



## ACTIVE RESPONSE GUIDE

**Surprise! Stories of Discovering Jesus**  
**Active Response Guide**

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# INTRODUCTION

Jesus surprised the people he met! People in the temple were amazed by the conversations and questions they had with a boy named Jesus. Hungry people in a crowd had more than enough food to eat when Jesus provided plenty of food. Two travelers were sad that Jesus died, but then they were surprised when Jesus started walking alongside them! With each surprise, people discovered more about Jesus.

Are you ready to be surprised by Jesus? Are you ready to ask questions and discover more about him? Then come along on the journey, open your eyes, and see what you will find!

Several games and activity ideas are offered each day, but you are not expected to do all of them. Focus on the activities most appropriate for your group. The ideas are intended to be user-friendly for grades K–5, but can be adapted for other ages. Some of the activities require a large space, so think about outdoor places that can be used, such as a lawn, parking lot, or nearby park. Some of the activities require more adult supervision than others, depending on the age group involved, so invite other adults and well as youth to help. Regardless of which activities are chosen, the *Surprise!* themes will be extended in fun and creative ways.

# OUTLINE

The daily plan includes the Bible background, faith focus, and memory verses. Read them to understand how the activities and games connect with the theme, and to guide you as you interact with the children. The variety of games and activities allows you to be flexible and consider the needs and abilities of your groups when planning each segment.

## PRIMARY CHILDREN

Primary children are both endearing and challenging, and often open and affectionate. They may enjoy doing things on their own one minute, but want the leader's attention and guidance the next. Projects completed independently, though imperfect, are more satisfying than those completed by the leader.

Primary children think mainly about themselves and need encouragement to consider others and their needs. Sharing is hard for them, but repeated intervention is effective. Always acknowledge the children's feelings, even while correcting inappropriate actions. If you treat children with respect you will have encouraged positive behavior because primary children look up to their leaders and try to emulate them.

Primary children have lots of ideas and want to share them. They need space to express themselves and feel they are contributing to the group.

## MIDDLE CHILDREN

At this age, children are becoming less self-centered and are able to understand another's point of view. They are big on fairness and rules, and will quickly tell you when something is unfair. Clearly communicate your expectations about group behavior. Follow through on your expectations. When working on a new skill or project, middle children show amazing focus and determination. They take criticism seriously, so try to frame comments in a positive way. Middlers tend to have best friends and can exclude others. Peers are important to them. While some still want to please their leaders, others are beginning to challenge authority. Model respect in your words and actions.

Children at this age show great developmental differences (physical, intellectual, psychological, social, and spiritual). Be aware of these differences and provide opportunities for everyone to contribute as they are comfortable. For example, reading abilities can range greatly. Be sensitive to any child's reluctance to read aloud. Many children are eager to read and comfortable doing it, while others find it difficult or embarrassing.

Middle children are full of energy and enthusiasm. Their bodies are growing and need physical activity. Whenever possible, provide opportunities to move around.

# DAILY SCHEDULE

Schedule is for a 2-hour-and-15-minute Bible school session. For other session times, see below.

GATHER (10 minutes)	WORSHIP (25 minutes)	BIBLE/CREATIVE/ ACTIVE RESPONSE (30 minutes each)	SEND (10 minutes)
Small groups meet to begin the session.	Small groups converge for worship. A drama presents the Bible story.	Small groups rotate to participate in three stations each day. Activities focus on Bible story themes. Creative Response time includes a snack.	Blessing and dismissal in small groups or in total group assembly.

## Modified schedule

### If you have 2 hours:

**Gather**—5 or 10 minutes  
**Worship**—20 minutes  
**Respond**—75 minutes  
 Active—25 minutes  
 Bible—25 minutes  
 Creative—25 minutes  
**Send**—5 or 10 minutes

### If you have 1½ hours:

**Gather**—5 minutes  
**Worship**—20 minutes  
**Respond**—60 minutes  
 Active—20 minutes  
 Bible—20 minutes  
 Creative—20 minutes  
**Send**—5 minutes

### If you have 1 hour:

**Worship**—15 minutes  
**Respond**—45 minutes  
 Active—15 minutes  
 Bible—15 minutes  
 Creative—15 minutes

## Day 1

# DISCOVERING JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

### Biblical background

The Bible shares just this one story about Jesus' boyhood. It is an important one for children, helping them to understand that Jesus was young once, too.

At age 12, Jesus travels with his parents to Jerusalem to observe the Passover festival. We know from Mary and Joseph's presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple that they observed traditional religious events and rituals. It is no surprise that they make the journey to Jerusalem for Passover. Their faith is a natural part of their life and part of their identity.

Most of the story takes place after the event, as the family travels home. After a full day of walking, Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus is not with them. They are traveling with a group—a community of family and friends—and assumed Jesus was walking with others.

When they realize Jesus is missing, they return to Jerusalem and search for three days until they find him in the temple. Jesus is with the teachers, talking, listening, and asking questions. The teachers are surprised and amazed at his understanding!

