



BIBLE RESPONSE GUIDE

Surprise! Stories of Discovering Jesus Bible Response Guide

Portions of this work copyright © 2017 The Pastoral Center / PastoralCenter.com.
Adapted and reprinted with permission from *Surprise! Stories of Discovering Jesus*,
copyright © 2014 by MennoMedia, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22802.
Printed in United States of America
Cover design: Reuben Graham
Cover photo: Thinkstock
Writer: Ilene Bergen, Project Director: Mary Ann Weber, Designer: Reuben Graham

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in whole or in part, in any form, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior permission of the copyright owners.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture text is quoted, with permission, from the *New Revised Standard Version*, © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

To order or request information, please call 1-844-727-8672 or visit GrowingUpCatholicVBS.com.



**Growing Up
Catholic**
A ministry of The Pastoral Center

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!

You are privileged to work with children as they discover surprising stories about Jesus! Pray that each child will learn and grow while having fun during the Bible Response time.

OUTLINE

The daily plan includes the Bible background, faith focus, and Bible memory verses. Read them to understand how the Bible Response ideas connect with the theme. Allow them to guide you as you consider the needs and abilities of your groups when planning each day.

Activities are geared for various age groups, and you will want to consider the age and abilities of the children as you decide which activities to do. Additional activity options are suggested at the end of the daily plan if you want to extend it. Some activities require more adult supervision than others, particularly with younger age groups, so invite adults and youth to help you.

BIBLE STORY

The Bible Response time helps children reflect on the Bible story and what it means for their lives. The Bible story is read or retold during this time, even though the children have seen it dramatized during the Worship session. If you find this repetitive, ask the children to tell you the story or move on to other activities.

Create a space where children can gather to hear the Bible story. Make a story circle with tape on the floor. Or, use an area rug or a blanket, and add pillows and cushions. It may be helpful to mark where children sit with small markers such as pieces of cardboard or boxboard with children's names on them.

Make a curiosity box by wrapping a box with colorful paper and cutting a hole in the top. Prepare small pieces of paper on which children can write questions. Encourage children to write their questions about God, Jesus, and faith on slips of paper and put them into the box. Each day, draw some questions from the box and respond to them. Remember that as a leader, you do not need to have all of the answers. You may invite children to do research and see if they can find answers, and you can acknowledge that some things we will never completely understand.

A prayer symbol will be used during prayer times and is something that will help the children recognize that it is time to talk with God. You will hold the prayer symbol in your hands as you pray, or children will also take turns holding it as you pray or say blessings for them. The symbol can be a pair of carved hands in a prayer pose, or any small item that can be easily passed around.

STUDENT BOOK

Tales of Discovery, the student book, features a variety of activities that connect to the day's theme. Each child will need a book. Plan to have a few extras on hand in case you have visitors.

BIBLE MEMORY

One Bible memory passage is featured throughout the week:

“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

(Bible memory continues on the following page.)

Motions for key words will be introduced during the Bible memory time as a way to help children learn the words. Practice the motions and become familiar with them so that you can teach them to the children.

- **Come**—wave your hands towards yourself
- **Stop**—extend your arm with the palm held away from yourself
- **Kingdom of God** (first mention)—children form a circle and join hands
- **Does not**—shake head
- **God**—point up
- **Little child**—hold hand palm down as if patting the head of a smaller child
- **Took them up**—put arms in front as if hugging someone
- **Laid his hands on them**—put both hands in front as if placing them on someone's shoulders
- **And blessed them**—raise one hand high as if blessing someone

If you choose not to do the motions, there are other fun ways to memorize Scripture. You may use your own ideas, or choose from the list below to make Bible memory fun and easy.

1. **Word Scramble:** Create cards with the words of the passage, one word per card. Hand out the cards in no particular order, and then invite children to stand in line with the passage unscrambled. If there are enough children, divide into teams, with each team having a set of words. Which team can unscramble first?
2. **Missing Words:** Create cards with the words of the passage, one word per card. Attach them to the wall or a poster board in their correct order. Invite children, one at a time, to remove a word. After a word is removed, repeat the entire passage until all of the cards are gone. Or, write the passage on a whiteboard and invite children to erase one word at a time.
3. **Action Words:** Invite children to suggest actions for key words. Say the passage together using the actions. This can be done in one large group, or in smaller groups with adults helping.
4. **March in Place:** Say the passage while marching in place, one word per step. This gets tricky when words have more than one syllable! Try doing different actions, such as hopping on one foot, raising arms into the air, or tapping knees.
5. **Balloon Toss:** Blow up a balloon and knot it, and then have children stand in a circle. Invite children to tap the balloon, with everyone saying a word of the passage each time the balloon is tapped. Keep it in the air. If the balloon falls to the floor, begin the passage again until the whole thing is said without the balloon falling.
6. **Ball Toss:** Have children stand in a circle and give one of them a ball. Before gently throwing the ball to another child, the one holding the ball needs to say the next word of the passage. Invite other children to help if a child is unable to recall a word.
7. **Musical Verse:** Hand out rhythm instruments and invite children to create sounds as they chant the verses together.
8. **What Is It?** Divide into small groups and give one piece of paper and several crayons to each group. Invite them to illustrate key words of the passage. Display the illustrations around the room.

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. Make everyone feel welcomed at VBS!

MIDDLER 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. Communicate clearly your expectations about group behavior. Follow through on your expectations. When working on a new skill or project, middler 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 vary 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.

Middler children are full of energy and enthusiasm. Their bodies are growing and need physical activity. Whenever possible, provide opportunities to move around. Make everyone feel welcomed at VBS!

DAILY SCHEDULE

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

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

Session materials

- Bibles
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* CD
- *Tales of Discovery* student book for each child
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils
- Prayer symbol
- Curiosity box

Advance preparation

- Review activities and become familiar with the daily plan.
- Decide on any additional activities and gather supplies needed.
- Display the Bible memory poster.
- Choose a prayer symbol to use in your prayer times, such as carved hands in prayer, or any small item that can easily be passed around.
- Prepare a story circle where children will hear the story each day.

Create a space in which children can gather to hear the Bible story. Make a story circle with tape on the floor. Or, use an area rug or a blanket, and add pillows and cushions. It may be helpful to mark where children sit with small markers such as pieces of cardboard or boxboard with children's names on them.

