

5

Unplug

MARK 1:35–39



GOAL

By hearing how Jesus withdrew to quiet places for prayer, children explore how unplugging can help them connect with Jesus and others.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Lord, untether me from distractions so I may focus on you. May I be plugged in to your love and be a conduit of it to these children. Amen.

THIS SESSION

The spiritual practice of *unplugging* invites followers of Jesus to take a break from digital technology. While digital technology connects people living on opposite sides of the world, it ironically also wields the power to redirect our focus away from those living closest to us. Unplugging for a time from digital technology’s plethora of information and entertainment can help us focus on our relationships, including our relationship with Jesus.

THE BIBLE STORY

Jesus did not face distractions from digital technology, but throughout his ministry, many people and opportunities vied for his attention. With so many needs, how did Jesus avoid letting the world’s demands dictate his schedule? Scripture informs us that Jesus often unplugged by withdrawing to deserted places.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Limited and quality daily screen time is best for children ages two to five, yet before they enter elementary school, many children already have a complex relationship with digital technology. It educates and entertains them while expanding their worldviews. Children observe and are impacted by the digital consumption of those closest to them. Inviting children to unplug introduces healthy digital habits as they journey with Jesus.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Hidden Object Pictures” (p. 48): Obtain hidden-object picture books, such as any of the series of *Where’s Waldo* by Martin Handford (Candlewick) or other “seek and find” puzzle books, or use Resource Pages 1 and 2.
- Depending on the options you choose:
 - “Hearing a Story” (p. 49): Obtain *Babbit & Joan, a Rabbit and a Phone* by Denise Turu or use the YouTube video “Babbit and Joan, a Rabbit and a Phone Read by Judy Gardner” (bit.ly/FMBabbitAndJoan, 8:14).
 - “Low-Tech Walk” (p. 50): Prepare simple snacks, such as crackers and cheese, grapes, or cookies. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.
 - “Hide and Seek Jesus” (p. 50): Prepare a Jesus puppet from a card-stock copy of Resource Page 4. Color and cut out the picture. Attach a craft stick to the back of the picture to make a puppet.



GETTING STARTED

- Hidden objects picture books, such as any of the series of *Where's Waldo* by Martin Handford (Candlewick) or other “seek and find” puzzle books, and/or Resource Pages 1 and 2
- Music player and quiet instrumental music or internet-connected device

HIDDEN OBJECT PICTURES



Unplugging helps us focus by limiting potential distractions. As a spiritual discipline, we unplug so we might more easily focus on finding God. As a connecting point, hidden-picture games require concentration and persistence while improving one's ability to focus on details.

As children arrive, invite them to find the hidden objects in the puzzle books or Resource Pages 1 and 2. Depending on the number of hidden object picture books you have, children may need to share a book or Resource Page. Ask the children to work quietly as they find the hidden objects.

As the children are working, make several distractions, such as greeting children loudly, bumping into furniture in the room, or dropping objects. Then play some quiet instrumental music. After the children have spent some time finding hidden objects, wonder together what made it difficult to concentrate on finding the objects and what made it easier.

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD



The opening ritual in this unit includes a responsive litany with one line changing to correspond to the spiritual discipline in each session. There are motions to help children learn their responses. The children's response is printed in the bold text and remains the same throughout this unit.

Draw near to God

and God (*raise both arms to the sky*)

will draw near to us. (*bring hands toward heart, crossing them over your heart*)

When we unplug, we connect with God and others.

Let us (*extend arms forward, palms facing upward*)

keep company (*bend elbows and bring together hands in prayer*)

with Jesus. (*sign “Jesus” with hands using right middle finger to touch the middle of left palm and repeat with left middle finger to touch the middle of right palm*)



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

I SPY



This popular children's game encourages us to actively engage in what is being communicated, not just passively receive information. Much like unplugging as a spiritual discipline, participation in this game involves someone in a busy landscape focusing on listening and finding the key thing they seek.

