



## CREATIVE RESPONSE GUIDE

**Surprise! Stories of Discovering Jesus**  
**Creative 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 craft and activity ideas are offered each day, but you are not expected to do all of them. Focus on the ones most appropriate for your groups. They are intended to be user-friendly for grades K–5, but can be adapted for other ages. Some of the crafts and activities require more adult supervision than others, depending on the age group involved, so be sure to have other adults and youth help with them. At the end of each activity is a “Think about it” section. Use the questions and conversations starters to make connections between the day’s story and the activities.

You are privileged to work with the children. Affirm their gifts of creativity. Encourage them to develop healthy relationships with each other. Pray that each child will learn and grow through having fun.

# OUTLINE AND PREPARATION

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

Pay attention to how the room is set up. It is ideal to have at least two areas or tables—one for snacks and another for crafts—if space is available. Choose one craft for everyone to do, or set up craft stations around the room and allow children to choose which craft they would like to make. Take time to make the crafts and be sure directions are understood. This will also allow children to see samples of what they will make.

Some activities require more adult supervision than others, particularly with younger groups, so invite adults and youth to help you.

## SNACK IDEAS

Snack suggestions are offered for the Creative Response time. The suggestions go along with the Bible stories in some way, and many times they are used to develop deeper understanding of the stories or the faith focuses.

Invite adults and youth who are not directly working with the children to prepare the snacks and to clean up afterward.

Have napkins or small plates on hand, as well as cups for water or juice. Make sure children either wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before eating.

Be aware of anyone with gluten intolerance or nut allergies. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.

- **Day 1:** matzo bread or crackers; hummus; grapes
- **Day 2:** gingerbread cookies shaped like children; assorted frosting, sprinkles, dried fruit for decoration
- **Day 3:** small pitas; tuna salad
- **Day 4:** popcorn
- **Day 5:** monkey bread (also known as pluck-it)

## 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. Communicate clearly 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 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.

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.

### Session materials

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Water or juice, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 7-8)

## Advance preparation

- Prepare snack.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups, and prepare materials.
- Make craft samples ahead of time to be sure you understand the directions, and so that children can see what they will make.

Snack idea: matzo bread or crackers; hummus; grapes; water or juice

Be aware of anyone with gluten intolerance or nut allergies. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.

## Saint Booklet

The one-fold booklet for **St. Albert the Great** can be used as an additional activity to teach children about asking questions and growing in freedom. Simply reproduce the pages front and back and allow the children to fold them in half and color the picture. If time allows, have them read through the story and talk through the questions during this session. Otherwise, they can take it home and use it there.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Welcome them to the first day of vacation Bible school! Explain that during this time they will enjoy a snack and make crafts that go along with the Bible story.
2. **Snack time.** Offer matzo bread or crackers to the children, along with hummus. Explain that when Jesus was a boy in today's story, he would have eaten unleavened bread that is similar to the crackers. Add that hummus is a common food in the Middle East. Offer grapes, and water or juice.
3. **Activity time.** Explain that today's activities will help us ask questions and better learn to know God, just as Jesus asked questions in the temple so that he could grow in wisdom.
4. **Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the areas and put materials away. Decide if the projects will be taken home, displayed, or collected for other purposes. Make sure all projects have names on them.
5. **Closing prayer:** *God, you know each of us, inside and out. Guide us and help us to grow in wisdom. Amen.*

## Treasured Questions Boxes

### Materials

- Boxes, such as tissue boxes
- Cards copied from the reproducible page 25
- Wrapping paper or newspaper
- Tape
- Glue
- Scissors
- Decorative items such as sparkle glue, buttons, stickers
- Marker, colored pencils, or crayons; pencils and pens
- Slips of paper

In preparation, make copies of the cards on page 25, one for each child.

1. Explain what a question box is. People who have questions may write them down and put them inside of the box.
2. Each child will choose decorative paper or newspaper, and a box. Allow time for children to wrap their boxes.
3. Ask adults or youth to help young children cut a hole in the top of their wrapped boxes, large enough so that small papers may be placed inside. Older children may cut the hole by themselves.
4. Children may decorate their boxes to personalize them. Invite them to write down one or two questions that they have for God, and place them inside their boxes. Remind children that they can ask God anything!
5. Children will put a card with the Bible verses inside their question boxes, along with their questions. Talk about the verses and how they are good reminders that we can seek wisdom from God.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** We decorated our question boxes like treasure boxes. In today's Bible story, Jesus met with the teachers to ask questions and talk about the Scriptures. How does sharing our questions with others help us learn about God?