- Make a curiosity box. Wrap a box in colorful paper and cut a hole in the top. Prepare small pieces of paper on which children can write their questions about God, Jesus, and faith. Encourage children to write their questions or things they are curious about, and put them in the box. Beginning on Day 2, questions will be chosen from the box. Remember that some questions are difficult to answer and it is okay to not know all the answers. Some things we will never completely understand.

DAILY PLAN

Introduction

1. **Welcome the children** to this first day of vacation Bible school. Ask them to share their names and something about the world around them that they are curious about. Begin by introducing yourself and adding something such as *I wonder why the sky is blue* or *I wonder why frogs sing at night*. (As leader, you do not need to have the answers; encourage the children not to give answers at this point. Instead, simply wonder about things you are curious about.)
2. **Pray with the children.** Hold the prayer symbol as you pray: *Great God, you have created such a wonderful world and we have so many questions. Help us to be curious about you. Fill our minds and hearts with a love for learning more and growing in wisdom and faith. Amen.*

The prayer symbol is held by the one leading the prayer. When children are prayed for individually, or if they pray, they may hold the prayer symbol.

3. **Ask the children if they know that Jesus was curious about the world around him and about God.** He had questions. Jesus went to the very best teachers about God; he went to the rabbis (teachers) at the temple.

Bible story

1. **Move to the story circle.** Review the Bible story drama. Who was the story about? What happened? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Find Luke 2:41-52 in your Bibles. Depending on the age of the children read the story together from the Bible, or retell the story from page 3 of *Tales of Discovery*.
2. **Connect with the story** by talking about some or all of these questions. Invite children to share their own questions or comments. As they wonder about the stories and ask questions, they too will grow in faith.
 - In the story Mary and Joseph searched for Jesus. But because Jesus was asking questions, we know that he was searching for something, too. What do you think he was looking for?
 - What kind of questions do you think Jesus asked the teachers in the temple?
 - What questions would you like to ask about God?
3. **Introduce the curiosity box.** Explain that every day during VBS, children can write questions they have about God on slips of paper. Say: *Write things about God that you are curious about. Put them in this box and each day we'll pick some of the questions and think about them.*
 Tell the children you won't necessarily have the answers, because some questions about God we'll never have the words to explain. But, like Jesus and the teachers in the temple, you'll have conversations and will think together about where you might find answers. Provide a computer or tablet for older children to search the Internet to find more information about the questions.
4. **Explain that as a boy, Jesus grew in several ways.** Invite children to listen closely to see if they can hear how Jesus grew. Read Luke 2:52: *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*
 - Have the children crouch as low as they can go, and share that Jesus grew in wisdom. Say: *He got wiser. As you get older you know more and more things. So did Jesus. But "wiser" also means wondering about things. Being curious and asking questions and learning more about who you are and who God is. That's what Jesus was doing in the temple.*
 - Have the children stand, but lean over, and share that Jesus increased in years, or got older. Say: *He got older and bigger just like you do. Every year you celebrate another birthday and you are taller than the year before. Jesus was like that too.*
 - Have the children stand up straight and share that Jesus increased in divine favor. Say: *Jesus understood more and more how much God loves him and what that means for how he lived and how he treated others. Jesus loved God.*
 - Have the children stretch as tall as they can with their hands in the air, and share that Jesus increased in human favor, or that people thought highly of him. Say: *Jesus' family and neighbors and friends liked him more every year. Jesus liked to make friends.*
5. **Go through the movements again,** this time having the children repeat after you the phrases about Jesus growing. Repeat movements and phrases, doing them faster each time.
 - Crouch low and say: *being wiser*
 - Stand, leaning over and say: *growing older*

.....

When Pope Francis spoke about this passage, he emphasized how beautiful it was how the whole Holy Family went on this pilgrimage together. They had a single goal to focus on God. And the pilgrimage didn't end until they returned home to their daily lives and reflected on what they learned from the experience. Our families help us grow in wisdom! (12/27/15)

- Stand straight and say: *loving God*
 - Stand tall with hands in the air and say: *making friends*
6. **Just as Jesus learned about God**, we can learn about God, too! Turn to page 4 of *Tales of Discovery* and talk about ways we learn. Invite children to write or draw additional ways they learn about God.

Bible memory

1. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Explain that each day the children will learn part of it so that it can be recited together on Day 5.

This Bible story helps children discover Jesus welcoming the children to share, ask questions, and be blessed by God. Children are very important to God!

Let the little children come to me, do not stop them. —Mark 10:14b

"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

Encourage children to bring their Bibles to Bible school. Help them find the memory verses.

2. **To say today's portion of the verses**, invite children to stand in a line facing you. Say the verse. When the children hear "come" they will walk toward you. When the children hear "stop" they will stop. Do this several times, inviting different children to stand in front of the others and say the verse, while the other children *come* and *stop*.

Teach children the following motions and allow time for them to walk around the room practicing them.

- **Come**—wave your hands towards yourself
- **Stop**—extend your arm with the palm held away from yourself

Or, use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn this part of the passage.

Closing

1. **Say a closing blessing and prayer.** Hold the prayer symbol and ask children to quiet their hearts and minds and souls. Say: *We'll end this session in prayer and I'll pray for each one of you.*

Give the symbol to the first child and say: *(Name), may you grow in wisdom and be blessed by God.*

Have the child pass the symbol to the next child and continue around the circle. If children would like to join you in blessing each other, encourage them to prayerfully say the blessing with you for each child.

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:

- “The Temple”
- “Bless the Lord”
- “Just Like You”

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Additional activities may be used to extend a session, depending on the amount of time available. Consider the age and abilities of your VBS children so that you choose appropriate activities.

1. **Make a footprint path.** This is an ongoing activity for all of the Bible Response times during VBS. The stories are not only about the surprises in discovering Jesus—they also include travel. Create a footprint path that goes around the space, out into the hallway, and through other rooms, and see how long it becomes! Each day will have a different focus for the footprints.