After selecting an object in the room that you want the children to guess, begin the game by saying: “I spy something with my little eye that is the color (*color*).” You can also use shapes, saying, “I spy something with my little eye that is a (*shape*).” Let everyone have a turn being the “I spy” person.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

IGNATIAN MEDITATION



Announce that it is time for the Bible story, but that it will be in a different format than usual. Direct the children's attention to an internet-connected device and place it where everyone can see. Ask who likes to watch videos or movies. Wonder what it would be like to see a movie of the Bible story instead of listening to you read it. Wonder what it would be like to, not just see the movie, but be an actor in it or the film director making a movie about the Bible story.

Tell the children that they will not be watching a video today because this session is about unplugging! Explain that there is a special way of reading the Bible that a Spanish priest started more than 400 years ago. Tell the children about a man named Ignatius (Ig-nay-shus), who was from a town called Loyola, and he created an interactive way of reading the Bible that involved people imagining they were inside the Bible story. Suggest that this is sort of like imagining that they are a character in or director of a movie (only movies were not yet invented). Tell the children you will be guiding them through today's Bible story reading as they practice Ignatius's way of hearing a Bible story. Invite them to find a comfortable position to sit. Ask the children to put on their imagination cap as you mime placing a pretend cap on your head. Guide everyone in a few deep breaths. Read the adapted Bible story of Mark 1:35–39 from Resource Page 3. Wonder together:

- Throughout this story, how are your senses engaged? What do you see, taste, touch, feel, and hear?
- What is your favorite part of the story? Why?
- What character(s) do you see yourself as in this story? Or are you a new character that is not specifically mentioned?
- Imagine you have a conversation with Jesus. What do you both say?
- What might God be telling you today through this Bible story?

- Internet-connected device (as a prop)
- Resource Page 3



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

HEARING A STORY




Ask the children if they know anyone who has a cell phone and if they think they will have one someday. Wonder together if cell phones get tired from working so hard. Tell the children they will hear a story about a cell phone named Joan who needed to be unplugged for a while! Read *Babbit & Joan, a Rabbit and a Phone* by Denise Turu or show the YouTube video "Babbit and Joan, a Rabbit and a Phone Read by Judy Gardner" ([bit.ly /FMBabbitAndJoan](https://bit.ly/FMBabbitAndJoan), 8:14). Stop at 6:53. Reflect on the story with the children using the following questions:

- Besides feeling alone, how else might Babbit be feeling when he is separated from Joan?

- Babbit & Joan: A Rabbit and a Phone* by Denise Turu (Flyaway Books, 2020) or internet-connected device

- If he felt alone, why do you think Babbit didn't try getting his neighbors' attention and try talking to them?
- What new things did Babbit, the bird, and bear notice on their adventure?
- What screens do you use? What might you do if you took a break from your screens?
- Did taking a break from the phone make Babbit's friendship with Joan better or worse? Why do you think that?
- Do you think it's possible for Babbit to play with both his new friends and Joan together? Why or why not?
- When is a time you took a break from something? What feelings did you have during and after the break?
- When Babbit took a break from his friend Joan, he met and became friends with a bird and a bear. How might taking a break from your screens this week help you connect with God and people this week?

- Internet-connected device (as a prop)
- Small towel or blanket
- Picnic blanket (optional)
- Snacks (optional)

 Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

LOW-TECH WALK

AM NS F X

Tell the children they will be going on a “low-tech walk.” Explain that your digital device needs to take a rest. Using the small towel or blanket, ask the children to help you tuck in the digital device. Have everyone wave and say to it “Sleep well. We’ll see you soon.”

Take the group for a walk. If your location and weather permit, walk outside to a place where you can spread out a blanket and have a snack. If that is not possible, walk to another location in your building where you can do so. As you begin the walk, wonder together who you might encounter on your way. Ask everyone to listen with their ears and look with their eyes at what they hear and see. Go to your spot and spread out your picnic blanket. While you have a snack, reflect on the walk using the following questions:

- What did you notice on the walk? What did you hear and see?
- What did you like or not like about this activity?
- How did it feel to take a break from other activities?
- How do you think you might do this kind of activity at home: give screens a rest and do something low tech, such as take a walk, have some quiet time, make observations about life around you?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Prepared Jesus puppet from card-stock copy of Resource Page 4
- Card-stock copies of Resource Page 4
- Markers and/or crayons
- Scissors
- Craft sticks
- Tape

HIDE AND SEEK JESUS

A G AM X

Show the children the Jesus puppet you prepared and explain that he needs their help. Have the Jesus puppet explain to the children that there are so many people who want his attention. If he doesn't take some time away from all the demands—time away to be plugged into God—he could get drained and tired. Have Jesus ask the children if they will help him find a quiet place to pray.