When Mary tells Jesus how worried they were, he responds, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (v. 49). Neither Mary nor Joseph fully understands, but Mary treasures the experience.

This story reminds us to take children and their faith experiences seriously, as the teachers did with the young Jesus. Young children are capable of reflecting about God, so embrace their enthusiasm and allow their faith to grow.

Hearing a story about Jesus as a boy allows children to see him as someone who understands them. When Jesus was in the temple, he asked questions as many children do. As a result, he grew in wisdom. Children will learn that they can ask questions, too, and learn and grow in their faith.

### Today's Bible experience

Luke 2:41-52

### Summary

Jesus' parents travel home to Nazareth after observing Passover in Jerusalem and discover that 12-year-old Jesus is not with them. They return to Jerusalem and find Jesus in the temple, asking questions and talking with the teachers.

### Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

### Faith focus

We can ask questions and grow in wisdom.

## Advance preparation

- Choose games and activities appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places for the activities. Some are best done indoors, while others may be done outside at a nearby park, lawn, or parking lot.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Ask volunteers to share one exciting or interesting thing from their previous VBS session.
2. **Introduce the activity time.** Today's activities focus on seeking wisdom and asking questions as ways to grow in our faith, just as Jesus asked questions and grew. Explain the directions for the chosen activities. Afterward, take time to discuss the questions listed after each activity, making connections between the activity and the Bible story.
3. **Close in prayer:** *God, we give thanks for our bodies that grow. We give thanks for our minds that can learn your ways. We give thanks for our spirits that can hear your voice speaking to us. Amen.*

## Unwrapping Wisdom

### Materials

- Box
- Wrapping paper or newspaper
- Tape
- Scissors
- Small candies or other treats, one per child
- Slips of paper with verses about seeking wisdom (page 25), one per child
- *Surprise!* CD

In preparation, place small candies or other treats inside a box. Copy reproducible page 25 and cut apart the slips of paper, and place them inside the box along with the treats. Wrap the box with several layers of wrapping paper or newspaper.

1. Invite children to sit on the floor in a circle.
2. Play the CD as the children pass the box around the circle. Stop the music at various intervals. When the music ends, the child holding the box needs to (a) ask a question or make a comment about today's Bible story and (b) unwrap a layer of paper.
3. Continue until all layers are removed from the box. Open it and show everyone what is inside.
4. Pass the box around the circle again so that all may select a treat and a piece of paper.
5. Read the Bible verses aloud while enjoying the treats.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** The box had many layers of wrapping paper. We didn't just unwrap one layer to discover what was inside. We unwrapped many layers. How might the process of unwrapping many layers be an example of the way we are to seek wisdom?

We shared the process of unwrapping the box. Can you think of ways that you benefit from connecting with others as you learn about God?

## Finding Information

### Materials

- Several items that are symbolic of seeking information or wisdom, such as Bibles, magnifying glasses, dictionaries, phones, songbooks, tablets, and others

1. Select one child to begin the game. The child will hide one object somewhere in the room. The other children will close their eyes and turn their backs so that they cannot see where the object is hidden. (Or, the children may need to leave the room while the object is hidden.) Signal the group after the object is hidden.
2. As children search for the object, the one who hid it will say "Wiser" to encourage those who are moving close to the object.
3. The one who finds the object hides the next one.
4. After all objects are hidden and found, look at them and think about what they might have in common. (They can be used to obtain information or increase learning about the world, God, or others.)

**THINK ABOUT IT:** How do people look for information? How do you find out what you need to know? What are some ways we can learn about God?

## Guessing Game

### Materials

- Cards from page 26
- Scissors
- Beanbag or soft ball

1. Invite children to sit in a circle.
2. Choose one child to act as the wise person and select a card, keeping the content of the card secret.
3. Explain that all of the cards have words that relate to today's Bible story. The group may ask 20 questions of the wise person in order to try and discover what is on the card.
4. To play, select a child to be the guesser, who will hold the beanbag or ball. The guesser will ask a question of the wise person in order to try and discover what is written on the card. The question must be able to be answered either "yes" or "no."
5. The guesser then tosses the beanbag to another member of the circle, who asks another question of the wise person.
6. Continue until someone in the circle believes that he or she knows the answer. The group will confer, and if the group believes the guess is correct, they may ask the wise person. This counts as one of the 20 guesses.
7. If a guess is correct, select another wise person. Repeat the process using the other cards.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** What were some of the trickier words to discover? What do you think made them tricky? What do you think drew Jesus to stay and talk with the community of teachers at the temple?

## Yarn Surprises

### Materials

- Pieces of yarn, one color per group of four children, one yarn per child

In preparation, hide the yarn in various places around the room.

1. Explain that there are pieces of yarn around the room, and allow time for the children to find them. After a child has found a piece, he or she will sit on the floor and wait for others to find their pieces.
2. Have the children get into groups according to the color of yarn they found.
3. Invite children to think creatively and discover many things they can do with the yarn. To get the children thinking, here are some ideas: tie hair, make a bracelet, braid it, create outlines of letters or pictures, and so on. How many things can the groups think of?
4. Allow time for groups to share their creative thinking with others.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** You needed to discover the yarn, and then figure out ways to use the yarn. How did your group work together to discover uses for the yarn? Were there any surprises in how the yarn was used? During VBS we are going to discover stories about Jesus, and some of them will surprise us!

