WHAT: Students will discover the heart behind Jesus' supernatural acts and wrestle with whether or not they believe in his power.
2. WHY: Sometimes the miraculous things Jesus does can make him seem so “other” than us that we don't know how to relate to him.
3. HOW: Your students will explore, in depth, the “why” behind several miraculous things Jesus has done.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 8:23-27

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Matthew 9:1-4; 14:13-33; 15:32-38; 21:18-20; Luke 5:4-9; John 1:43-51; 2:1-11; 5:1-9; 6:16-21; 16:30

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead.

Read Matthew 8:23-27.

The story of Jesus calming the storm while the frightened disciples huddled on the boat together is really our story—most of us would admit we'd react just as the disciples did if



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TIP



we witnessed Jesus doing the supernatural. It's easy to believe in the power of Jesus when we're reading a story about him, but our doubts and struggles about his true nature and ability surface when we're in the story, not just reading about it. Do we really believe Jesus is who he says he is, and can do what he says he can do?

Mark Galli, a former pastor and an associate editor for Christianity Today, tells a story in his book *Jesus Mean and Wild* about his encounter with a Laotian family. Galli was pastoring a church in Sacramento, California, when a group of refugees from Laos asked him how they could become members of the church. They were new to the church and were attending because the congregation had sponsored their relocation to Sacramento. They knew little of Christianity, so Galli suggested they do a Bible study focusing on the book of Mark. The Laotians agreed, and Galli dived into the study with them. Here's Galli's account of what happened next:

“After we read the passage in which Jesus calms the storm, I began as I usually did with more theologically sophisticated groups: I asked them about the storms in their lives. There was a puzzled look among my Laotian friends, so I elaborated: we all have storms—problems, worries, troubles, crises—and this story teaches that Jesus can give us peace in the midst of those storms. ‘So what are your storms?’ I asked.

“Again, more puzzled silence. Finally, one of the men hesitantly asked, ‘Do you mean that Jesus actually calmed the wind and sea in the middle of a storm?’

“I thought he was finding the story incredulous, and I didn't want to get distracted with the problem of miracles. So I replied, ‘Yes, but we should not get hung up on the details of the miracle. We should remember that Jesus can calm the storms in our lives.’

“Another stretch of awkward silence ensued until another replied, ‘Well, if Jesus calmed the wind and the waves, he must be a very powerful man!’ At this, they all nodded vigorously and chattered excitedly to one another in Lao. Except for me, the room was full of awe and wonder.

“I suddenly realized that they grasped the story better than I did, and I finally acknowledged, ‘Yes, Jesus is a very powerful person. In fact, Christians believe he is the Creator of heaven and earth, and thus, of course, he has power over the wind and the waves.’ ” [Mark Galli, *Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of an Untamable God* (Baker Books, 2006), p. 112.]



If we're honest, we're a lot like Mark Galli. Why do we so often struggle to believe in the literal power of Jesus in our lives? Jesus wants to invite us into a relationship with him so complete that we not only believe in his power, we expect it.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

Text Message Questions

We've provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Jesus spoke to the storm and the storm ceased—is he doing the same for you? Join us at small group.
- When's the last time you experienced a miracle? Come to small group, and let's see what happens.

Parent Email

We've provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We're in the fifth week of our six-week study that's focused on answering the question Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" In this lesson, we explored the supernatural things Jesus did—sometimes these stories of Jesus' supernatural power actually have the impact of making Jesus seem so "other" that we can't draw near to him. So we explored not just the "what" behind the epic things he does, but the "why" behind them.

As you go throughout the week, help reinforce this lesson in your teenager's life by asking the following questions as you have the opportunity.

- When have you believed in Jesus' power in your life, and what happened when you did?



- When have you doubted Jesus' power in your life, and what happened when you did?
- What is the central reason we believe, or don't believe, in Jesus' power in our lives?

Thanks for all your prayers for our students. Have a great week!



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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then jump into today's lesson.



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If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you'd like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING GUIDE



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The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen are (1) What we expect of our superheroes, (2) Exploring the heart of Jesus through the lens of his supernatural acts, and (3) Believing in the power of Jesus.



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Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Matthew 8:23-27 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so everyone has a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *I'd like everyone to stand up and find a partner who's roughly your size. [Pause] Face each other at arm's length. Partner 1, you'll hold your right arm straight out in front of you at a 90-degree angle from your body. [Demonstrate for them] Partner 2, you'll use your left arm to try to push down on top of your partner's arm with firm but gentle pressure. Partner 1, you'll try to keep your arm from going down while repeating, "My name is (your name)." Repeat this over and over while your partner attempts to push your arm down. I'll demonstrate what I mean. [You and a volunteer show how to do this, making sure to repeat the phrase "My name is (your name)" over and over.] We'll do this for about 10 seconds. Go!*



Most often Partner 1's arm won't go down, unless there's a big size or strength difference in partners. After Round 1, have partners do the same activity all over again, but this time all Partner 1's should repeatedly say, "My name is Bart Simpson" instead of his or her real name. And this time, the arm typically will go down. It's OK if this doesn't "work" with everyone. But it works most of the time, and people will generally be amazed by it. After the activity, tell people they can be seated.