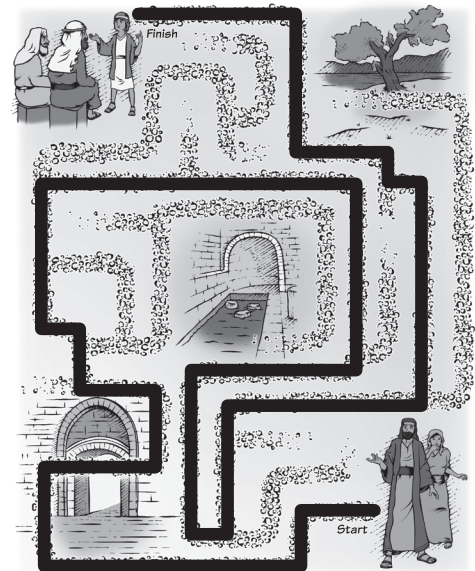
Give children pieces of construction paper and have them trace their feet and cut out their footprints. On the Day 1 footprints, invite children to illustrate the story by drawing Jesus in the temple. Or, some children may prefer writing about the story instead. Attach the footprints heel to toe to the floor and walls, and see how long the path is after Day 1.

2. **Help Jesus' parents find him!** Go to page 5 in *Tales of Discovery* and do the maze.

3. **Learn about Passover.** Jesus and his family went to the Passover in Jerusalem every year. They celebrated the way God had blessed their ancestors with freedom when they were slaves in Egypt. Jewish families still celebrate Passover and they have a special meal called a seder (*say-der*). At this meal children ask the questions. One of the questions they ask is, “Why do we eat these special foods?”

Bring some of these foods and explain their significance:

- **Parsley and a bowl of salt water.** The parsley is dipped in the salt water as a reminder of the tears of God's people when they were slaves in Egypt.
- **Horseradish** is a bitter herb and a reminder of the hard life of the slaves.
- **Lamb bone** is a reminder of how the Israelites put blood on their doors just before they left Egypt.
- **Unleavened bread or matzo** is a reminder of the time when the Israelites fled during the middle of the night and had no time for their bread to rise. Children today search for some hidden matzo bread during the seder.



4. **Take a walk.** In preparation, let adults know that you will visit them to ask what questions they have about God. Walk with the children from one location to

another within the church building. Talk to the adults in the church office, those in the kitchen, and in other areas. Remind children that adults have questions, too!

5. **Read the storybook *The Night the Stars Flew*** by Jo Ellen Bogart (book list). This is a story about curiosity about creation, and how adults sometimes don't get it!
6. (An option for older children.) **Jesus spent time in the temple** when he was an adult, too! Find these Bible stories and discover some things that happened when Jesus was in the temple
 - **Matthew 21:12**—What was one of the most famous things Jesus did at the temple? (*He drove out everyone who was selling and buying, he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the dove sellers.*)
 - **Matthew 21:13**—What did he teach about the temple? (*My house [the temple] is a place of prayer.*)
 - **Matthew 21:14**—Who came to Jesus at the temple and what did he do for them? (*The blind and the lame came to Jesus at the temple and he healed them.*)
 - **Matthew 22:36-37**—What was the lawyer curious about? What did he ask Jesus? What was Jesus' answer? (*"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."*)
 - **Luke 20:25**—Some spies were sent to trick Jesus. They asked him, "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" What was Jesus' answer? (*"Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."*)
 - **Mark 12:41-43**—Jesus often surprises us. Who did Jesus say gave the most money to the temple: rich people who gave lots or the poor widow who dropped in two small copper coins worth a penny? (*The poor widow gave the most.*)

BOOK LIST

- Bogart, Jo Ellen. *The Night the Stars Flew*. Markham, ON: North Winds Press, 2001. For children who are curious and wonder and keep looking.
- *Curious Creatures: 4 Books in 1*. Part of the Made by God series. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2014. For children curious about God's great creation.
- Gaudrat, Marie-Agnes. *What Is God Like?* Collegeville, MN: The Lutterworth Press, 1998.
- Murray, Julie. *Passover*. Edina, MN: ABDO Publishing Group, 2011. This book explains Passover to children.
- Muth, Jon J. *The Three Questions*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2002. Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy. Nicolai has three very important questions to ask.
- Tutu, Archbishop Desmond, and Douglas Carlton Abrams. *God's Dream*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2008. Do you ever wonder what God dreams for us? This book lovingly gives some answers.
- Weiss, David R. *When God Was a Little Girl*. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications, 2014. In this book a father does his best to answer his curious daughter's unusual request: "Tell me a story, Daddy... about when God was a little girl."*

* Available for purchase from PastoralCenter.com.

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.

Session materials

- Bibles
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* CD
- *Tales of Discovery* student book for each child
- Prayer symbol
- Curiosity box

Advance preparation

- Review activities and become familiar with the daily plan.
- Decide on any additional activities and gather the supplies needed.
- Display the Bible memory poster.
- Prepare three sheets of paper, each with one phrase on it:
 - The kingdom of God belongs to children.
 - Do not bother Jesus.
 - Do not stop them.

DAILY PLAN

Introduction

1. **Welcome the children** to the Bible Response time. Remind them that this is a time to be curious about the Bible story and a good time to ask questions and learn more.
2. **Pray with the children.** Hold the prayer symbol as you pray: *God of love, help us to see your blessings us each day. We know you are a God who loves to bless people. Amen.*
3. **Ask the children to show you a happy face,** a sad face, an angry face, and a stern face. Hold up the paper that reads: “The kingdom of God belongs to children” and ask the children to read it using a happy voice.

Ask children to think about what a stern voice sounds like. Hold up the paper that reads: “Do not bother Jesus” and have the children to say it in a stern voice. Ask the children what they feel like when they hear a stern tone of voice.

Ask the children to think about what an indignant (annoyed) voice sounds like. Show the paper that reads: “Do not stop them.” Have the children read it in an indignant voice like Jesus might have said it. Ask the children what they felt like when they heard Jesus use this indignant voice with the disciples.

Bible story

1. **Move to the story circle.** Review the Bible story drama. Who was in the story? What happened? Find Mark 10:13-16 in your Bibles. Read the story from the Bible or tell the story from page 6 of *Tales of Discovery*. Hold up the papers from the previous activity at the correct places in the story, and have the children repeat the lines in the appropriate tone of voice.
2. **Connect with the story** by asking some of these questions. Invite children first to think silently about the questions, and then they may share their own questions or comments.