## Day 2

# DISCOVERING JESUS WITH THE CHILDREN

### Biblical background

The story of Jesus blessing the children is a familiar one. People bring children to Jesus, but the disciples stand in their way. Perhaps they feel Jesus is too busy, or perhaps they are caught up in Jesus' words and don't want to be interrupted. Maybe they don't want to let others into their space.

We don't know why the disciples tried to keep children away, but we do know that Jesus was indignant. He insisted that they let the children come. Jesus not only welcomes the children but blesses them, saying, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." (v. 15)

Jesus embraces the children and all that comes with being a child. This is a marked departure from the culture of the day, in which children had little significance and were seen as weak and defenseless. In this story, the disciples are the ones with power, and they try to use it to keep the vulnerable children away.

But Jesus showed another way—overturning those with power and defending those who are weak. Perhaps the kingdom of God is not about power, but about powerlessness. Perhaps the kingdom of God is not about greatness, but about being vulnerable and humble.

We know Jesus is with us and with the children attending vacation Bible school. Allow time for children to ask questions, or to quietly be present with Jesus. Give them the opportunity to feel heard and blessed.

Children will delight in knowing that Jesus embraces, blesses, and values them. Help them to see Jesus at VBS, through one another, the Bible stories, and the games and crafts. Let children know they are significant to Jesus and that he wants to be with them and bless them.

### Today's Bible experience

Mark 10:13-16

### Summary

People bring their children to Jesus, but the disciples turn them away. Jesus sees this and insists that they let the children come to him. He takes the children in his arms and blesses them.

### Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

### Faith focus

We can receive the blessing of Jesus.

## Advance preparation

- Choose games and activities appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places for the activities. Some are best done indoors, while others may be done outside at a nearby park, lawn, or parking lot.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Ask volunteers to share one exciting or interesting thing from their previous VBS session.
2. **Introduce the activity time.** Today's activities focus on Jesus' blessing. Explain the directions for the chosen activities. Afterward, take time to discuss the questions listed after each activity, making connections between the activity and the Bible story.
3. **Close in prayer:** *God, we thank you for Jesus' kindness to children. When we feel afraid or confused or unimportant, remind us that we are valued and blessed by you. Amen.*

## Circle of Blessing

### Materials

- Copies of the verses on page 27
- Basket
- Scarf or crown
- *Surprise!* CD

In preparation, make enough copies of the verses so that each child will have one verse. Place the verses in a basket.

1. Invite children to stand in a circle.
2. Have a volunteer play the role of the blesser. The blesser will wear the scarf or crown, and stand outside the circle.
3. The blesser will pull a slip of paper from the basket and read it out loud. Have an adult or youth help the younger children read their verse.
4. After reading the verse, the blesser will turn away from the circle and play the *Surprise!* CD. The children will walk in a circle.
5. The blesser will turn off the CD and the circle will stop.
6. Whoever is in front of the blesser receives the scarf or crown, chooses a slip of paper, and reads it out loud. They switch places.
7. The new blesser continues play. Repeat until all have been blessed.

**NOTE:** You may wish to establish the rule that a person is only picked once. If someone is selected a second time, the person closest on the right who has not been blessed will be chosen.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** What was it like to be in the role of the blesser? What did it feel like to be selected to receive the scarf or crown? What do you think it felt like to be one of the children who was called forward to be blessed by Jesus?

## Come for a Blessing

### Materials

- Tape

In preparation, draw or tape a line at one end of the playing space.

1. Have a volunteer play the role of the caller. Have a second volunteer play the role of the distractor. The caller will stand at one end of the space, with his or her back to the group. The rest of the children, except for the distractor, will stand along the line at the opposite end of the space.
2. The caller will call out: "Come for a blessing!" The children who are lined up will try to reach the caller. However, the distractor will try to tag people to prevent them from reaching the caller. Children who are tagged must be seated.
3. The children who are seated may rejoin play after being tagged by a child who is not the distractor.
4. As children reach the caller, they will join hands to create a chain.
5. Repeat, choosing new volunteers to be the caller and the distractor.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** What was it like to have to avoid the distractor in order to get to the caller? What did it feel like to finally reach the caller and join hands with the group?

What do you think the disciples felt when Jesus told them to stop blocking the children and to let them come to him?

## Active Blessings

### Materials

- Copies of scenarios from page 28, cut apart and put into a basket

1. Divide children into two groups with various ages in each group, if possible.
2. Ask a volunteer from the first group to choose a slip of paper from the basket and read it out loud.
3. The first group will take one or two minutes to figure out how to act out the scenario. The second group will figure out how to act out providing a blessing to those affected by the scenario.
4. Have the teams act out their scenes.
5. Now someone from the second group will choose a slip of paper. Repeat using more scenarios.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** How were people blessed in these scenarios? How does being blessed make us want to respond to others around us?