Choose one child to hide the Jesus puppet while the rest of the children close their eyes. Once Jesus is hidden, invite the children to be quiet for one minute, giving Jesus some quiet time. Then have them search for him, shouting, “Jesus! Jesus!” Once they find him, have the children shout, “We found you!” Repeat, giving each child a turn to hide Jesus.

Provide card-stock copies of Resource Page 4, markers and/or crayons, scissors, craft sticks, and tape. Invite the children to color and cut out the picture of Jesus. Assist with cutting as needed. While they work, wonder together about quiet places where they and Jesus could go in their home for some quiet time and prayer.

MAKING THE CHOICE TO UNPLUG



Talk together about what kinds of activities require batteries or plugs to use, such as digital devices, televisions, computers, telephones, and video games. Ask the children if they ever feel like they or others in their home are so focused on their plugged-in devices that they don't notice others around them. Suggest that *unplugging*—taking time away from devices that take our attention away from God or others—is a healthy habit to practice. Wonder how doing this might create time with God, family, or friends.

Provide copies of Resource Page 5, markers, and/or crayons. Invite the children to draw a picture of something they can unplug from this week and something they can do during that time to connect with God or others. Suggest the children share their pictures and encourage one another to unplug.

Copies of Resource Page 5

Markers and/or crayons



FOLLOWING JESUS

COME AND SEE



Introduce the song you are singing to close each session of this unit. It is sung to the tune of “London Bridge Is Falling Down.” Teach the chorus by singing one line at a time. Then have the children sing the chorus with you. Teach the verse of the song in the same way. Invite the children to sing the chorus and the verse using rhythm instruments, if you choose.

Chorus:

Jesus says to come and see, come and see, come and see.

Jesus wants to be with me.

I love Jesus!

Verse:

Put the screen down for a bit. Turn it off. Turn it off.

You might be surprised to hear

God speak to you.

Rhythm instruments (optional)



The chorus of the song is repeated in each session of this unit. The verse changes to reflect the spiritual practice highlighted in that session.

