

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 36** and ask **Question #1: What's the craziest weather you've experienced?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 37** to the author's story of his son's love for swinging at the park and his trust for the one pushing the swing.

SAY: "Today's session will remind us of the importance of God's presence with us, especially in the storms of life."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 37: You can trust Jesus in the storm.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to teach us to trust Him when we go through literal and figurative storms in our lives.

SESSION 3 JESUS RULES



The Point

You can trust Jesus in the storm.

The Bible Meets Life

If you've ever been in an area hit by a flood, tornado, or hurricane, you know you can only do so much to protect life and property. A time comes when you just need to get out of the way. The forces of nature

are powerful, but Jesus is more so—and He is present with His followers in everything they face. The Lord over all creation is with us, and He invites us to trust Him.

The Passage

Mark 4:35-41

The Setting

Chapter 4 contains some of the most detailed examples of Jesus' teaching in Mark's Gospel. In addition to the parable of the soils (Mark 4:1-20), this chapter includes two more parables about the kingdom of God (vv. 26-32). These parables reminded listeners that the kingdom was present and active in Jesus. Although the people recognized the authority with which He taught (1:22,27), while crossing the Sea of Galilee Jesus demonstrated His authority extended over nature as well.

Mark 4:35-37

35 On that day, when evening had come, he told them, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea.”

36 So they left the crowd and took him along since he was in the boat. And other boats were with him.

37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

Verse 35. Sometimes, it’s tempting to believe that following Jesus will solve all of our problems. We expect He will smooth every step and fill every pothole along the way. But that’s simply not the case. As His first disciples discovered one night on the Sea of Galilee, life brings its share of storms even for followers of Jesus. While their storm was a literal one, the imagery reminds us of the many various challenges we face as well.

Mark included several details not present in other Gospel accounts of this event (Matt. 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25). Mark noted the presence of other boats on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus and His disciples left the crowd and Jesus sleeping on a cushion in the stern of the boat during the journey. The presence of these details may indicate that Mark got the information from an eyewitness, possibly Peter.¹

Mark also indicated that the earlier events recorded in chapter 4 took place on the same day. After a full day’s worth of preaching, Jesus told His disciples that it was time to move on: “**Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea.**” They would have been moving from the west side of the sea to the eastern shore (Mark 5:1). It is not clear why Jesus determined to move to the other side of the lake. Possibly He was ready to move away from the crowds (1:45; 2:2; 3:9; 4:1) and/or focus His ministry on a different area (1:38). Eventually, He and His disciples would land the boat in a region occupied by Gentiles who were known as the Gerasenes (5:1-20). While in that region, Jesus would drive demons from a man who had been living a tortured existence among tombs.

1 ▶ But for the time being, **evening had come** and Jesus was ready to wrap up His ministry for the day. Since many of Jesus’ disciples were fishermen by trade, it would not have been unusual for them to set sail at dusk. Fishermen tended to work during the night because that’s when fishing was the best. It also limited the possibilities of storms, which usually

STUDY THE BIBLE

Mark 4:35-37



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, refer to **The Bible Meets Life** on **page 38** that discusses the powerful forces of nature. But stress that Jesus is more powerful; we can trust Him in the storm.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Mark 4:35-37.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 38-39** and ask someone to read these words:

“Many times we find ourselves in the same situation as the disciples. We feel as though we’re doing everything right. We feel our relationship with Jesus is growing stronger; we see Him working in our lives . . . We may even get the sense that all is as it should be and that this business of following Christ is going to be smooth sailing. Smooth sailing in the present is no guarantee that it will remain smooth. . . . We will know moments of calm, but we will still experience storms. We’re not exempt.”

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on page 39 and this page to explain why crossing the sea in the evening would not have been unusual for these seasoned fishermen.

GUIDE: Refer members to **DIGGING DEEPER** on **PSG page 39**, to explain how storms could come up so suddenly on the Sea of Galilee.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** to explain the conditions that produce storms on the Sea of Galilee.

SAY: "Storms serve as an apt metaphor for the storms we face in life. They can come up quickly with little or no warning. They can toss us about, turning our lives upside down. Being a believer does not exempt us from facing life's storms."

DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p. 40): Why are we often surprised when we encounter difficult circumstances?

(Alternate: What kinds of things cause us to be fearful?)

TRANSITION: "Next we will see Jesus' power over nature."

popped up during the afternoon. While the disciples may have been comfortable sailing across the lake in the evening, they were about to learn an important lesson about trusting Jesus when things got uncomfortable. ◀

Verse 36. Since he was in the boat already, the disciples set out with Jesus toward their new destination leaving the crowd behind. **Other boats** were traveling with them. We are not told who owned the boats or how long they stayed with Jesus' boat. They may have been among the dozens of fishing boats that would have launched out to do a night's worth of work on the lake.