## Goodness Shines Through

### Materials

- White poster board
- Crayons in bright colors, plus black crayons
- Popsicle or craft sticks

In preparation, cut the poster board into card-sized pieces, one per child.

1. Give each child a piece of the poster board. Invite children to draw creative designs on the board using brightly colored crayons.
2. After their poster boards are filled with colorful designs, have children cover their boards (and the designs) with black crayon.
3. Demonstrate how to use the popsicle or craft sticks to gently scratch off the black crayon to reveal the colors underneath. Take time to look at everyone's patterns and designs.
4. You may want to put newspaper on the work surface for better cleanup.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Sometimes we experience hard times that seem to cover up our happiness, similar to the way the bright colors were covered on the poster board. But even though we couldn't see the bright colors anymore, they were still there. How is asking God our questions like scratching a pattern onto the poster board?

## Footprint Plaque

### Materials

- Plastic lids with edges
- Plaster of paris
- Craft sticks
- Paper clips
- Shells, buttons, stones, other objects (optional)

In preparation, mix the plaster of paris.

1. Give children one lid each and help them pour the plaster into it.
2. Show children how the side of their fist becomes a footprint. Have them create a footprint in the plaster. Use fingertips to add toes.
3. Children will write their names in their plaster using a craft stick. Add buttons, shells, stones, or other objects to create designs around the footprint.
4. As the plaster hardens, add a paper clip at the top so that it can be hung.
5. Plaques need to dry, and may need to be taken home another day.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Jesus traveled with his parents to Jerusalem and then stayed at the temple to talk with the leaders. Throughout VBS, many stories involve people traveling with Jesus. Your footprint plaque reminds you that you can walk with Jesus, too!

## Question Spirals

### Materials

- Round white paper plates
- Markers
- Scissors
- String
- Hole punch

Give each child a paper plate, or several plates if there is time. Demonstrate how to draw a spiral onto the plate, and then cut it out.



1. Explain that the spirals will be filled with questions. Spend a few minutes talking about questions of things children might be wondering. For example: Why is the sky blue? How far away are the stars? How can I make cookies? Will I ever understand long division?
2. Encourage children to think of their own questions, and write them on their spirals. They may decorate the spirals.
3. Punch a hole in the top of everyone's spiral. Give children a piece of string to thread through the hole, knotting it, so that the spiral can be hung. If you choose, hang the spirals around the room, or outside in a gentle breeze.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** We always have questions. Even adults have questions! Writing them down on the spirals and hanging them up is one way to ask questions. Maybe we can find the answer, or ask someone who can help us find the answer.

## 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

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Water or juice, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 11-12)

## Advance preparation

- Prepare snack. If you choose to have children decorate gingerbread cookies, prepare an area where they can do it.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups, and prepare materials.
- Make craft samples ahead of time to be sure you understand the directions, and so that children can see what they will make.

Snack idea: gingerbread cookies shaped like children; assorted frosting, candies, sprinkles, dried fruit for decoration

Be aware of anyone with gluten intolerance or nut allergies. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.

## Saint Booklet

The one-fold booklet for **St. Joseph of Cupertino** can be used as an additional activity to teach children about receiving the blessing of Jesus. Simply reproduce the pages front and back and allow the children to fold them in half and color the picture. If time allows, have them read through the story and talk through the questions during this session. Otherwise, they can take it home and use it there.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Welcome them to the second day of vacation Bible school! Explain that during this time they will enjoy a snack and make crafts that go along with the Bible story.
2. **Snack time.** Give each child a gingerbread cookie to decorate like himself or herself. Children may want to show their creations to each other. Point out some of the wonderfully unique features on the cookies. Offer water or juice.
3. **Activity time.** Explain that today's activities will remind us that Jesus blessed the children, and Jesus blesses us, too! We can also bless others.
4. **Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the areas and put materials away. Decide if the projects will be taken home, displayed, or collected for other purposes. Make sure all projects have names on them.
5. **Closing prayer:** *God, you have made each of us special. Thank you for knowing all about us and liking us! Help us to remember that we are loved and blessed by you. Amen.*

## Blessing Jars

### Materials

- Small jars, such as baby food or jam jars
- Glue-and-water mixture
- Paintbrushes
- Tissue paper in various colors, cut into small squares
- Candies in various colors, or other treats
- Wax paper

In preparation, cut the tissue paper into small squares. Prepare a glue mixture of one part glue and one part water.