- I wonder why the parents wanted to take their children to Jesus.
- Do you think the children wanted to go?
- What do you think Jesus might have said to the children when he blessed them?
- Do you think the children said anything to Jesus?
- If you could talk with Jesus face-to-face, what questions would you ask?

Add to this wondering time by choosing a question or two from the curiosity box. Encourage children to add questions to the box about God, Jesus, and faith as they think of them.

3. **Imagine the scene.** Invite children to sit comfortably with their eyes closed. Lead them in imagining a scene, pausing between each phrase to allow time for children to think.

Say: Imagine your mom or dad or grandparent is leading you to see someone. That someone is Jesus. He has lots of people around him. Imagine the disciples stopping you. Then Jesus looks right at you and says, "Come." You go to Jesus and he put his hands on your shoulder and blesses you. Listen to him blessing you. Is there anything you'd like to say to Jesus?

Allow time for children to reflect on what they were thinking and feeling during this time.

4. **Words of blessing.** Read the blessing phrase on page 7 of *Tales of Discovery* and take time to look at how this blessing is written in several languages. Can you read any of them? Invite children to go to the Internet to find out how other languages say "God loves you."

Read the prayer of blessing together, a blessing to God that is in the Bible.

.....

When Pope Francis spoke about Jesus welcoming the children, he reminded us that Jesus continues to welcome all children, especially those who are hungry, poor, abandoned, or otherwise in need. How does it change the way we hear this passage if we think of Jesus welcoming children who are "the least of these."
(4/8/15)

Blessing: Receiving a blessing is about receiving something good from God. God blesses us with love, joy, salvation, and peace. The really good things in our lives are blessings that come from God.

The kingdom of God: Jesus talked about the kingdom of God many times. Jesus said God's reign is good news because it's a kingdom where children are blessed, the poor are cared for, and the sick are healed.

Bible memory

1. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Explain that each day the children will learn part of it so that it can be recited together on Day 5.
2. **This Bible story helps children** discover Jesus welcoming the children to share, ask questions, and be blessed by God. Children are very important to God! The children should recognize the memory verses from today's story.

Let the little children come to me, do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. —Mark 10:14b

"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

Encourage children to bring their Bibles to Bible school. Help them find the memory verses.

3. **Add motions to the words.**

- **Come**—wave your hands towards yourself
- **Stop**—extend your arm with the palm held away from yourself
- **Kingdom of God**—children form a circle and join hands

Explain that they are in a circle because the kingdom of God is for everyone who believes in God.

Or, use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn this part of the passage.

4. **The word search** on page 8 of *Tales of Discovery* will help children learn the story.

B	S	T	E	R	N	L	Y	E	C	G	I
J	L	P	S	B	V	G	I	J	H	Y	D
I	C	O	A	J	L	C	R	N	I	E	I
S	N	A	L	R	S	E	D	G	L	N	S
V	O	D	T	M	P	H	S	N	D	U	C
N	A	L	I	T	T	L	E	S	R	W	I
T	H	Z	B	G	X	H	L	K	E	B	P
Q	E	B	W	F	N	D	T	C	N	D	L
Y	M	O	Y	G	D	A	P	R	U	K	E
F	W	I	B	E	L	O	N	G	S	F	S
K	I	N	G	D	O	M	A	T	D	K	M

Closing

1. **Say a closing blessing and prayer.** Invite children to sit in a circle, then say the words from Psalm 103:1-2 as a prayer of thankfulness. Invite children to repeat phrases after you, or read it together from page 7 in *Tales of Discovery*.
Hand the prayer symbol to the first child and say: *(Name), you are a child of God.* Have the child pass the prayer symbol to the next child and continue around the circle. If children would like to join you in blessing each other, encourage them to prayerfully say the blessing with you for each child.
2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:
 - “Bless the Lord”
 - “Children of God”
 - “Just Like You”

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Additional activities may be used to extend a session, depending on the amount of time available. Consider the age and abilities of your VBS children so that you choose appropriate activities.

1. **Continue the footprint path.** This is an ongoing activity for all of the Bible Response times during VBS. The stories are not only about the surprises in discovering Jesus—they also include travel. Create a footprint path that goes around the space, out into the hallway, and through other rooms, and see how long it becomes! Each day will have a different focus for the footprints.
Give children pieces of construction paper and have them trace their feet and cut out their footprints. On the Day 2 footprints, invite children to illustrate the story by drawing children walking toward Jesus. Or, some children may prefer writing about the story instead. Add the footprints to the Day 1 footprint path.
2. **Read the book *The Doorbell Rang*** by Pat Hutchins (book list). This book about hospitality and generosity gives a sense of what the kingdom of God looks like and how we can be part of receiving it.
3. **Make a web of blessings.** Have children sit in a circle on the floor. As leader, begin by holding a ball of yarn. Tell the children one thing you can do to bless others. Then, hold on to one end of the yarn and gently toss or roll the ball to a child. The child will share another way to bless others, then hold on to the yarn and gently toss or roll the ball to a second child. Continue until everyone has an opportunity to share. Notice the web in the middle of the circle!
Some children may need prompts to think about how they can bless others, so offer ideas such as playing a game with a friend, offering a thank-you to someone who has done something nice, helping someone with a task, and other ideas.
4. **Sing B-L-E-S-S** to the tune of “Bingo.”

There were some children gathered 'round

and then they went to Jesus.

B-L-E-S-S

B-L-E-S-S

B-L-E-S-S

And Jesus gave his blessing.

Sing the song again, the second time giving one clap for the letter *B*.

Continue to sing the song a third time, substituting claps for the letters *B-L*.

Sing until all of B-L-E-S-S is a series of five claps.

5. **Make blessing coupons.** Spend time thinking with the children about people who have blessed them. Who has done nice things for them? Who takes care of them? Who makes sure they are okay or comforts them when they hurt? Invite children to make a blessing coupon for someone by writing “You are a blessing to me” on a note card and then decorating the card with colorful drawings and designs. Remind children to give their cards to someone who has blessed them!