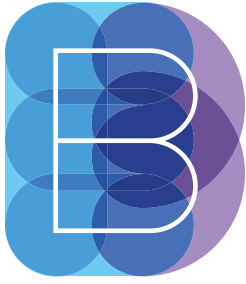


Find 10 objects
in the picture



Find 10 objects in the picture





BIBLE STORY

BASED ON MARK 1:35–39

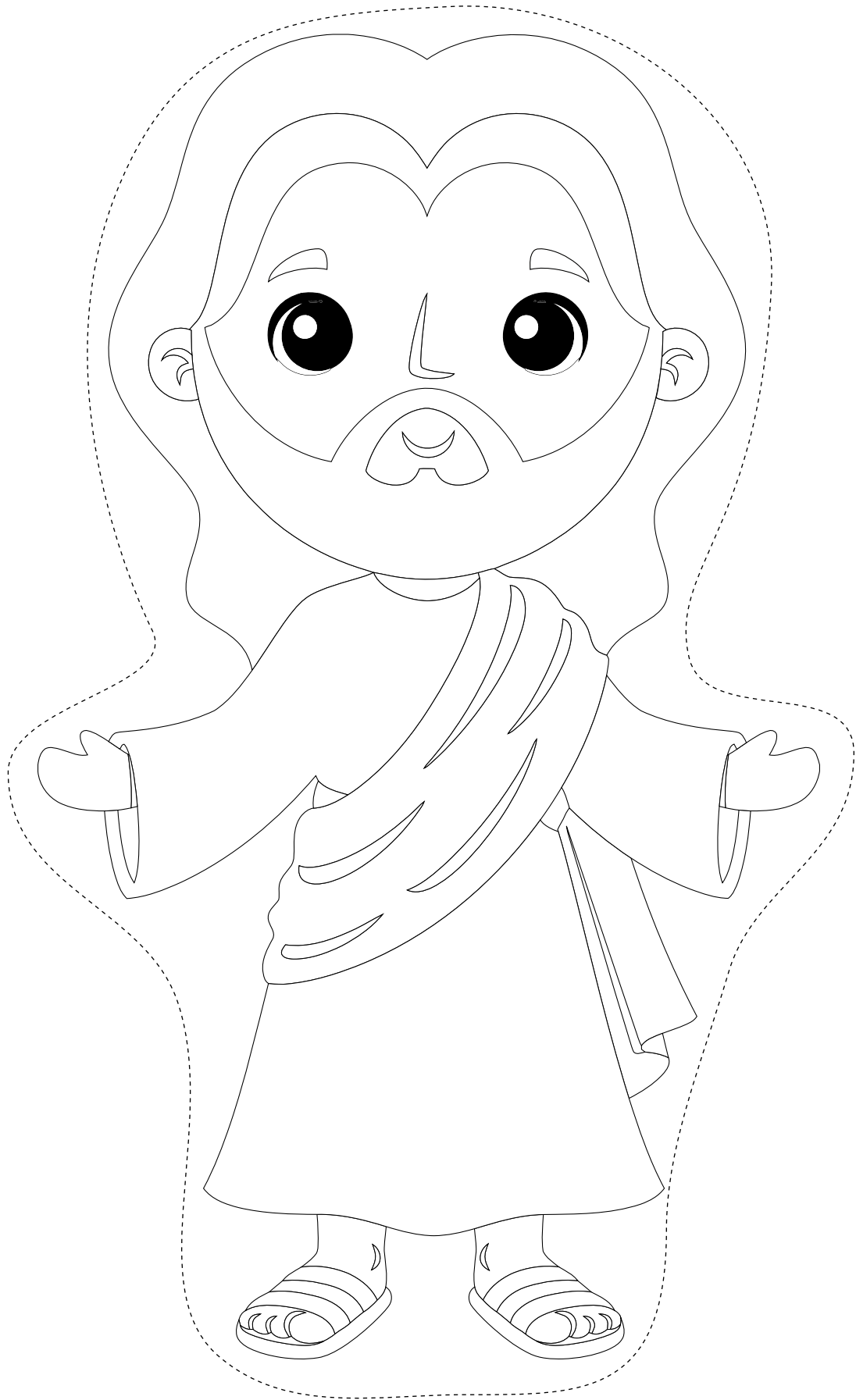
“Jesus! Jesus!” the voices shouted at sunrise. “Where are you?” Peter could not believe he lost Jesus. Jesus’ instructions had been clear: “Follow me.” That’s what Jesus had told Peter, his brother Andrew, and the brothers James and John. Ever since they left their fishing boats, they were having amazing adventures with Jesus.