2 ▶ Verse 37. The Sea of Galilee is a freshwater lake, about thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. It sits in a basin or bowl, almost 700 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills and mountains reaching anywhere from 1500 to 3300 feet above sea level. When cool air flows in from the surrounding mountains, it displaces the warmer air closer to the water and creates sudden, violent storms. The wave height during these storms can reach up to twenty feet. ◀

While the presence of such violent storms was not unusual on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples would not have expected such a **great windstorm** at night. Even for experienced fishermen like the disciples, the situation quickly turned dire as waves broke over the sides of the boat and their vessel **was already being swamped**. Jesus' disciples certainly recognized the danger they were facing.

In many ways, the storm on the Sea of Galilee serves as an apt metaphor for the storms we face in life. They can come up quickly with little or no warning. They can toss us about, turning our lives upside down and creating huge "waves" that break over the sides of our "boats." Being a believer does not exempt us from facing life's storms. In fact, Jesus warned His followers that they would face troubles in the world (John 16:33). But while Jesus guaranteed suffering and struggles in this life, He also promised us His presence, that He will always be with us and will never forsake us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

Mark 4:38-39

38 He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher! Don’t you care that we’re going to die?”

39 He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Silence! Be still!” The wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

3 ▶ **Verse 38.** Many people enjoy falling asleep to the sound of rain on their windows. They might even appreciate the power of a thunderstorm as it passes over their homes. But if they were outside, fighting the elements, rest probably wouldn’t come quite so easily. They might worry more about how to make it through the storm. That’s what the disciples faced in the middle of their storm—but Jesus’ response was probably not what they expected.

While the disciples wrestled to keep their vessel afloat, Jesus slept in the stern (rear) of the boat. The Messiah had found a pillow and was resting after a full day of teaching the crowds. He was at peace, even in the midst of turmoil.

Some Bible students compare Jesus’ sleeping in the boat to Jonah’s sleeping in the ship going to Tarshish. However, such a comparison is not warranted. While Jonah’s nap was part of his fleeing from the presence and call of God, in contrast Jesus’ peaceful slumber in the midst of the violent storm suggests confidence and trust in God (His Father). Jesus had told His disciples that they were going to the other side of the lake, so He knew they would get there—storm or no storm. His time had not yet come, so He could rest in the storm. Jesus’ need for sleep after a long day of ministry also underscored His humanity.²

But Jesus’ followers didn’t share His peace. These experienced fishermen realized the danger they were in and were terrified, so they did the only thing they knew to do. They went to Jesus and **woke him up**. However, their question, “**Teacher! Don’t you care that we’re going to die?**” was more of a rebuke than a cry for help. They mistook His lack of anxiety for a lack of concern. They assumed that His ability to sleep through the violent storm meant that He really didn’t care if they lived or died.

Fear has a way of both driving us to Jesus and leading us to doubt His compassion. On one hand, we know He is our only sure hope for survival during life’s storms. So, we come to Him seeking His help. On the other hand, at times our fears can distort our perceptions of Him. They

STUDY THE BIBLE

Mark 4:38-39



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Mark 4:38-39.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 41**, to the paragraph that quotes Matthew 8:25: “Lord, save us! We’re going to die!”

- “*Lord, save us!*” is the language of faith.
- “*We’re going to die!*” is the language of fear.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** on this page and page 42 to provide further insights into Jesus’ sleeping, at peace in the midst of turmoil, in contrast to the terrified disciples.

SAY: “The disciples mistook Jesus’ lack of anxiety for unconcern. They assumed His ability to sleep through the violent storm meant He really didn’t care if they lived or died. Fear has a way of both driving us to Jesus and leading us to doubt His compassion.”

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 4 on this page and page 43 to reinforce why we can trust Jesus in the storm: As creator He has the power to speak to the forces of nature and calm the wind and the sea. Only God could do this. Enlist a group member to read Colossians 1:16-17.

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 41): When have you felt like God was unaware or uninterested in your distress?

(Alternate: How do the trials of life compare and contrast with a physical storm?)