BOOK LIST

- Berenstain, Stan and Jan Berenstain. *The Berenstain Bears Count Their Blessings*. New York, NY: Random House, 1995. Every one of their friends’ things are better than their own.
- Hutchins, Pat. *The Doorbell Rang*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books, 1989. A book to help with understanding what the kingdom of God looks and feels like.
- Kostecki-Shaw, Jenny Sue. *Same, Same but Different*. New York, NY: Henry Holt, 2011. Two boys (one in the United States, the other in India) correspond and discover much they have in common though their worlds look very different. Jesus blesses all the children.
- Mackall, Dandi Daley. *God Blesses Me (My Favorite Verses)*. Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 2005. A book about the Beatitudes.
- Nellist, Glenys. *Love Letters from God: Bible Stories*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2014. A wonderful book of Bible stories, each with a love letter from God, a blessing from God.
- Sweetland, Nancy. *God’s Quiet Things*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. Notice and marvel at the blessings of God evident in nature.

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.

Session materials

- Bibles
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* CD
- *Tales of Discovery* student book for each child
- Paper, pencils, timer
- Playdough for each child, in various colors
- Blessing balloons, one per child
- Prayer symbol
- Curiosity box

Make a blessing balloon for each child. Write words of blessing on small slips of paper, and insert one into each balloon. Blow up the balloons and knot them. Blessings may include: God loves you, You are a child of God, The kingdom of God belongs to you, You are special to God, and others.

To make playdough:

- In a bowl, mix 2 cups / 500 ml flour and 2 tablespoons / 30 ml alum.
- Heat to boiling 1½ cups / 375 ml water, ½ cup / 125 ml salt, 1 tablespoon / 15 ml oil, and food coloring.
- Stir liquids into dry ingredients.
- Knead until smooth.
- Store in airtight container.

Advance preparation

- Review activities and become familiar with the daily plan.
- Decide on any additional activities and gather the supplies needed.
- Display the Bible memory poster.

DAILY PLAN

Introduction

1. **Welcome the children** to the Bible Response time. Remind them that this is a time to be curious about the Bible story, and a good time to ask questions and learn more.
2. **Pray with the children.** Hold the prayer symbol as you pray: *We thank you, God, for Bible stories that have children blessing others. Help each one of us to be a blessing to others. Amen.*
3. **Explain that today's Bible story** is about a very large crowd and a very big miracle.

To get a sense of the size of both the crowd and the miracle, hand out paper and pencils to the children. Ask them to draw as many small happy faces, representing people, as they can in two minutes. Set the timer, and when two minutes have gone by, children will count how many faces they drew.

Have children put their pictures on the wall close together and add up the total number of faces. Have the children drawn enough faces for five thousand people? How many more would be needed? Adults may want to participate, too!

Twenty people need to draw 250 faces each to have five thousand people.

Bible story

1. **Move to the story circle.** Review the Bible story drama. What happened? Why were the people so hungry? What did the boy do? Find John 6:1-14 and read it, or read with the children the story from page 9 of *Tales of Discovery*.
2. **Connect with the story** by asking some or all of these questions. Invite children to first think silently about the questions, and then they may share their own questions or comments.
 - I wonder why this very large crowd kept following Jesus.
 - Why was Jesus concerned about whether or not people had something to eat?
 - I wonder if I would have shared my lunch and been a blessing to so many people.

Add to this wondering time by choosing a question or two from the curiosity box. Encourage children to add questions to the box about God, Jesus, and faith as they think of them.

3. **Give each child a blessing balloon.** Explain that it was a surprise that one boy's small lunch could feed so many people. And there are many surprises if we look around us, too! Say: *Inside the balloon is a special surprise blessing for you.*

Allow time for children to pop their balloons and read their blessings.

.....

Pope Francis explains that Jesus does not simply feel pity for the hungry crowd, but shows *compassion* for them in this story. The word means to *suffer with* someone and feel what they feel. Jesus continues to do this today wherever people are hungry or hurting, and we are called to do the same as we follow him. (8/3/14)

Bible memory

1. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster.

Remind children that these are Jesus' words when he blessed the children in the story for Day 2. Ask if anyone know what "Truly I tell you" means. (*I'm telling you this is true.*)

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. —Mark 10:15

"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

Encourage children to bring their Bibles to Bible school. Help them find the memory verses.

2. **Add motions to the words.**

- **Kingdom of God** (first mention)—children form a circle and join hands
- **Does not**—shake head
- **God**—point up
- **Little child**—hold hand palm down as if patting the head of a smaller child

Or, use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn this part of the passage.

Closing

1. **Say a closing prayer.** Distribute playdough to the children and give them a few minutes to shape fish and bread. Have children hold the shapes in their hands during prayer. Invite children to think silently about something for which they would like to pray. Let them know that there will be a pause during the prayer, when they can tell God their silent prayers.

Hold the prayer symbol and pray: *Dear God, thank you so much for blessing us. Help us to bless others. We pray that you would provide food for those who are hungry and for boys and girls who don't have enough to eat. (pause) All these things we ask in your name. Amen.*

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:

- "Put It In the Hands of Jesus"
- "Go Make a Difference"
- "Children of God"

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Additional activities may be used to extend a session, depending on the amount of time available. Consider the age and abilities of your VBS children so that you choose appropriate activities.

1. **Continue the footprint path.** This is an ongoing activity for all of the Bible Response times during VBS. The stories are not only about the surprises in discovering Jesus—they also include travel. Create a footprint path that goes around the space, out into the hallway, and through other rooms, and see how long it becomes! Each day will have a different focus for the footprints.

Give children pieces of construction paper and have them trace their feet and cut out their footprints. On the Day 3 footprints, invite children to illustrate the story by drawing bread and fish. Or, some children may prefer writing about the story instead. Add the footprints to the footprint path.

2. **Find Bible memory bread and fish.** In preparation, use paperboard and cut out 15 pieces of bread and 5 pieces of fish. On each cutout, write one word from today's portion of the Bible memory verses.

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.

Hide the bread and fish around the room. Invite children to find them and then place the words in the correct order.