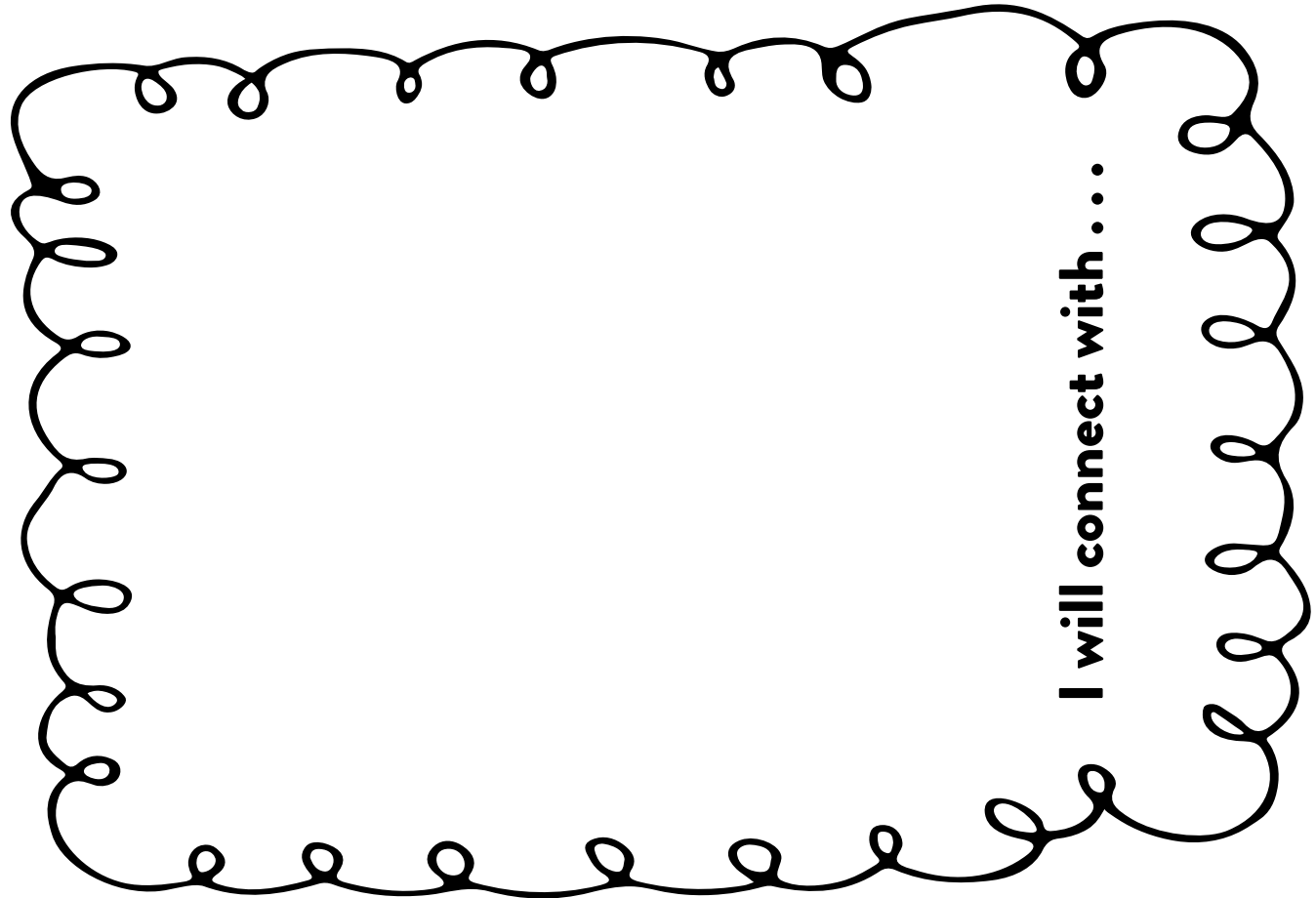
When Jesus went to the synagogue, he taught and did the most marvelous things. Jesus comforted people who were frightened and healed people who were sick. He told people about God’s love for everyone. Neighbors started sharing the news that Jesus was staying at Peter and Andrew’s home. More and more people wanted to see Jesus and have him help them. People brought their sick friends and family members. Into the night Jesus healed the people. When the last neighbor left, Peter went to bed exhausted but happy. He wondered what adventures he would have with Jesus next.

When Peter woke up, Jesus was gone! How was Peter supposed to follow Jesus if he did not know where Jesus was? There was a knock at the door. Perhaps it was Jesus returning from a morning walk. But when Peter answered the door, it was a crowd of people wanting to see Jesus. “Where is he?” the people demanded to know. “I don’t know,” answered Peter.