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Ask the group to consider how the following life circumstances may cause senior adults to wonder if God cares:

- *Spouse's physical decline*
- *Fear of mental deterioration*
- *Stress due to finances*
- *Feeling lonely or forgotten*
- *Transitioning to assisted living*

Say, "You can trust Jesus, He will be with you in the storm."

can raise questions in our minds and tempt us to question His motives and even if He really cares for us at all. If we're honest, we know that at times we aren't much different from the disciples in that respect. Instead of coming to Jesus in confidence and faith, we approach Him with doubt and despair. Fortunately, He is not offended even in those times we come to Him in panic. He understands, and He shows grace when we need it most. ◀

4 ▶ Verse 39. While the disciples were dismayed by the sudden storm and Jesus' ability to sleep through the events going on around them, they were completely unprepared for what He did next. Amidst the chaos of the storm and the panic and terror of His disciples, Jesus simply **got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!"** While the disciples in their terror had rebuked Jesus, He turned around and calmly rebuked the storm that was causing all the trouble. Jesus spoke directly to the forces of nature and ordered them to calm down—and nature obeyed!

By calming the storm He demonstrated to His disciples a whole new kind of power and authority. As Creator of all, Jesus had every right to command nature to do His bidding, and He had every reason to expect that it would obey Him. Jesus showed that He not only heard the cries of those who needed Him, but He also holds the authority over the issues that are causing them fear and stress. By calming the storm, Jesus revealed His deity to the fearful disciples and demonstrated a power and authority only exercised by God in the Old Testament Scriptures.³ Only God could do what Jesus had done. Only God had that kind of authority and mastery over the elements. In calming the storm, Jesus taught His disciples an important lesson about His nature and position as God's Son.

Sometimes, we can forget that Jesus took an active role in creation from the very beginning. Years after this incident on the Sea of Galilee, the apostle Paul wrote instructing the believers of the Colossian church that everything was created through and for Jesus (Col. 1:16). Jesus also holds everything together (v. 17), keeping creation from spinning into utter chaos. In addition, John wrote in his Gospel that all creation came into being through Jesus (John 1:1-4). This was the power and authority that Jesus displayed to His disciples.

The disciples did the right thing by turning to Jesus in the middle of the storm—even if they were doing it out of fear

rather than faith. They set the example we need to follow when we face anxieties and struggles in our own lives. It's true that Jesus never promised us that life would be easy. But He did promise that He would be with us in the boat. He said He would be with us until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). As He was with the first disciples, He is and always will be present with us today (albeit not *physically* present in the exact same way He was with His disciples during His earthly ministry).

Because we have Jesus' presence in our storms, we can respond differently than the world might expect. We can act with confidence and peace. That kind of reaction will make an indelible impression on the world as it watches us. Unbelievers can recognize something in our lives that they don't have—and could be drawn to Jesus as a result. Weathering our storms through faith in God can provide a witness to the world! ◀

Mark 4:40-41

40 Then he said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 And they were terrified and asked one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"

5 ▶ Verse 40. Jesus was not concerned with the storm. That was a problem He was able to resolve easily. But the distinction between fear and faith was a matter that He needed to address more directly with His disciples. As they had rebuked Him about their plight in the raging storm, Jesus now rebuked them: "**Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?**" The Greek term translated **afraid** has the meaning of being cowards.

By answering His call and following Him, the disciples had displayed a certain degree of faith in Jesus. But Jesus expected more from His disciples. "Mark likely intended to indicate that faith is more than intellectual assent, that it is trust in a Person. This kind of faith Jesus' original disciples should have had and all subsequent disciples should have."⁴ The storm provided the disciples with a test as to the depth of their faith in Jesus.

Much like Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils (Mark 4:1-20), this had been a chance for the disciples to demonstrate what kind of "soil" they were nurturing in

TRANSITION: "Next we will consider the question Jesus asked His disciples and see their response."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Mark 4:40-41



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Mark 4:40-41.

GUIDE: Refer members to **PSG page 42**, to the author's summary of the teachings from the Gospel of Mark regarding Jesus' authority ...

- ...over both animals and angels (1:13)
- ...to teach (v. 22)
- ...over the devil and demons (v. 34)
- ...to forgive (2:10-11)
- ...over the law (2:28)
- ...to give authority (3:14-15)
- ...over nature (4:39)

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 43**, to passages from the Psalms that reflect God's power over nature. Recruit volunteers to read these passages aloud:

- *Psalm 46:1-3*
- *Psalm 89:9*
- *Psalm 108:28-29*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** on page 43 and this page to point out that Jesus knows that both fear and faith existed in the disciples and in us.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** to point out the disciples' responses:

- *They were terrified* (phobos/phobia).
- *Fear to the point of fleeing*
- *In awe or amazement.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 7** to explore the meaning of the question and statement about Jesus: "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

relation to Jesus. In this instance their response was more like that of the soil comprised of shallow dirt that caused the plants to wither under pressure than the fruitful ground that produced a harvest greater than anyone could have imagined. Their fear of what was going on outside the boat blinded them to the reality of the One who was with them in the boat.