3. **Invite children to share** about the foods they usually eat for lunch. If they were to share their lunches with Jesus, what would they give? Go to page 10 of *Tales of Discovery*. Children will write or draw on the plate the food they would give to Jesus. Allow time for children to share about their plates with the entire group.
4. **Read the book *Max's Magic Seeds*** by Geraldine Elschner (book list). By sharing what he had received, a birthday present of many flower seeds, Max blesses his town and he is changed. Reflect with the children about how Max is affected by his generosity. Then imagine how the boy in our Bible story might have been changed by sharing his lunch. Have the children ever experienced something similar? How do they feel after helping others?
5. *(An option for older children)* **Find other stories in the Bible where food is multiplied.** Read the stories together.
 - **Bread from heaven (Exodus 16)**—The people of Israel had been freed from slavery in Egypt and were traveling in the wilderness. They complained about their hunger.
 - **The widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16)**—What food that was multiplied? Who was willing to share?
 - **Elisha feeds one hundred (2 Kings 4:42-44)**—Compare this story to what Jesus did. What was the same in the stories? What was different in the stories?

BOOK LIST

- Brandt, Lois. *Maddi's Fridge*. Brooklyn, NY: Flashlight Press, 2014. Sofia discovers her friend Maddi's fridge is empty and she promises not to tell anyone. She makes several attempts at getting Maddi and her brother something to eat.
- Davis, Aubrey. *Bagels from Benny*. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press, 2003. Benny learns the values of caring and sharing, building a strong community, and giving thanks.
- Elschner, Geraldine. *Max's Magic Seeds*. New York: Penguins Young Readers Group, 2007. Max receives a birthday gift of flower seeds. He blesses the town where he lives by scattering the seeds all over. The town is transformed and so is Max.
- Kushner, Lawrence, and Gary Schmidt. *In God's Hands*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005. A traditional Jewish folktale of a bread miracle that reminds us we can all be a blessing.
- Lucado, Max. *Small Gifts in God's Hands*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000. A young boy, Elijah, wonders what he can give to Jesus. He doesn't have much but he gives his lunch.
- Meyer, Jane G. *The Suitcase: A Story about Giving*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2017. An enthusiastic child packs his suitcase to put into practice Jesus' request that we serve others.*
- Nellist, Glenys. *Love Letters from God: Bible Stories*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2014. A wonderful book of Bible stories, each with a love letter from God, a blessing from God. Today's story is included.
- Peña, Matt de la. *Last Stop on Market Street*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2015. A young boy rides the bus across town with his grandmother, helps feed hungry people, and learns to appreciate the beauty in everyday things.
- Walters, Eric. *My Name Is Blessing*. Plattsburgh, NY: Tundra Books, 2013. Muthini, a young Kenyan boy lives with his grandmother and eight cousins. Grandmother gives them boundless love but they live with very little. The main characters are all blessings to others even though some difficult choices need to be made.

* Available for purchase from PastoralCenter.com.

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.

Session materials

- Bibles
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* CD
- *Tales of Discovery* student book for each child
- Construction paper, scissors, tape
- Prayer symbol
- Curiosity box

Advance preparation

- Review activities and become familiar with the daily plan.
- Decide on any additional activities and gather the supplies needed.
- Display the Bible memory poster.
- If possible, select an outside place to meet as a “secret church.” This could also be done inside but, either way, make sure the place is visible to other VBS staff, and let them know what you are doing.

DAILY PLAN

Introduction

1. **Welcome the children** to the Bible Response time. Ask them to be very quiet and not to make any sounds. Ask if any of them have heard about a secret church. Say: *When we go to a church, we don't need worry about getting into trouble for going. We can go to VBS or to church on Sunday mornings. But in some places, going to church is not allowed. People need to worship God secretly. This has happened in lots of places at many different times. A long time ago a group of people who worshiped God, who were called Anabaptists, used to meet secretly after dark in the middle of forests. They asked questions and were trying to understand the Bible. They were seeking Jesus together.*
2. **Pray with the children.** Hold the prayer symbol as you pray: *Dear God, help us to hear your voice. We want to walk in your ways and be your children. Amen.*
3. **Invite the children to go outside with you.** (See advance preparation.) Take the curiosity box, Bibles, student leaflets, and walk quietly to the place chosen for the Bible story, as the secret church would have gathered. Make sure the place you choose to meet is visible to other VBS leaders. Say: *We came here quietly, just as a secret church might have gathered. Some people went to Jesus quietly, too, hoping no one would see them. We don't always know why they went to Jesus in secret, but it's good to know that people were seeking Jesus however they could!*

Bible story

1. **Review the Bible story drama.** Who was in the story? What happened? Read John 3:1-21 or use the readers' theater on page 11 in *Tales of Discovery*.
2. **Connect with the story** by asking the following questions.

- I wonder why Nicodemus went to Jesus when it was dark.
- Why would someone who is a pretty famous teacher of religion still have questions?

Add to this wondering time by choosing a question or two from the curiosity box. Encourage children to add questions to the box about God, Jesus, and faith as they think of them.

3. **Return to the usual Bible Response** meeting space. Make paper lanterns to help children remember the story. The paper lanterns will not hold a candle, but can be nice decoration if they are strung together and hung along a wall. Turn to page 12 in *Tales of Discovery* for directions.
4. **Think about an ending to the story.** Ask the children:
 - Do you think Nicodemus ever met Jesus again?
 - Do you think Nicodemus and Jesus became friends?

Allow time for children to imagine how the story ends. Invite older children to look up two more occasions in the Bible where Nicodemus is mentioned: John 7:45-52 and John 19:39-42. What do these verses tell us about Nicodemus and Jesus?

Although Jesus seemed to speak in mysteries and in riddles, Nicodemus lived his life differently even though he might have gotten into big trouble. His friends would not have agreed with him. He took some pretty big risks.

.....

In speaking about the “mysterious dialogue” between Nicodemus and Jesus, Pope Francis argued that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist in this story. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to change our attitude and the whole direction of our lives. (4/13/15)

Bible memory

1. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Tell the children that at this point in the memory passage, Jesus is finished talking and now he acts by touching the children and blessing them. Review the text so far and then add this phrase:

And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.
—Mark 10:16

“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

Encourage children to bring their Bibles to Bible school. Help them find the memory verses.