## Blessing Relay

### Materials

- Tape

In preparation, use the tape to create two lines about 20 ft / 6 m apart.

1. Divide children into teams of about six children. They should line up as teams behind one of the lines.
2. At “go,” the first children in line run to the second line and do eight jumping jacks while spelling B-L-E-S-S-I-N-G (one letter per jump). After spelling *blessing* the children will run back to their teams and tag the second children to go.
3. Play continues until everyone has had opportunity to do the jumping jacks. The team that finishes first, wins.

**NOTE:** This relay can be extended by having children spell different words such as JESUS, BIBLE, and others.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Jesus blessed the children in today’s story. What are some ways that Jesus blesses us, too?

## Day 3

# DISCOVERING JESUS IN THE CROWD

### Biblical background

We don't know much about the boy in today's story, but he plays a key role in one of Jesus' miracles. The boy is part of a crowd following Jesus and listening to him speak. The boy, not knowing how long he will be away from home, has brought his lunch along. Imagine his surprise when Jesus' disciples want the food! Why should he give up his lunch? Besides, how could one boy's lunch feed a large crowd?

The boy's food sets the stage for Jesus to perform a miracle that satisfies people's hearts and bodies. Jesus takes the lunch of bread and fish, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples to distribute. The food not only feeds everyone in the crowd, but there are leftovers! Twelve baskets of bread are carefully gathered so nothing is wasted.

The miracle of this feast has people saying that Jesus is a prophet. They do not yet recognize Jesus' divinity, but know that he must be someone special. The boy has given his lunch and it has blessed others.

God uses our gifts, too. Though we may be surprised at what God asks of us, we should never be surprised at the ways God uses what we give to bless others.

Children and their gifts are important to God. This particular story helps children understand that our contributions, no matter how small or unimportant they may seem, can be blessed and multiplied to do great things. Inviting someone to play, for example, will make that child happy. The child's happiness, in turn, can be passed on to others. Or perhaps children will choose to do an extra chore around the house to help ease the family's schedule. No gift is too small or unimportant for God!

### Today's Bible experience

John 6:1-14

### Summary

Hungry crowds travel to hear Jesus speak. There is no food except a young boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish. Jesus takes the lunch, blesses it, and the food multiplies to feed everyone.

### Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

### Faith focus

We can give to others and bless them.

## Advance preparation

- Choose games and activities appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places for the activities. Some are best done indoors, while others may be done outside at a nearby park, lawn, or parking lot.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Ask volunteers to share on exciting or interesting thing from their previous VBS session.
2. **Introduce the activity time.** Today's activities focus on giving to others and blessing them. Explain the directions for the chosen activities. Afterward, take time to discuss the questions listed after each activity, making connections between the activity and the Bible story.
3. **Close in prayer:** *God, we give thanks for the many ways we have received blessings. Give us thankful hearts, and eyes that notice how we can give to others and bless them. Amen.*

## Upset the Picnic Basket

### Materials

- Chairs for the number of players, less one

In preparation, place chairs in a circle.

1. Assign some of the players to be “bread” and the others to be “fish.”
2. Have a volunteer stand in the middle of the circle, with the other children seated on the chairs.
3. The volunteer will call out: “Fish” and children who are fish will find a new chair to sit on. If the volunteer calls out: “Bread” the children who are bread will find a new chair to sit on. The volunteer also needs to find a chair. The child who is without a chair is now in the middle.
4. If the volunteer calls out: “Upset the picnic basket,” everyone must stand and try to find a new chair.
5. If someone is in the middle three times, that child is out of the game, and a chair is removed from the circle.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Name some words that describe what it felt like to search for a new chair to sit on. What are some words that might describe how the disciples felt when Jesus suggested they feed a large crowd? Part of the fun of the game is racing to find a seat so that you are not left out. How would it change relationships to make sure all are included?

## Gathering the Fragments

### Materials

- Large basket
- Four containers
- Small balls or beanbags, four for each child
- Tape

In preparation, place the basket at one end of the room or playing area. Place the other containers at the other end of the room and spread them apart. Place enough balls or beanbags in each container so that there is one for each participant in the activity. Use the tape to mark a starting line at one side of the area.

1. Divide children into two teams. Have the teams line up near the large basket. Each member of a team must retrieve a ball from each of the containers and place it in the basket. Children must walk heel to toe to the first container, skip to the second container, crawl to the third container, and hop to the fourth container.
2. Play begins when the first members of each team follow the prescribed movements to the first container. After they pick up a ball or beanbag, they may run to the basket and place the ball inside, and then go to the back of their line. The next team members will go. After everyone on a team has retrieved a ball or beanbag from the first container, the team begins to collect balls from the second container, following the prescribed movements. Play continues until all the balls are removed from all four containers.
3. The first team that gathers all of its balls and places them in the basket, wins.