1. Demonstrate how to paint the glue mixture to the outside of a jar, and then cover it with tissue paper squares, overlapping them as desired.
2. Encourage children to create their own unique, special, and colorful designs on their jars, following your demonstration.
3. After children have their jars covered, they should brush a thin coat of glue on top of the tissue paper squares to seal them. Set them on wax paper to dry. You may wish to let them dry overnight.
4. Give children candy or treats to put inside their jars. Explain that they can think about being blessed by Jesus as they eat the treats over the coming days.
5. Let children know that when the candy is gone, they may place a small light inside the jar to illuminate the tissue paper.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Look at the colors and designs of the tissue paper on the jars. What patterns or colors do you like? Which colors or designs remind you of happy times?

Jesus sees all of us and blesses us. What is one way your blessing jar could help you to remember this?

## Blessing Shawls

### Materials

- Fabric in solid-colored rectangular swaths (such as small bath towels, large hand towels, scarves)
- Fabric paint or permanent markers

1. Read this verse aloud: “The Lord bless you and keep you.” —Numbers 6:24.
2. Explain that everyone will make a blessing shawl, a way to remember Jesus blessing the children. Allow children to choose a piece of fabric for their shawls.
3. Read the Bible verse again. Encourage the children to use the fabric paint and markers to decorate their shawls. They may want to include words of blessing on the shawl, or phrases from the Bible verse.
4. The shawls will need time to dry.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Imagine that your blessing shawl is being placed over your shoulders by someone you respect and that the words of the Bible verse are being said to you. What would that feel like? Can you imagine Jesus placing the shawl over your shoulders and blessing you? When you are sad, worried, upset, etc., put the shawl around you and be reminded that Jesus is with you and blesses you.

## Meeting Jesus Puppets

### Materials

- Brown paper lunch bags
- Markers, crayons, scissors, yarn, fabric scraps, glue, and other craft items
- Mirrors (optional)

1. Invite children to look at themselves in a mirror. What do they see? They see someone Jesus loves!
2. As children continue to look at themselves have them notice things that are distinctive, such as hair and eye color, clothing, jewelry, and other things. Explain that they will make a paper bag puppet of themselves.
3. Give each child a bag, provide craft items, and allow time for children to make a puppet that looks like themselves. If there is time, they may want to show their puppets to others.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Jesus invited children to meet with him, and then he blessed them. Jesus wants to meet with you, too! Whenever you look at your puppet, remember that you are important to Jesus.

## I Am Special Mural

### Materials

- Mural paper
- Ink pads, or paint and a shallow container
- Painting shirts (if using paint)
- Large marker

1. Jesus blessed the children because children are special and important to him. Tell the children that they are special and important to Jesus, too!
2. Invite children to look at the lines on their hands or fingertips. Explain that no one else in the whole world has exactly the same lines and patterns on their fingers and hands! Everyone is made special and unique. This collective mural will showcase everyone's uniqueness.
3. Demonstrate how children will press their fingers into the ink pad and then onto the mural paper, leaving their own special mark on the paper. Or, if you use paint, pour some into shallow containers. Make sure children wear painting shirts. Invite them to dip their hands into the paint and then to make handprints on the mural paper.
4. Use the large marker to write across the mural “We are special to Jesus!”
5. After the mural dries, hang it in the room so that children can see it each day.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Look at your hand and fingerprints, and the lines on them. Now look at a friend's hand. How are your hands alike? How are your hands different? Aside from hands, in what other ways is each person special and unique?

## 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

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Water or juice, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 15-16)

## Advance preparation

- Prepare snack.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups, and prepare materials.
- Make craft samples ahead of time to be sure you understand the directions, and so that children can see what they will make.

