

Message Received: Hearing God's Call

ACTIVE RESPONSE GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

God has a message for you! Can you hear it?

Samuel heard it during the middle of the night. Mary heard it through an angel. The disciples were hard at work when they heard it. They all heard God's special message just for them! *Message Received: Hearing God's Call* lets children know that God continues to call all kinds of people—including them! People are called to love God and follow Jesus every day. Those who hear God's message and respond are forever changed.

Several games and activity ideas are offered for each session, but you are not expected to do all of them. Focus on the activities most appropriate for your groups. The ideas are intended to be user-friendly for age 6 through grade 5, but can be adapted for other ages. Some of the activities require a large space, so think about outdoor places that can be used such as a lawn, parking lot, or nearby park. Some of the activities require more adult supervision than others, depending on the age group involved. Regardless of which activities are chosen, the *Message Received* theme will be extended in fun and creative ways.

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 in these sessions.

SESSION OUTLINE

Each session includes the Bible background, faith focus, and memory verse of the day. Read them to understand how the Active Response ideas connect with the theme, and to guide you as you interact with the children. The variety of games and activities allows you to be flexible and consider the needs and abilities of your groups when planning each session.

- **About the session:** gives an overview of your time with the children
- **Session materials:** lists supplies for the session
- **Advance preparation:** notes what needs to be done ahead of time
- **Active Response session plan:** offers game and activity options and directions

THE PRIMARY CHILD

Primary children (those in early elementary school) 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.

THE MIDDLE CHILD

At this age (late elementary/middle school), 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.

DAILY SCHEDULE

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

<p>Gather (10 minutes) Small groups meet to begin the session.</p>	<p>Worship (25 minutes) Small groups converge for worship. A drama presents the Bible story.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Send (10 minutes) Blessing and dismissal in small groups or in total group assembly.</p>
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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 90 minutes:

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

SAMUEL

Biblical background

Samuel is a familiar and popular figure in the Old Testament. As a child, he serves God in the temple with his mentor, Eli, the priest. As an adult, he serves as a prophet of God to the people of Israel.

Samuel begins his ministry at a young age after experiencing something highly unusual—he actually hears God’s voice calling him. Not surprisingly, Samuel thinks it is Eli who is calling, and goes to see what he wants. Eli, however, realizes that it is God who is calling Samuel’s name.

According to 1 Samuel 3:1, the beginning of this story, “the word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” Yet God calls and Samuel responds, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” He is willing to take on whatever God has for him, even though it means that he has to tell Eli some difficult news.

God has warned Samuel about the coming downfall of the house of Eli. Samuel is afraid to share the message, but Eli invites him to do so anyway. Eli hears the news with resignation, saying that the Lord should “do what seems good to him.”

Listening and responding to God’s call transforms Samuel’s life. He grows from a young boy who does not fully know God, to a man who becomes known as a trustworthy prophet of the Lord at Shiloh.

Children will be fascinated that someone their own age was given such an important task from God. This can encourage them to think about God’s call in their own lives and to listen for the voice of God as they make decisions.

About the session

Children will participate in games and activities to heighten their listening skills. The games will help children remember how important it is to listen to God and to others, just like Samuel did.

Advance preparation

- Choose games appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places to play the games. Consider space and the amount of children in the group.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity (pp. 6–7).

Active Response session plan

1. **Greet the children.** Find out which session the children have just experienced and ask about it: What activities did you do? What did you learn? What did you like best?
2. **Activity time.** Explain to the children that they will have opportunities to practice their listening skills. Invite them to think about how Samuel practiced his listening skills in today’s Bible story.
Introduce the games and allow time to play them.
3. **Closing prayer:** *Dear God, help us to find quiet time to listen to you. Help us do what you ask us to do. Amen.*

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HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today’s Bible experience

1 Samuel 3:1-21

Summary

Samuel, a young person, is called by God and gives a message to Eli. Samuel listens to God and Eli accepts the message.

Bible memory

Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!
—Luke 11:28b

Faith focus

God calls us to listen and respond.

Sequence Echoes

Materials

- Chairs, one per child
1. Invite children to have a seat on chairs that are arranged in a circle. An adult leader needs to be part of the circle.
 2. The leader will demonstrate a sequence of two to four actions that make noise (clap, stomp, snap, click tongue, hit legs, etc.). The children will echo the leader.
 3. For the second round, have children turn their chairs so that they are seated facing away from the circle. The leader will give another sequence of two to four actions and children will echo it. This time, children who are not able to repeat the sequence will turn their chairs to the inside to listen to the next sequence. They may continue to participate.
 4. Repeat other sequences, making each longer. Continue until all are turned in to the circle again.