**TIP:** You may wish to have one team begin with the first container and the other begin with the fourth container so as to reduce the risk of collisions.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Each person had to play a part in placing the balls into the basket. Each disciple also had a role to play in gathering up the fragments left over after Jesus fed the large crowd. What do you think it would have been like to be sent out with a basket to gather up leftovers from such a large crowd? What do you think it was like to return to Jesus and discover that each disciple had a full basket?

## Going on a Picnic

### Materials

- Beanbag or soft ball

1. Have children sit in a circle on the floor.
2. Practice chanting “I’m going on a picnic, and I am going to bring . . .” Ask people to slap their knees twice and then clap their hands twice on each of the lines “I’m going on a picnic” and “and I am going to bring.” They may add tapping feet during the answering part of the refrain.
3. Toss the ball or beanbag to someone. Children will chant the refrain, and then the one with the ball must name a food that begins with the letter *A*.
4. The child then tosses the ball to someone else. The group repeats the refrain, and then the second child must answer by naming the food beginning with the letter *A*. Then the child must name a new food beginning with the letter *B*. Then the ball is tossed to someone new.
5. Continue adding foods with the next letter of the alphabet and tossing the ball to someone new to begin the refrain again.
6. Invite children to help each other name foods if someone becomes stuck.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** What letters did you find most difficult to work with? Were there any foods that you remembered easily? You had to work as a group to continue the game. Think about all of the people involved in bringing your food to you each day. For example, there are farmers, truckers, harvesters, grocery store clerks, and others. Pause for a moment to give thanks to God for the blessing of food and those who bring it to others.

## Who Has the Bread?

### Materials

- A small ball of clay or similar object to represent bread

1. Explain that the object of the game is for the group to conceal from the detective who has the clay.
2. Ask for a volunteer to be the detective.
3. The detective will turn around while you secretly give the clay to one of the children. The clay must be held in one hand during the game.
4. After the detective turns around, the children will begin acting as though they are at a picnic. The detective watches carefully to see who has the clay in one hand.
5. The clay may be passed from person to person.
6. When the detective calls out, “Who has the bread?” everyone freezes. Then the detective makes a guess.
7. If the detective is correct, that person becomes the new detective. If not, play continues. If the detective guesses incorrectly three times, he or she enters the picnic crowd, a new detective is chosen, and a new game begins.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** In today’s story, a boy was found to have five barley loaves and two fish. What do you suppose the boy might have been thinking when his food was discovered?

Think about times when we want to hide what we have—objects or talents or friendships—rather than offer them to others. Can you remember and share about a time when you felt blessed by receiving something?

## Day 4

# DISCOVERING JESUS AT NIGHT

### Biblical background

Nicodemus, a religious leader, has questions about Jesus and wants to learn more. He already knows that no one can do the things that Jesus does apart from God. But what does this mean? He seeks Jesus at night, under cover of darkness, to find out.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (v. 3). Some Bible translations use the phrase “born again” and others use “born anew.” Nicodemus wonders how it is possible to be born as an adult. Jesus replies that a person must be born of water and the Spirit to be part of the kingdom of God and receive new life.

Nicodemus continues to ask questions, and Jesus answers them. He tells Nicodemus about God’s love for the world and about eternal life. He points out that those who believe in God will be in the light. They will do good deeds and people will see them. Perhaps Jesus used this imagery because Nicodemus came to Jesus during darkness. We don’t know why Nicodemus chose to seek Jesus at night, but perhaps he wanted to make sure no one saw them together.

The conversation must have convinced Nicodemus. He is mentioned two more times in the Bible, and in both cases he is supportive of Jesus (John 7:45-52; 19:38-42).

This story is reassuring to children who have lots of questions. They will learn that adult leaders like Nicodemus have questions, too. As a vacation Bible school leader, recognize that it’s okay for you to have questions as well. It is these questions that help us learn more about ourselves, about God, and about our faith. Asking questions shows a desire to learn and grow. Encourage children to ask their questions. You will all learn a lot!

### Today's Bible experience

John 3:1-21

### Summary

Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night. He has seen Jesus’ miraculous signs and wants to know more about him. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born from above and that God loves the world and wants to save it.

### Bible memory

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

### Faith focus

We can choose to seek Jesus.

## Advance preparation

- Choose games and activities appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places for the activities. Some are best done indoors, while others may be done outside at a nearby park, lawn, or parking lot.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Ask volunteers to share one exciting or interesting thing from their previous VBS session.
2. **Introduce the activity time.** Ask children to think about a time when they looked for something they needed to find. Today's activities focus on seeking Jesus. Explain the directions for the chosen activities. Afterward, take time to discuss the questions listed after each activity, making connections between the activity and the Bible story.
3. **Close in prayer:** *Dear Jesus, you are with us all of the time. Thank you that when we look for you, we will find you. Amen.*

## Darkness and Light

### Materials

- Flashlight

In preparation, find a room or space where lights can be dimmed or turned off. The space should also have places where children can hide.