Snack idea: small pitas, tuna salad

Be aware of anyone with gluten intolerance or nut allergies. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.

## Saint Booklet

The one-fold booklet for **St. Bertilla Boscardin** can be used as an additional activity to teach children about giving to others and blessing them. Simply reproduce the pages front and back and allow the children to fold them in half and color the picture. If time allows, have them read through the story and talk through the questions during this session. Otherwise, they can take it home and use it there.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Welcome them to the third day of vacation Bible school! Explain that during this time they will enjoy a snack and make crafts that go along with the Bible story.
2. **Snack time.** Give each child five small pitas and tuna salad to spread on them. Offer water or juice.
3. **Activity time.** Explain that today's activities will help everyone remember that we can help others, and bless them, just as the young boy in today's story offered his lunch, which helped and blessed others.
4. **Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the areas and put materials away. Decide if the projects will be taken home, displayed, or collected for other purposes. Make sure all projects have names on them.
5. **Closing prayer:** *Dear God, we give you thanks for the blessings of food and friends. Help us use our gifts to bless others. Amen.*

## Fish and Bread Mosaic

### Materials

- Paper plates
- Pencils
- Glue
- Assorted large dried beans and large seeds

Explain that near the places where Jesus performed the miracle presented today, a church was built with a mosaic of a picture of fish and bread built into the floor. Show children the picture of the Tabgha mosaic.



1. Give the children paper plates and seeds to make their own mosaic. They should first draw an outline of a simple fish shape or a loaf of bread, and then fill in the outline with glue.
2. Children will add seeds and beans to the glue to create their own mosaic.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Imagine that you were in the crowd that Jesus fed. What do you think it would be like to be the boy with the loaves and fish? Someone else in the crowd? A person who was near the front when Jesus and the disciples were talking?

## Stuffed Fish Sculptures

### Materials

- Large sheets of construction paper
- Pencil, crayons, markers, yarn, glue, and other craft items
- Newspaper
- Stapler
- Hole punch (optional)
- Yarn (optional)

1. Give each child two pieces of construction paper, or fold a large sheet of construction paper in half. Place one piece of construction paper on top of the other. Invite children to draw an outline of a fish on the top paper, and to cut out both pieces of paper so that there are two identically shaped fish. Have adult and youth helpers to help create the fish shapes and cut them out. You may want to draw a simple fish outline on a whiteboard so that children have an idea of how to draw an outline.
2. With adults and youth helping the children, staple together the two fish, leaving an opening at the top. Children will wad up newspaper and put pieces into the opening to stuff the fish.
3. After the fish are stuffed, staple the fish closed. Children may decorate their fish using the craft supplies.

**OPTIONAL:** Punch holes in the top of the fish and string yarn through them so that they can be hung from the ceiling.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Fish are important in today's story because Jesus used them to feed many people. Even today, fish are important to livelihoods and healthy eating around the world. Remind children that whenever they look at their stuffed fish, or eat fish, they can remember that Jesus took care of the crowd's need to eat. Jesus will take care of us, too.

## Pinecone Bird Feeders

### Materials

- Pinecones
- Peanut butter or suet
- Birdseed
- String
- Shallow plates
- Craft sticks
- Plastic baggies

In preparation, pour birdseed onto several shallow plates.

1. Give each child a pinecone. Demonstrate how to use a craft stick to spread peanut butter or suet on the pinecone.
2. Children will roll their pinecone in the seeds to coat them.
3. Demonstrate how to tie the yarn around the top of the pinecone so that it can be hung on a tree branch or another place outdoors.
4. Put the pinecones into baggies to take home.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** The boy shared his lunch with Jesus, who blessed it and shared it with others. Making pinecones bird feeders means that we can share lunches, too—with our feathered friends!

## Table Grace Basket

### Materials

- Plastic cups
- Scissors
- Yarn in various colors
- Table graces copied from page 26

In preparation, cut an uneven number of slits in the plastic cups from the rim to about halfway to the bottom. Copy and cut apart the prayers on the reproducible page.