While contemporary believers might be tempted to criticize the disciples for letting their fears get the best of them, many times we are not so different from the disciples as we would like to think. Too often, we let our fears overwhelm our faith—especially when we find ourselves in the midst of life's more violent storms. Jesus' challenge is just as relevant for us today as it was for His twelve disciples that night on the Sea of Galilee. Are we living in fear ... or living by faith? Paul wrote in his letter to the believers in Rome that God's love for us in Christ is so great that absolutely nothing will ever be able to separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:31-39). God loved us so much that He became one of us in Jesus Christ and died for us on the cross. Through repentance and faith in Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, we can spend eternity with Him in heaven. God, who loves us enough to die for us, is worthy of our trust—even in the midst of this life's worst storms. ◀

6 ▶ Verse 41. Ironically, while Jesus' mastery over nature calmed the storm, it did not necessarily calm the fears of His disciples. They were **terrified** in the wake of Jesus' miracle. The Greek word used here for "terrified" is a different term from that used in verse 40 for "afraid." The Greek word for "terrified" is related to *phobos*, from which we get our word "phobia." The term usually indicates a genuine fear or sense of being frightened to the point of fleeing; it can also have the meaning of a reverential awe or amazement.

The disciples may have been wrestling with both sheer terror and utter amazement. Their earlier question about Jesus' concern for their lives had carried a less than subtle hint of rebuke (Mark 4:38). But the result of their encounter with the storm certainly demonstrated that Jesus was no ordinary person. They had realized that He was special when they followed His call, but they apparently did not grasp the full implication of His position and authority. They knew He had authority over the lives of people (through His teaching and miracles), but they had failed to understand He also had authority over the winds and the seas. ◀

Part of their fear may have been rooted in a misunderstanding common among Jews in first-century Israel, who expected the Messiah to be a conquering king who would drive out the Romans. Given such a perspective, it would have been natural for the disciples to wonder about Jesus' identity. He had revealed a side of Himself they had not expected, even though His authority over the forces of nature was just what they needed at that moment. As a result, they would have had to adjust their understanding of Him and His ministry.

7▶ The disciples' lack of understanding is indicated by the question they asked one another: **“Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”** Despite seeing Jesus' Deity on full display, they still wondered who Jesus was. They knew Jesus was a teacher and miracle worker. But His power over nature demonstrated in no uncertain terms that the One who stood before them was God incarnate—the Creator and Sustainer of all. Grasping this reality would take more time.

The disciples' experience underscores the truth that faith grows over time. The mystery of Jesus' identity and purpose was not something His followers unraveled in a day. It took them the entirety of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection to fully grasp who He was and what He had come to do—and their role in God's plan. But the events surrounding the storm provided a milestone as they continued to learn and grow.

True faith never tries to put Jesus into a box or assumes that it completely understands His ways. Instead, the believer who truly has faith in Jesus is challenged to learn more about Him and grow in faith each day. This type of faith trusts Jesus to provide exactly what is needed exactly when we need it. Even in the midst of life's storms, we can know that Jesus is in control. ◀

1. James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 87.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 88.

4. *Ibid.*

DISCUSS: Question #4

(PSG, p. 43): **What evidences of Jesus power have increased your trust in Him?**

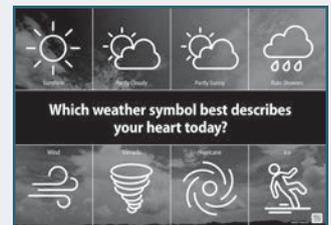
DISCUSS: Question #5

(PSG, p. 44): **What lessons can we learn from Jesus' calming of the storm?**

(Alternate: How can we speak the peace of Jesus into the lives of those who are going through a storm?)

LEADER PACK: Point

to **Item 4: Weather Alert** and ask volunteers to tell how one of the weather symbols best describes their heart at this time.



DO: Encourage group

members to take a few minutes to complete the activity **“How's the Weather?”** on PSG page 44.