1. Ask for a volunteer to be the flashlight tagger. Designate one section of the room to be the holding tank.
2. Eyes covered, the flashlight tagger will count to 25 while the other children hide. After the children are hidden, dim or turn off the lights.
3. The tagger will try to find the children who are hiding and shine the flashlight on them. Whoever the flashlight shines on must go to the “holding tank.” Children in the holding tank can be freed if they are tagged by a child who is not officially in the holding tank.
4. Children may move hiding spots under the cover of darkness.
5. After everyone is in the holding tank, a new tagger is chosen and the game continues.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Talk about some of the tense moments in the game when you were afraid that the tagger would find you. What were you thinking? Think about Nicodemus, who was a respected leader in his community. He wanted to ask Jesus questions. Why do you suppose he met Jesus at nighttime?

## Air Power

### Materials

- Two table tennis (Ping-Pong) balls
- Straws, one for each child
- Two sealable sandwich bags
- Two books of the same size and weight
- Tape

In preparation, place the table tennis balls and straws at one end of the room. At the other end, place two books on the floor. Set a sandwich bag beside each one. Place a strip of tape on the floor in front of the books to indicate the finish line.

1. Divide children into two teams.
2. Team members will take turns kneeling on the ground and blowing through their straws to move their ball across the room to the finish line. After their ball crosses the line, they will pick it up and run back to hand it to the next child in line. This continues until all team members have blown the ball across the room.
3. After the last person on a team blows the ball to the finish line, there is a final challenge. The team members will place a straw into the sealable sandwich bag and close the seal around it. Then they will lay the bag on the ground with the book on top. They must blow enough air into the bag to move the book an inch off of the ground. They may try inserting more than one straw into the bag.
4. The first team to complete all the tasks is the winner.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Jesus compared the Spirit to wind. We don’t see the wind, but we can feel its powerful effects. How would the game have been different if there had been a big fan blowing behind you to help the balls move across the floor? Remember that God’s Spirit helps us to follow Jesus.

## Sit Down Tag

In preparation, find a large playing area outside, preferably a large field, park, or parking lot. You may want to mark the edges with tape or objects so that children know the boundaries.

1. Review with the children the names of characters talked about so far in VBS, such as Jesus, Mary, Joseph, temple leaders, children, disciples, boy with a lunch, and Nicodemus.
2. Have a volunteer be It. The rest of the children will run around the playing area and It will try to tag them.
3. If It is about to tag a child, the child may call out the name of one of the Bible characters and sit down before being tagged. Then the child cannot be tagged, and It must go to someone else. If the child cannot remember the name of a character or does not sit down before being tagged, that child becomes It.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** We have talked about several people in the Bible. What is something you remember about one of the people we talked about?

## God Loves You

### Materials

- Blindfold

In preparation, find a large playing area outside, preferably a large field, park, or parking lot. You may want to mark the edges with tape or objects so that children know the boundaries.

1. Blindfold a child who volunteers to be It. It will stand in the middle of the playing area, and the other children will stand around It.
2. It will say, "God loves you," and the other children will respond, "God loves you, too!" It will follow the voices of the other children and try to tag one of them. The children may move to avoid It, but may not go beyond the marked boundaries.
3. The child who is tagged becomes the next It. You may want to time the play so that It is not in the role for more than two minutes so that others have a chance to be It, should It not tag another child.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** God loves you and you and you. An important verse in our story today says that God loves the whole world. Don't ever forget how important and special you are to God, and don't ever forget that God loves you very much.

## Day 5

# DISCOVERING JESUS ON THE ROAD

### Biblical background

Two men walk to Emmaus discussing the troubling events of the past few days. As they walk, they are joined by a third man, who wants to know what is disturbing them. The men share that “Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (v. 19) was handed over by the religious leaders to be sentenced to death and crucified.

The third man is Jesus himself, but the travelers do not recognize him. They continue their story: it has been three days since Jesus’ death, and this very morning his tomb was found empty. What should they think?

Jesus responds by telling the travelers about Moses and the prophets. He interprets scripture for them. Though they still do not recognize Jesus, they ask him to stay with them. As they eat together Jesus takes the bread and blesses it, then breaks it and serves it. The travelers suddenly recognize Jesus, but as they do, he vanishes.

The travelers are inspired. They share that their hearts were “burning within” them (v. 32) as Jesus was talking. They know that something amazing has happened! They return to Jerusalem and share that Jesus has risen and they have seen him.

In this story, 21 years after the boy Jesus discussed and taught scriptures in the temple, he continues to teach. As he took loaves from the boy’s lunch and blessed and broke them to serve the crowd, Jesus breaks bread in this story. Just as Nicodemus had questions for Jesus, so do those who are traveling to Emmaus.

Jesus meets the travelers in their ordinary moments of walking to an ordinary town. Afterward, they realize the significance of this incident. Many times we too encounter God during ordinary moments. Help children to understand that throughout our days, God is with us. During ordinary moments of spending time with friends, taking a walk, eating, or otherwise, God is right beside us.

### Today's Bible experience

Luke 24:13-35

### Summary

Two men walk on the road to Emmaus, talking about Jesus’ recent death and the empty tomb. Jesus joins them and enters the discussion, but the men do not recognize him. They invite Jesus to stay and eat with them. As he blesses the bread and breaks it, the men recognize him.