1. Demonstrate how to weave the yarn around the slits to make a basket. Allow children to choose yarn and begin weaving.
2. After the baskets are completed, share that people pause before meals to give thanks to God for providing the food. This is what Jesus did in today's story when he broke the bread and blessed it. Read the prayers copied from page 26.
3. Children will choose one or two table graces and place them in their baskets. Explain that table graces are prayers they can pray to thank God before eating a meal.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Are any of these table graces similar to ones you already know? Which ones? What sorts of thankful prayers do you suppose people prayed after everyone in the crowd was fed by Jesus?

## 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

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Water or juice, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 19–20)

## Advance preparation

- Gather the snack items, which will be prepared during the session.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS group, and prepare materials.
- Make craft samples ahead of time to be sure you understand the directions, and so that children can see what they will make.

Snack idea: popcorn

Be aware of anyone with gluten intolerance or nut allergies. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.

## Saint Booklet

The one-fold booklet for **St. Martin of Tours** can be used as an additional activity to teach children about seeking Jesus. Simply reproduce the pages front and back and allow the children to fold them in half and color the picture. If time allows, have them read through the story and talk through the questions during this session. Otherwise, they can take it home and use it there.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Welcome them to the fourth day of vacation Bible school! Explain that during this time they will enjoy a snack and make crafts to go along with the Bible story.
2. **Snack time.** Show children some unpopped kernels of popcorn, and ask if they know what the kernels will become. Explain that even though we cannot see the hot air that will change the kernels, we know when the air is working because the kernels become popcorn!

We know that the Spirit of God is at work in the world, even though we can't see the Spirit, because we can see the good things that happen around us.

Use an air popper to make the snack and watch the kernels change.
3. **Activity time.** Explain that today's activities will help us ask questions and better learn to know God, just as Nicodemus asked Jesus questions so that he could learn more about God.
4. **Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the areas and put materials away. Decide if the projects will be taken home, displayed, or collected for other purposes. Make sure all projects have names on them.
5. **Closing prayer:** *Dear God, your Spirit is at work in the world around us, even though we can't see it. Thank you for all of the good things that happen, and for all of the ways we can learn about you. Amen.*

## God Loves the World Magnets

### Materials

- Juice can lids, or other lids of a similar size
- Construction paper in blue or green
- Glue
- Markers, crayons
- Magazine pictures
- Scissors
- Flat magnets or magnet tape
- Glue

1. Invite children to choose a lid and either blue or green construction paper. Demonstrate how to trace around the lid onto the paper, cut it out, and then to glue it onto the lid. Explain that the circles represent the world.
2. After the glue is dry, children will either draw objects on their circles to remind them of the beauty of God's creation or cut pictures from magazines and glue them to the circle.
3. After the circles are decorated, invite children to write "God loves the world" across the pictures.
4. Glue magnets to the backs of the lids.

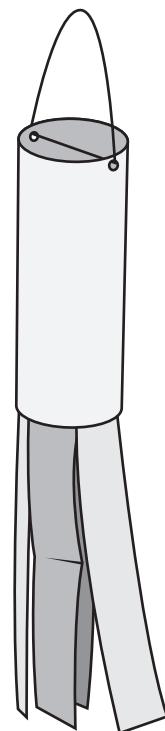
**THINK ABOUT IT:** What did you include on the circle that symbolizes creation's beauty? Did you include people? Today's story tells us that God loves the whole world. It is that love that sent Jesus to live on the earth. How does knowing that God loves you, and that Jesus loves you, help you seek Jesus?

## Catching the Breeze Windsocks

### Materials

- Construction paper
- Glue or tape
- Streamers or tissue paper
- Scissors
- Hole punch
- Ribbon
- Paper reinforcements (optional)

1. Invite children to choose a piece of construction paper, along with streamers or tissue paper, in colors that they like.
2. Demonstrate how to roll the paper so that the long edges are together. Glue or tape the edges.
3. Demonstrate how to cut lengths of tissue paper or streamers and tape them along the inside bottoms of the construction paper rolls.
4. Older children and adults can help punch two holes, directly across from the other, in the tops of the rolls. Then, thread ribbon through the holes so the windsocks can be hung. You may want to apply paper reinforcements around the inside of the holes in order to strengthen them.
5. Demonstrate how to hang the windsock to catch a light breeze. Add that the windsock should not be outside when it is raining.