2. **Add motions to the words.**

- **Took them up**—put arms in front as if hugging someone
- **Laid his hands on them**—put both hands in front as if placing them on someone’s shoulders
- **And blessed them**—raise one hand high as if blessing someone

Or, use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn this part of the passage.

Closing

1. **Say a closing blessing and prayer.** Invite children to sit in a circle, and tell them that Nicodemus listened to Jesus, and we can listen to Jesus, too! Say: *Today we will all pray at the same time. We will listen for Jesus. One way we can hear Jesus is if we are quiet on the inside and quiet on the outside, too. Jesus can speak to us on the inside, in our minds, and in our thoughts. We are used to noise, and so sometimes it’s hard to be really quiet. So let’s practice a listening prayer. We will be silent and then I will say “Amen” when the listening prayer is over.*

Place the prayer symbol in the middle of the group. Be silent for about one minute, or longer if the group can handle the silence.

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:
 - “We Are the Light”
 - “Just Like You”
 - “Go Make a Difference”

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Additional activities may be used to extend a session, depending on the amount of time available. Consider the age and abilities of your VBS children so that you choose appropriate activities.

1. **Continue the footprint path.** This is an ongoing activity for all of the Bible Response times during VBS. The stories are not only about the surprises in discovering Jesus—they also include travel. Create a footprint path that goes around the space, out into the hallway, and through other rooms, and see how long it becomes! Each day will have a different focus for the footprints.
Give children pieces of construction paper and have them trace their feet and cut out their footprints. For the Day 4 footprints, use dark brown or black construction paper and gel pens or colored pencil. Invite children to illustrate the story by using colors to tell the story of Nicodemus going to Jesus when it was dark. Or, some children may prefer writing about the story instead. Add the footprints to the footprint path.
2. **What do you know about light?** Explain that it's like God is shining a huge flashlight on the world. Share the following interesting facts, and find more on the Internet if you have time. Say a prayer of thanks to God for creating light!
 - If there was no light we wouldn't be able to see.
 - Light only travels in straight lines. It cannot go around corners, but it can change direction when it goes from air to water.
 - Light travels very quickly—186,000 miles / 300,000 kilometers per second.
 - Nothing travels faster than the speed of light.
 - It takes 1.255 seconds for light to get from the earth to the moon.
 - Sunlight can reach depths of about 262 feet / 80 meters in the ocean.
 - Plants use energy from the sunlight to make their own food.
 - Some light is invisible to humans but some insects can see it.
3. **Read the book *Mr. George Baker*** by Amy Hest (book list). He is one hundred years old and wants to learn to read. We can ask questions and choose to search for Jesus and learn more about faith no matter how old we are!
4. **Who can see the wind?** Go outside and ask if anyone can see the wind. If it is windy look for evidence of the wind (clouds moving, tree branches swaying, feeling the wind on your face). If it is not windy, ask the children how they know about it. In today's story, Jesus spoke about the wind (John 3:8). Though we can't see the wind, we know it is there. Though we can't see the Spirit, we know it is present in the world. Ask the children to think silently about how we know the Spirit of God is in the world. After a time of silence, invite children to share their responses.

5. **Take another look at light.** Place a bowl of water on a sunny windowsill, and put a mirror into the bowl, facing the sunlight. Hold a piece of white paper to intercept the reflection and what happens? A rainbow appears! This activity may be done as a large group, or divide into small groups, with each group capturing the light. Today's story tells us that Jesus brings light into the world. Talk about how important light is to help us find our way. Jesus is also important, because when we follow him, we find our way to God and learn to know God better.
6. **Nicodemus asked questions and listened carefully** to Jesus' responses. Give time for children to practice their listening skills by clapping rhythms. Sit in a circle on the floor. Clap several times using a simple rhythm. Have children repeat the clapping rhythm back to you. Do it again, using a longer clapping sequence. Continue for several rounds. Some of the older children might want to take turns being the leader.

BOOK LIST

- Bateman, Claire Bodreaux. *This Little Light of Mine*. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications, 2017. Angels prepare children for life on earth, and are reassured that their inner light is permanent.*
- Burnie, David. *Light (Eyewitness Guides)*. New York, NY: Dorling Kindersley, 1998. Have available for children who would like to learn more about light. Look for other children's reference books on light at your local library.
- Hest, Amy. *Mr. George Baker*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press: 2004. Mr. George Baker is one hundred years old and is learning to read. He goes to school . . . learning is a lifelong endeavor. We can ask questions and learn about our faith throughout our lives.
- Joosse, Barbara M. *Papa Do You Love Me?* San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2005 or *Mama do you Love Me?* (1992), also by Barbara Joosse. Explores a parent tenderly reassuring children that a parent's love is everlasting and unconditional. Relate to John 3:16.
- Tillman, Nancy. *I'd Know You Anywhere, My Love*. New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2013. Just as the parent will "know you anywhere, my love," so we will always be God's precious children, known and loved.

* Available for purchase from PastoralCenter.com.

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.

Session materials

- Bibles
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* CD
- *Tales of Discovery* student book for each child
- Bag with a common household object inside
- Prayer symbol
- Curiosity box
- Pictures of children

Advance preparation

- Review activities and become familiar with the daily plan.
- Decide on any additional activities and gather the supplies needed.
- Display the Bible memory poster.
- Put a common household object in a paper bag, such as a candle, hammer, dish, or other object.
- Search the Internet or photo albums for images of children hiking, children in nature, children playing together, children going to school, children eating, and other activities. Or, you may want to take photos of the children throughout VBS to use for this activity.

DAILY PLAN

Introduction

1. **Welcome the children to the last day of vacation Bible school.** Pass around the paper bag with the object inside. Invite children to use their hands to feel what the object is, but to not look inside the bag. After everyone has had a turn, ask how the children could guess what was in the bag even though they had not seen it. How could they recognize it? Add that today's story is about travelers learning to recognize Jesus even though at first they could not quite see him.
2. **Pray with the children.** Hold the prayer symbol as you pray: *Dear Jesus, we want to be able recognize you even if we can't see you. Come close to us now as we learn more about you. Amen.*
3. **Ask the children to make very sad faces** and look at each other. Tell them that the two travelers in today's story were very sad because Jesus had died. As they walked to the town of Emmaus they talked with each other about what had happened. They were remembering Jesus.
Use this time to review VBS and ask the children what stories about Jesus they remember.