### Bible memory

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

### Faith focus

We can recognize Jesus with us.

## Advance preparation

- Choose games and activities appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places for the activities. Some are best done indoors, while others may be done outside at a nearby park, lawn, or parking lot.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Ask volunteers to share one exciting or interesting thing from their previous VBS session.
2. **Introduce the activity time.** Ask the children if they have ever been lost. What was it like to finally see the facing of a caring adult who could help them? Today's story is about some friends of Jesus who were sad because he had died. Suddenly, they recognized that Jesus was with them! Explain the directions for the chosen activities. Afterward, take time to discuss the questions listed after each activity, making connections between the activity and the Bible story.
3. **Close in prayer:** *Dear Jesus, you are here with us. Help us to recognize you and give you thanks for your presence with us. Amen.*

## Tableaux of the Tale

### Materials

- Light-colored bedsheet, suspended so that children can gather behind it (optional)
- Flashlights (optional)

1. Divide children into groups of about five. Explain that each group will retell today's story in a creative way. You may need to review the story first.
2. Each group will decide together on one scenario from the story, and work together to create a freeze-frame scene that captures the scenario.
3. Groups will take turns sharing their freeze-frame scenes. The other children may call out which scene is being represented.
4. Optional: Suspend a bedsheet so that the groups may stand behind it to depict their scenes. Dim or turn off the lights in the room, and use flashlights to light up the bedsheet and see the silhouettes of the actors.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Talk about how the groups decided which scene to portray. Was it easy for the audience to recognize the scenes as they were portrayed? Is it always easy to recognize that Jesus is with us?

## Following Carefully

1. Have the children sit in a circle. Ask for a volunteer to be the first leader. All of the other children will close their eyes. No peeking!
2. The leader will make sounds that may be copied by the others while they remain seated. For example, the leader may clap, tap feet, whistle, snap fingers, or other actions.
3. The children will try to follow the leader closely just by using their sense of hearing. Repeat this activity several times with different leaders.
4. Then, children may open their eyes so that they can see the leader. Repeat several times with different leaders.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Talk about what the leaders noticed as they watched the rest of the group trying to follow their actions. How did the group's responses and timing change when the group was able to see? How can this activity be compared to recognizing how to follow Jesus?

## Jesus Is with Me Obstacle Course

### Materials

- Items to create an obstacle course

In preparation, create an obstacle course in an open room or outdoors. Here are obstacle course ideas:

1. Three cones or chairs that children will weave around
2. A table that children will crawl under
3. Two or more Hula-Hoops™ on the floor that children will jump in and out of
4. A jump rope with each child jumping at least twice
5. An area where children will do five jumping jacks
6. A taped line on the floor or ground where children will walk heel to toe
7. A floor rug that children will jump over
8. At the end of the obstacle course, children will shout out, “Jesus is with me!”

**THINK ABOUT IT:** You did many different things to get through the obstacle course. No matter how many different things we do each day, Jesus is with us.

## Ball Toss Review

### Materials

- Round laundry basket, one per team
- Balls, one per team
- Tape

In preparation, use tape to mark one line per team, which the children may not cross as they play. Set the laundry baskets about 10 ft / 3 m from each taped line.

1. Divide into teams of about five children. Each team needs to stand behind their designated taped line. Give the first child in line a ball. One child from each team needs to stand near their laundry basket.
2. The child will try to toss the ball into the laundry basket. If it goes into the basket, the team gets one point. Adults may need to assist in keeping track of the points.
3. The child near the laundry basket will roll the ball back to the team and the next child in line will toss the ball.
4. Teams will do this as quickly as possible within two minutes. At the end of two minutes, total the points to see which team got the ball into the laundry basket the most.
5. The children on each team will decide together on one of their favorite parts of VBS. The team with the most points shares first, the team with the second most points shares second, continuing until all teams have opportunity to share.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** We've had a busy, fun time at VBS and this is the last day! As we leave, let's remember what we've learned and the surprising ways people discovered Jesus. Remember that Jesus is with you no matter where you go.

Reproducible page

## UNWRAPPING WISDOM

With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding. —Job 12:13

You desire truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. —Psalm 51:6

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools  
despise wisdom and instruction. —Proverbs 1:7

To get wisdom is to love oneself;  
to keep understanding is to prosper. —Proverbs 19:8

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a  
spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him. —Ephesians 1:17

Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Happy are  
those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart. —Psalm 119:1-2