**THINK ABOUT IT:** The windsock allows us to see evidence of the wind, even though we can't see the wind itself. Even though we can't see the Spirit of God, we can see evidence of the Spirit around us. We know God is working when we see people doing kind things. What are some signs you might see that let you know the Spirit of God is working?

## Shining the Light

### Materials

- Small jars, such as baby food or jam jars
- Sand, in several colors
- Candle wax
- Double boiler
- Empty can
- Candlewicks, about 2 in / 5 cm long

In preparation, pour sand into bowls, one color per bowl, and add spoons to the sand. Place them around the work space.

1. Give each child a jar. Demonstrate how to carefully use the spoons to add sand to the jars. Create colorful layers, stopping about 1 in / 2.5 cm from the top of the jar.
2. As children add sand, have an adult melt the candle wax using a double boiler. The bottom of the double boiler should have water in it, as well as the top part. The candle wax should melt inside the can, placed in the top of the double boiler. Do not leave the double boiler unattended during this time.
3. After children are finished adding sand, an adult will pour the hot wax on top of the sand. While the wax is still hot, an adult will drop the piece of candlewick into it.
4. Allow candles to cool.

**NOTE:** The wax gets very hot, so be sure an adult does this part of the candle making. For more information about candle making, find tutorials on the Internet.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** What was it like to work with the sand? Imagine God's pleasure in creating the world. Today's story tells us that God loves the world and that includes each one of us.

Think about darkness. What is the darkest place you've ever been? Now picture a tiny light coming into the darkness. How does the light affect the darkness? Imagine more and more lights entering the darkness until the place is filled with light. I wonder why God's love can be compared to light.

## God Is Love Rocks

### Materials

- Rocks
- Painting shirts
- Paintbrushes
- Acrylic paints in assorted colors
- Newspaper

In preparation, place newspaper on the work space. Pour paints into small containers that children can easily reach.

1. Allow children to choose a rock, and then put on painting shirts.
2. Invite children to paint a heart, representing God's love, on the middle of their rock. Allow time for them to colorfully decorate their rock using other paint colors.
3. Allow rocks to dry.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Many times hearts are used to represent love. As we heard in today's story, God loves the whole world. When you take the rock home, put it in a place where you can see it every day. When you see it, remember that God loves you.

## 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

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Water or juice, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 23-24)

## Advance preparation

- Prepare snack.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups and prepare materials.
- Make craft samples ahead of time to be sure you understand the directions, and so that children can see what they will make.

Snack idea: monkey bread (also known as pluck-it). Use a favorite recipe or find one on the Internet, using bread dough or refrigerated biscuits. You may want to prepare the treat in advance, or have children help with dunking the pieces of dough into the butter, cinnamon, and sugar. Assemble the loaf prior to baking. Have an adult bake the loaf.

Be aware of anyone with gluten intolerance or nut allergies. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.

## Saint Booklet

The one-fold booklet for **St. Martha of Bethany** can be used as an additional activity to teach children about recognizing Jesus with us. Simply reproduce the pages front and back and allow the children to fold them in half and color the picture. If time allows, have them read through the story and talk through the questions during this session. Otherwise, they can take it home and use it there.

## Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Welcome them to the last day of vacation Bible school! Let the children know that you have enjoyed learning to know them, and spending time with them during VBS.
2. **Snack time.** Offer monkey bread. As children pull portions off of the loaf, remind them that Jesus' friends recognized him when he broke the bread.
3. **Activity time.** Explain that today's activities will help them relate to today's Bible story of recognizing that Jesus is with us.
4. **Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the areas and put materials away. Be sure to send all VBS projects home.
5. **Closing prayer:** *Dear God, thank you that we could get together and learn about you. Open our hearts and minds just as you did with the two travelers so that we recognize that Jesus is alive and with us. Amen.*