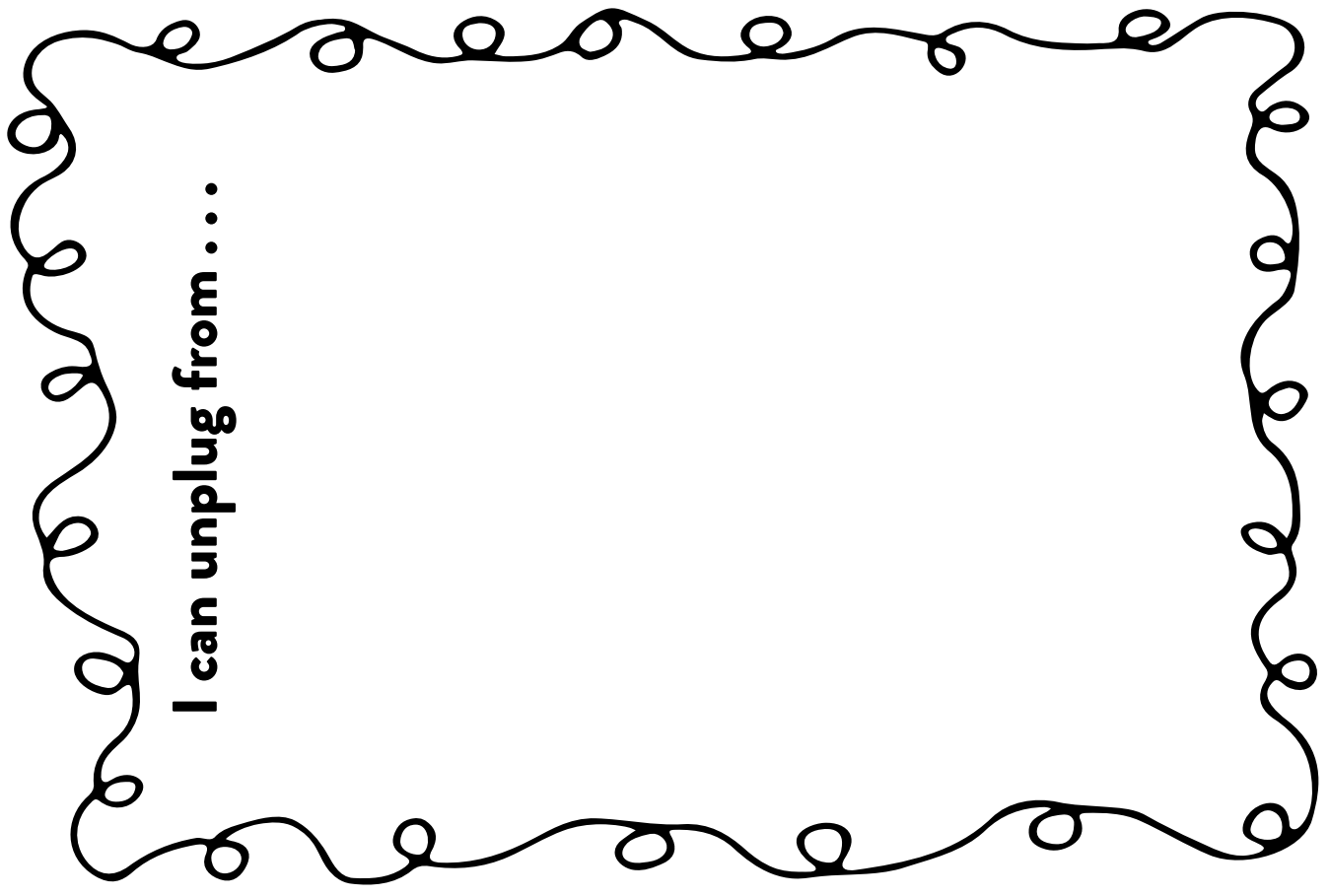
What Peter did not know was that, early that morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and walked to a quiet place. He needed some alone time. He went away from the synagogue, away from the people who needed his help, even away from the people he had called to follow him. Once he was away from the people and busy places, Jesus did something very important. Jesus prayed.

Eventually, Peter and the other disciples found Jesus in that quiet place. They called out, “Jesus! Everyone is searching for you.” Jesus answered, “It’s time to visit other towns, so I can keep sharing the message, for that is what I came to do.” Jesus continued helping and teaching people wherever he traveled.





I will connect with . . .



I can unplug from . . .