ASK:

- *How is what happened here like or unlike a supernatural experience?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The effect many of you experienced is tied to a powerful neurological truth—the same phenomenon measured by a lie detector test. Because you're not telling the truth the second time you try to hold your arm up, your brain changes your physical response. While some of you were amazed by this dynamic, once we understand the explanation it's no longer "miraculous," right?*

ASK:

- *Who has experienced something you would call truly miraculous in your life? Explain.*

1. What we expect of our superheroes

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *You know, the closest many of us get to a real miracle is when we watch a movie about a superhero who has superpowers. Let's watch this scene from Spider-Man 2. In it, Spider-Man fights his archenemy Doc Ock, who has sabotaged a hurtling train. All of the passengers on the train will die unless Spider-Man can save them.*

Play the out-of-control-train clip from *Spider-Man 2* (1:36:50–1:41:35).

ASK:

- *What emotions did you feel toward Spider-Man as you watched this clip?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Interestingly, none of us were afraid of Spider-Man—maybe we were scared for Spider-Man, but we weren't afraid of him—even though he clearly has the power and ability to further harm the people on the train.*



ASK:

- *Why do you think we're oblivious to Spider-Man's ability to intentionally harm the people on the train?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We're convinced of Spider-Man's good intentions, aren't we? Even more, we're convinced that he's good. It would be out of character, and somehow deeply disappointing, if Spider-Man suddenly acted in a mean or evil way with people in trouble.*

2. Exploring the heart of Jesus through the lens of his supernatural acts

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Remember the story we read at the beginning—of Jesus calming the storm while the frightened disciples huddled on the boat together? Sometimes Jesus performed supernatural feats that had nothing to do with healing people or casting out demons. These miracles almost reflect what we might see in a superhero film. For example: [reference as many of these as you want to]*

- Jesus changes water into wine at the Cana wedding (John 2:1-11).
- Jesus commands a miraculous catch of fish for the first disciples (Luke 5:4-9).
- Jesus calls Nathanael by telling him he “saw” Nathanael when he was too far away to see (John 1:43-49).
- Jesus seems to know the thoughts of others (Matthew 9:1-4).
- Jesus feeds 5,000 men with a few loaves and fish (Matthew 14:15-21).
- Jesus walks on the sea in full view of his disciples (Matthew 14:22-33).
- Jesus feeds 4,000 men with a few loaves and fish (Matthew 15:32-38).
- Jesus curses the fig tree, and it withers on the spot (Matthew 21:18-20).

Let's explore what Jesus wants us to know about him—and about his Father—through these supernatural acts. We'll do this by diving into some questions about Jesus' supernatural acts. As you and your partner explore your question, slow down and pay attention to details. Together, come up with a detailed answer to your question. Look up the Bible story referenced in your question if you want.

EXPLORATION: Instruct people to get with a partner, and then assign each pair one of the “Supernatural Jesus Questions” to pursue—each one is tied to a Scripture passage. If you want, print these questions and cut them apart so you can give them to pairs:



- If Jesus could walk on water, why didn't he ever fly? (John 6:16-21)
- Jesus' first recorded miracle was turning the water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana. This almost seems like a party trick rather than an appropriate use of his authority and ability, so why did he do it? (John 2:1-11)
- Twice Jesus fed a huge crowd with just a few loaves and some fish. Why didn't Jesus produce food in this way for every meal he ate? (Matthew 14:13-21)
- If Jesus had played sports, would he have been good enough to compete in the Olympics? Why or why not? (John 6:19)
- Do you think Jesus really knew the hidden thoughts of people, or did he have no more knowledge of others than we do? Explain. (Matthew 9:1-4)
- Did Jesus need to learn how to read or how to do math, or did he just know these things intrinsically? Explain. (John 16:30)
- At one point, Jesus tells Nathanael that he could see Nathanael sitting under a fig tree before he'd ever met him—a supernatural feat. Did Jesus have “superpowers” like a comic book hero? If so, what were they? If not, how do you explain his ability to see someone too far away to see? (John 1:43-51)

After five minutes or so, ask pairs to summarize their answer to the assigned question. After each summary, ask the rest of the participants what they think of the pair's answer. Have them consider these questions:

- Do I really understand or agree with the answer?
- Did the answer include words or descriptions that need to be explored further?
- Did the answer contradict what we already know about Jesus?
- Did the answer connect to something else we know about Jesus?

3. Believing in the power of Jesus

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Award-winning author Annie Dillard once wrote: “On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?”*



ASK:

- *Dillard targets a big issue for us—whether we really believe in the power of God. When the paralytic in John 5:1-9—who had camped out by the pool of Bethsaida for many years hoping to be healed—asked Jesus to heal him, why did Jesus first ask him if he really wanted to be healed?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Maybe Annie Dillard pinpointed one of our great struggles as Christians: We really don't believe. Why? Well, maybe we still think we can be like gods and take care of things ourselves. Maybe a Jesus this powerful scares us—we're scared both of what he will do and what he won't do. Maybe we're afraid that faith is just a fairy tale, so we doubt if we should really invest our hearts in it.*

ASK:

- *When have you believed in Jesus' power in your life, and what happened when you did?*
- *When have you doubted Jesus' power in your life, and what happened when you did?*
- *What is the central reason we believe, or don't believe, in Jesus' power in our lives?*

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to close their eyes, and then have them ask themselves this question:

ASK:

- *God, do I really believe in your power? If so, why? If not, why not?*

To close the lesson, invite students to share their answers to the question.

SUMMARY

End your lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.



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TIP**





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FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm (Matthew 8:26 NASB).