## Seeing Jesus (snow globes)

### Materials

- Small plastic objects that remind children of meeting Jesus during vacation Bible school, such as temple/church, fish, bread, and other items
  - Small jars, such as baby food or jam jars
  - Water
  - Glitter
  - Hot glue gun
  - Epoxy cement
1. Give a jar to each child. Invite children to choose one object that symbolizes meeting Jesus. Talk about how the items relate to VBS.
  2. Have adults help children glue their object to the inside of the lids using the hot glue gun. As they dry, children will fill their jars with water and add two spoonfuls of glitter to the water.
  3. Have adults put epoxy cement around the inside of the lids, then place them on the jars for the children to tighten. Allow epoxy to dry.
  4. After the epoxy cement dries, children can shake their jars. As the glitter clears, they will see the object that symbolizes meeting Jesus. They can show their jars and objects to each other.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** When the jars are shaken, the water becomes filled with lots of things that get in the way of seeing what is inside the jar. But when the water clears, we will remember the ways we met Jesus during VBS. Sometimes life is like that—things get in the way of our recognizing that Jesus is with us, but Jesus is with us anyway.

## Let Jesus' Light Shine

### Materials

- Tissue paper in various colors
- Wax paper
- Paintbrushes
- Liquid starch or white glue
- Yarn
- Tape

In preparation, if using white glue, water it down with one part water to two parts glue. Put the starch or glue in containers and set them around the work space.

1. Demonstrate how to carefully tear tissue paper into assorted shapes and sizes.
2. Give children individual sheets of wax paper and invite them to brush on the liquid starch or glue onto it.
3. Demonstrate how to attach the torn tissue paper to the wax paper, overlapping it. Brush more starch or glue onto the pieces of tissue paper as needed, to make the surface smooth.
4. Allow it to dry completely. After drying, invite children to cut shapes out of their wax paper. Use tape to attach yarn to the top of the shapes so that they can be hung in a window. Watch the light shine through them!

**THINK ABOUT IT:** This craft allows light to shine through. In the Day 4 Bible story we learned that light has come into the world. Today, we learn that we can recognize that Jesus is with us. How does light shine through Jesus? How can light shine through us?

## See the Sparkle

### Materials

- Squeezable bottles
- Tempera paints, several colors
- Flour, salt, water
- Paper
- Painting shirts

In preparation, mix equal parts of flour, salt, and water. Put some of the mixture into each of the squeezable bottles. Add paint to each bottle and shake to mix.

1. Give children each a piece of paper. Invite them to squeeze a paint bottle and write JESUS in the middle of their papers. Allow time for them to use other bottles to paint designs around the JESUS.
2. As the paint dries, the salt will sparkle.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Just as it takes a while to see the sparkle on the painted design, it sometimes takes a while to recognize that Jesus is with us.

## Play Dough Scenes

### Materials

- Play dough in various colors
- Plastic baggies (optional)

1. Review the five Bible stories presented during vacation Bible school. Which stories stand out to the children? Are there any highlights from the stories? Invite children to think of one scene that was presented.
2. Give the children play dough and invite them to recreate a scene from one of the Bible stories. Children may retell the stories to each other using their play dough creations.
3. You may want to give children play dough to take home. If so, place it in the baggies.

### To make play dough:

1. Mix in a bowl 2 C / 500 ml flour and 2 T / 30 ml alum.
2. Heat to boiling 1½ C / 375 ml water, ½ C / 125 ml salt, 1 T / 15 ml oil, and food coloring.
3. Stir liquids into dry ingredients.
4. Knead until smooth.
5. Store in airtight container.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Turn to someone sitting next to you and retell one of the stories you heard during vacation Bible school.

## Reproducible page

**DAY 1****Treasured Questions Boxes****Proverbs 2:3-6**

If you indeed cry out for insight,  
and raise your voice for understanding;  
if you seek it like silver,  
and search for it as for hidden treasures—  
then you will understand the fear of the Lord  
and find the knowledge of God.  
For the Lord gives wisdom;  
from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

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Reproducible page

## DAY 3

Copy and cut apart these table graces.

*God is great. God is good, and we thank God for our food. Amen.*

*For this food and for your many blessings, we give you thanks, O God. Amen.*

*Our hands, our feet, our eyes, our mouths—we offer them all to you, God.  
May this food give us strength to do your work. Amen.*

*For the friends around our table and the food we share, we give thanks, God. Amen.*

*You are with us, God, as we eat and talk together. May we feel your presence. Amen.*