Bible story

1. **Take the children on a walk**, either inside or outside, and tell the story from Luke 24:13-35 as you walk.
2. **Return to the room and connect with the story** by turning to page 13 of *Tales of Discovery*. As you read the story together, have children choose the correct emoticon for each line or paragraph. Then ask these questions:
 - How could the travelers not have recognized Jesus?
 - The travelers remembered afterwards that their hearts had been burning when Jesus was with them on their journey. Even though they did not recognize Jesus, somehow their hearts knew Jesus was close to them. When do you feel Jesus close to you?

- This story has a very happy ending, even though things did not turn out the way the travelers had hoped. Have you ever had a happy ending even though you thought the situation might not end so well?

Add to the wondering time by choosing a question or two from the curiosity box. Thank children for their good questions during VBS, and their good thinking. Let them know that they can continue thinking and asking questions. If their curiosity box question was not answered, tell them they can still ask any of the leaders, their parish priest or staff member, or their parents directly.

3. **Help children understand that God is with them**, even though they may not realize it until later. Show the pictures of children doing various activities. Ask if they can notice God at work in the pictures, even if they can't actually see God in the situations. Emphasize that God is with us always.

Bible memory

1. **Review the whole memory passage.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster.

“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

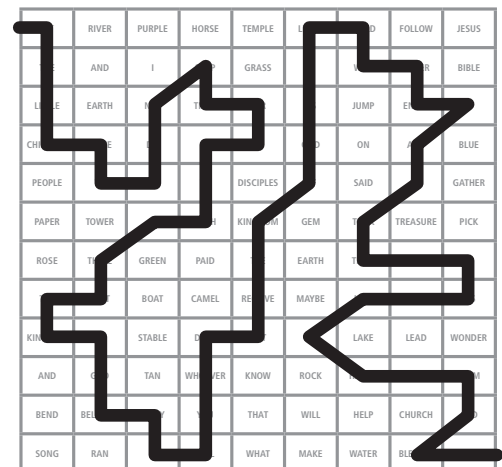
2. **Say the verses together and make the motions.**

- **Come**—wave your hands towards yourself
- **Stop**—extend your arm with the palm held away from yourself
- **Kingdom of God** (first mention)—children form a circle and join hands
- **Does not**—shake head
- **God**—point up
- **Little child**—hold hand palm down as if patting the head of a smaller child
- **Took them up**—put arms in front as if hugging someone
- **Laid his hands on them**—put both hands in front as if placing them on someone's shoulders
- **And blessed them**—raise one hand high as if blessing someone

Or, use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn this part of the passage.

3. **Review the entire memory passage** on page 14 in *Tales of Discovery*.

Pope Francis says the disciples in this story were so caught up in complaining about what happened that they couldn't recognize Jesus. When we live life complaining all the time, we lose hope and just focus in on ourselves. But Jesus is patient, listens to us, and reveals himself to us so we can be filled with hope again. (4/13/15)



Closing

1. **Say a closing prayer and blessing.** Hold the prayer symbol and invite children to stand in a line.

Remind children that the two travelers were walking, talking, and listening to Jesus. They were praying! Explain that for prayer today, everyone will walk together. As you walk, invite children to say a prayer along with you, saying one word with each step that is taken.

Offer a simple prayer with each step, such as: *Thank you, Jesus, for being with me.* Walk slowly around the room, inside the building, or outside.

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:

- “On the Road to Emmaus”
- “Go Make a Difference”
- “We Are the Light”

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Additional activities may be used to extend a session, depending on the amount of time available. Consider the age and abilities of your VBS children so that you choose appropriate activities.

1. **Finish the footprint path.** This is the last day for this ongoing activity. How long is the path?
Give children pieces of construction paper and have them trace their feet and cut out their footprints. On the Day 5 footprints, invite children to illustrate the story by drawing the two travelers and Jesus. Or, some children may prefer writing about the story instead. Add the footprints to the footprint path. How long did the path become during Bible school?
2. **Pray with a finger labyrinth.** Just as the travelers in the story were sad and worried, we sometimes feel sad and worried, too. Turn to page 15 in *Tales of Discovery* and follow the directions for a unique form of prayer. Children may sit quietly throughout the room to use the finger labyrinth.
3. **Dramatize the story.** Provide simple costumes and props, such as robes and bread. Divide into small groups and have each one create a drama of this Bible story. Do the dramas several times so that everyone has opportunity to play all of the characters.
4. **Take a walk.** Remind children that Jesus is with them all of the time. Have children walk heel to toe, slowly, around the room or down a hallway. As they put one foot in front of the other, invite them to whisper to themselves, “Jesus is with me.”
5. **What can you see?** Provide a variety of lenses for children to look through, such as magnifying glasses, kaleidoscopes, sunglasses, microscopes, or others. How do the lenses affect what we see? Do objects seem to change according to the lens we use? Remind children that we can always recognize that God is with us, no matter the lens we look through.
6. **Make a paper chain.** Provide colorful strips of construction paper for children to decorate with markers or crayons. Invite children to decorate the strips to represent one of their favorite stories from vacation Bible school. Create a chain and hang it in the room.

BOOK LIST

- Paterson, Katherine. *The Light of the World: The Life of Jesus for Children*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc., 2008. Gives children an overview of the story of Jesus, the light of the world.
- Stinson, Kathy. *The Man with the Violin*. Toronto, ON: Annick Press, 2013. A young boy hears beautiful music in the metro station. How can he make his mother stop and listen? Dylan noticed and some other children noticed, but very few adults heard the exquisite music happening that day. Music can warm our hearts and open our eyes just as the breaking of the bread finally opened the disciples' eyes.
- Wigger, J. Bradley. *Thank You, God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2014. We give thanks for Jesus' resurrection. This book expands the thanks and encourages children to look at the world with eyes and hearts full of thankfulness.
- Wood, Douglas. *The Secret of Saying Thanks*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2005. This book portrays many of the ways we can say thanks for the wonders we sometimes take for granted in life. And the secret: "We don't give thanks because we are happy. We are happy because we give thanks."