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** You can trust Jesus in the storm.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out** (PSG, p. 45); (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

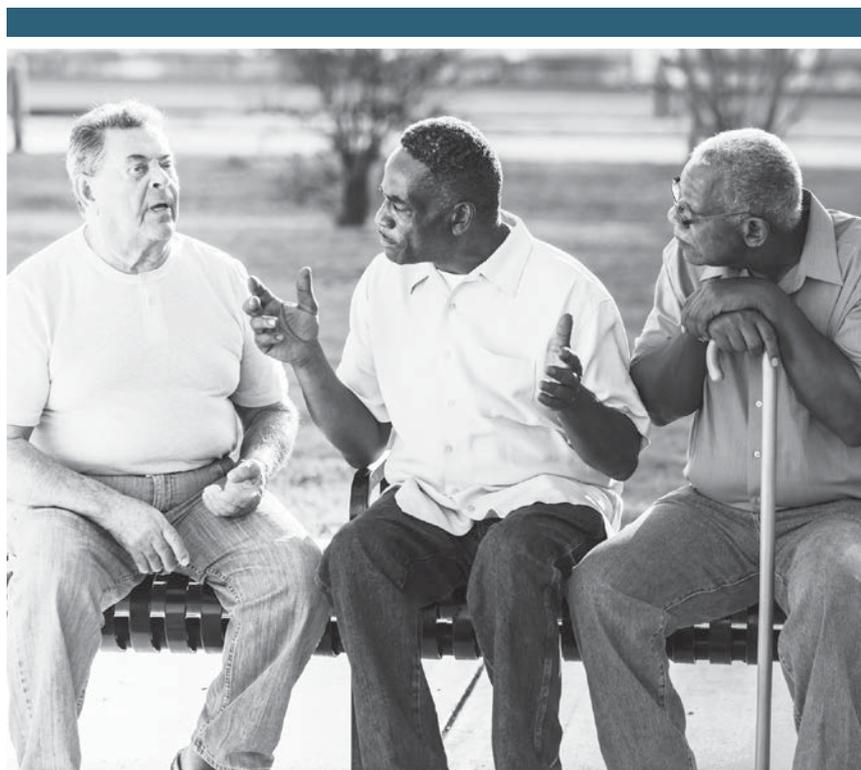
GUIDE: Remind group members that life is a lot like the weather: it is unpredictable, always changing, and we don't have control over it. That's why we need to trust Jesus who is with us in the storms of life.

PRAY: "Father, in this ever changing world filled with hazards and difficulties, help us to place our trust in you to be with us and see us through the storms we encounter."

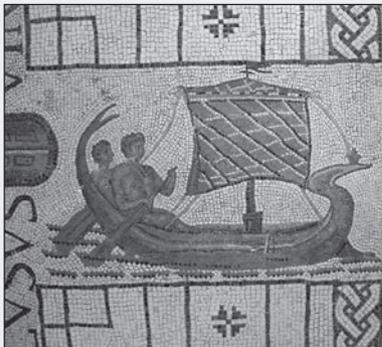
LIVE IT OUT

How can you obey God's Word this week? Consider doing one of the following:

- ▶ **Trust.** Jesus is able to handle the storm—any storm. Trust Him. Nothing comes against you that He has no power over it. Trust His presence in the boat with you to get you through your storm.
- ▶ **Look back.** Consider previous storms you have gone through and identify the ways Jesus strengthened you and got you through them.
- ▶ **Get in the boat.** Help someone see Jesus' powerful presence. As a Christ-follower, get in the boat with someone who is going through a storm. Be Christ's representative, encouraging the person to trust Him.



BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR



Mosaic pavement from Sousee in North Africa helps us understand how some Roman period fishing boats looked.

Luke 8 describes Jesus and His disciples setting out across the lake (vv. 22-25). As they sailed, a squall came up and the boat was swamped. Jesus was asleep. Luke called it a storm, but Matthew called it a tempest (KJV) or *seismos*, the Greek word for “earthquake” (8:24). As the lake pitched and rolled, the disciples cried out, “*Epistata, Epistata*, we are drowning.” Some translations say they cried “Master, Master,” but the crew was really calling “Captain, Captain, we are perishing.”

Jesus called for calm and immediately the wind and

sea subsided. The *seismos* was instantaneous and so was the calm. The geographical features surrounding the Sea of Galilee and its location make the Sea susceptible to intense and unexpected, albeit brief, storms.

Being located “in a bowl,” with mountains to the north, west, and east, the Sea of Galilee is uniquely situated for crosswinds and weather currents. The upper air in the mountains is cooler, while the air closer to the surface of the lake is warmer. The cooler air sinks, displacing the warmer air, forcing it upwards. This movement is exacerbated by the steep slopes of the surrounding mountains, resulting in sudden, dangerous storms. Additionally, moist air blows off of the Mediterranean and warm dry air comes from the deserts to the east—these factors converge resulting in disturbances that can bring sudden havoc and chaos.

The excerpt above is from the article “Wind, Weather, and the Sea of Galilee” (Winter 2009-10), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus is Lord over all, and there is no other way we can have a relationship with God apart from trusting Jesus Christ.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, “Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All,” on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



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