Debrief

Samuel had to listen carefully to hear God's message. We also need to listen carefully to God, our teachers, our parents, and others to hear important messages.

Samuel Says (Simon Says)

1. Invite children to stand in a circle, or randomly throughout the room.
2. As leader, tell the children to do different motions or activities, beginning the command with "Samuel says . . ." Or, simply tell the children a motion without preceding it with "Samuel says . . ." Alternate the two commands so that children have to listen carefully. The actions can be things such as: put your hand on your head, stand on one foot, take five baby steps, sit on your hands, etc.
3. Tell the children to follow the movement when they hear "Samuel says . . ." at the beginning, but not to follow when "Samuel says . . ." is not said.
4. If children do the command when Samuel does not say it, they sit down and watch the others. Keep the game moving at a good pace to hold the children's attention.

Debrief

Sometimes it's hard to pay attention because there are a lot of things going on. But we need to find a way to listen so that we can do what God tells us to do, just like Samuel did.

What's Your Name?

Materials

- Chairs, one per child
1. Invite children to have a seat on chairs that are arranged in a circle. Explain that the leader will call out names or characteristics of the children. If children hear their name, or a characteristic of themselves, they are to stand up and switch seats with others who were also called. Make sure that every child has a chair so that no one is left standing after switching seats.
 2. Play a few rounds with an adult as the leader; then allow a child to be the leader. Ideas include calling out several names at a time, those who are wearing red, those who like pizza, those with curly hair, those who have a dog, etc. Be sure that every child is able to switch seats several times.

Debrief

God knew Samuel's name. And God knows our names, too! Samuel had to listen carefully, and we need to listen carefully, too. Ask: How did it feel to anticipate that you would be called at some point? How did it feel when your name was not called? How difficult was it to find a seat? How important was listening during this activity?

3-D Art

Materials

- Bag of items, one per child; all bags include identical items

Advance preparation

- Place the same items in each bag. Items could include: different color blocks, tissue boxes, paper towel rolls, cans, or other items that can be used to build.
1. Invite children to sit in a circle with an adult leader. Because of the definitive directions, it is best to have an adult leader, not a child.
 2. The leader will give directions about what to do with the items in the bags. The children will need to follow the directions through listening only, and not look at what others are doing. Demonstrate what some of the directions might be by building something small. Example: Put your tissue box on the floor. Now put two cans on the tissue box beside each other. Put two red blocks on top of one of the cans.
 3. Give each child a bag of items and ask them to turn so that they are facing out and away from everyone. Remind them not to look at their neighbor's building.
 4. Call out directions, choosing any sequence or item. Only give each direction one time. Children will build their structures as they understand the leader's directions.
 5. After the directions end, have children carefully stand and sit on the other side of their 3-D art. Do their pieces look like the leader's piece?
 6. Try the activity again, with the leader giving a different sequence of items to build a new structure. Did the children listen more carefully the second time?

Variation

This idea can be adapted to make people sculptures. Divide children into groups of three to five. Give directions for them to arrange themselves, instead of using materials.

Debrief

Children needed to listen closely and follow directions. Samuel needed to listen closely to God's message. How can we listen closely to God?

Day 2

ESTHER

Biblical background

The book of Esther is a fascinating narrative. It includes royalty, grand banquets, a plot to kill, and a plan to save a group of people. Esther has been raised by her relative, Mordecai, who urges her to enter a contest to choose a new queen. Esther is chosen.

Haman, a leading official close to King Ahasuerus (ay-HAS-eeoo-EHR-uhs), wants people to respect him and bow before him. Mordecai, however, will not bow to Haman. This enrages the official, and he plots to have Mordecai killed, as well as all of his people, the Jews.

Queen Esther has not told anyone about her Jewish heritage, but Mordecai pleads with her to go before King Ahasuerus and ask him to save her people, the Jews. Queen Esther, however, knows that she can only appear before the king if summoned, or she may lose her life.

In today's text, Mordecai is urging Queen Esther to do something on behalf of her people—to dare to request an audience with the king. "Who knows?" he says. "Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." Queen Esther responds that she will go to the king, but requests that every Jewish person fast for three days on her behalf.

The story has a happy ending for Queen Esther. She is welcomed by King Ahasuerus, who is appalled that someone wants to kill the queen and her people. The king orders Haman to be killed instead.

This is an unusual story of call. Esther has to make difficult choices in which she sacrifices her own needs for the needs of the greater community. The story provides a picture of God working through circumstances and people to save others.