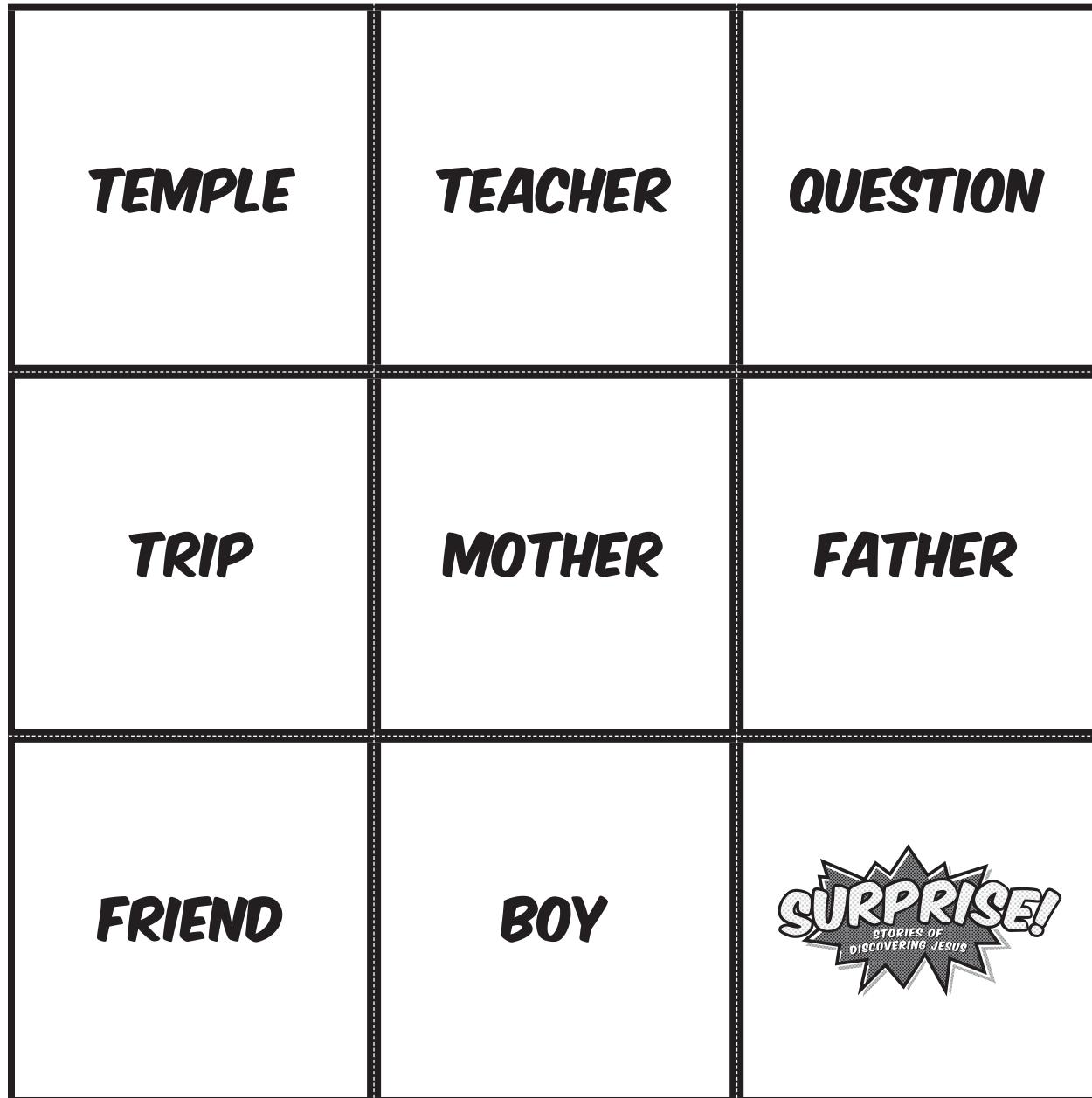
But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full  
of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. —James 3:17

From there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you  
search after him with all your heart and soul. —Deuteronomy 4:29

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## GUESSING GAME

Cut the cards out for use in the guessing game.



## Reproducible page

# CIRCLES OF BLESSING

Make enough copies so that each person in a group will have one Scripture verse. Cut apart the verses.

*For you bless the righteous, O Lord;  
you cover them with favor as with a shield. —Psalm 5:12*

*May the Lord give strength to his people!  
May the Lord bless his people with peace! —Psalm 29:11*

*May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us. —Psalm 67:1*

*The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel . . .  
he will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great. —Psalm 115:12-13*

*May you be blessed by the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth. —Psalm 115:15*

*May the Lord, maker of heaven and earth,  
bless you. —Psalm 134:3a*

*The blessing of the Lord makes rich,  
and he adds no sorrow with it. —Proverbs 10:22*

*Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,  
whose trust is the Lord. —Jeremiah 17:7*

Reproducible page

## ACTIVE BLESSINGS

Copy and cut apart these scenarios.

<p>A neighbor has not been seen for a few days. You notice him being dropped off at his house. He has a cast on his leg.</p>	<p>A new student at your school cannot speak any English.</p>	<p>You are saying goodbye to friends who are moving far away.</p>
<p>You see your brother on the playground at school. He is walking alone.</p>	<p>A girl made a mistake during a speech at school. Now some people at recess are teasing her about it. She seems quiet.</p>	<p>There is a new, popular game at school. You notice that one of the kids in class can only watch because he doesn't own the play pieces required.</p>