Children will be excited by this story about a queen, but they will come to understand that Queen Esther's life was not an easy one. She was called to do a difficult task and responded in a powerful way to save her people.

About the session

Children will participate in games and activities that encourage them to work together in their group and do what is right, just as Esther did.

Advance preparation

- Choose games appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places to play the games. Consider space and the amount of children in the group.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity (pp. 11–12).

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HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today's Bible experience

Esther 4:13-17

Summary

Esther is called to go before the king to deliver a message that might save her people. In turn, Esther asks the community to fast and pray as she prepares for this responsibility.

Bible memory

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

—1 Thessalonians 5:11

Faith focus

God calls us to work together for what is right.

Active Response session plan

- 1. Greet the children.** Find out which session the children have just experienced and ask about it: What activities did you do? What did you learn? What did you like best?
- 2. Activity time.** Explain to the children that they will have opportunities to experience working together for what is right. Esther and others fasted and prayed together so that they would be safe.
Introduce the games and allow time to play them.
- 3. Closing prayer:** *Dear God, help us to work together and do what is right. Be with us today at Bible school as we learn more about you. Amen.*

Pass and Tell

Materials

- A Koosh™ ball or other ball that is soft
1. Invite children to stand in a circle. Make two circles if you have a large number of children.
 2. Throw the ball to a child and invite the child to share one thing that he or she has done to help another person in the past day or two. A variation is that children may say one helpful thing they will do within the next day or two.
 3. After the child responds, that child will throw the ball to another person in the group. That child responds to the same topic. Keep the ball moving quickly in the circle.

TIP: You may want to talk about ways to be helpful before beginning.

Variation

For younger children, sit on the floor and pass or roll the ball. When working with older children, have them repeat all of the things said by others.

Debrief

Talk about how many things the children are already doing to help others. Encourage them to think about others and look for new ways to be helpful.

Pass the Balloons

Materials

- Pool noodles, one per child
- Balloons, two per child, one color per team
- Goal markers

Advance preparation

- Set goal markers at each end of the playing area and designate which team works toward which goal.
- Blow up and tie balloons ahead of time, and store in boxes. If you are outside on a windy day, add a bit of water in the balloons before blowing up so that they won't blow away as quickly.

1. Divide group into two teams. Give each child a noodle.
2. Put one color of the balloons in the middle of each team, with an equal number of balloons in each group.
3. Using the noodles, the children will hit their team's balloons to their goal. The team will need to work together and give each other encouragement.

Debrief

Talk about the techniques used to work as a team. Was it easy or difficult to work together? How did you encourage each other? How did Esther and others work together?

What's the Message?

Materials

- Masking tape or other marker
- Set of index cards, one per team, with each set a different color

Advance preparation

- Use the tape to create a square on the floor, one per team, large enough for the team to stand inside.
- Make card sets. Each set will contain four cards, one word each per card: We can work together!
- Scatter the cards around the area, at different distances from the squares.

1. Divide into teams and have the children stand completely inside their team's square.
2. Explain that each team needs to gather their cards and unscramble them to create a phrase. However, whoever leaves the square must still be connected to the square in some way. They will need to form a human chain in order to gather their cards.
3. The team that collects their cards and unscrambles the message first, wins.
4. Teams may want to play several times, so scatter the cards and play again, each time putting the cards farther from the team's squares.

Debrief

Ask each team how they decided to work together. Was it easy to figure out who ventures outside the square first? How would this activity have been different if they did not cooperate with each other?

Bubble Time

Materials

- Large bubble wand, one per team
- Stopwatch, one per team
- Kiddie pool or large dish
- Bubble solution

Advance preparation

- You may purchase large bubble wands or make your own using a bent hanger or a hula hoop.
- You may purchase bubble solution or make your own. There should be enough to cover the bottom of the kiddie pool or large dish. Bubble solution: 6 c / 1.4 L water; 1 c / 250 mL corn syrup; 2 c / 500 mL regular strength Joy dish soap.

1. Divide children into teams of about five and assign a timekeeper. Give the timekeepers a stopwatch and make sure they know how to use it.
2. Pour the bubble solution into the pool or dish, and give each team a bubble wand. Explain that they will work together to make a large bubble.
3. The timekeeper will start the stopwatch as soon as the bubble is made. The children will work together to keep the bubble as long as possible. The timekeeper will stop the stopwatch as soon as the bubble bursts. Children will need to talk together about what they can do to keep the bubble from bursting.
4. If their bubbles burst, teams will make new ones and continue timing the bubbles.
5. Do this activity for a set amount of time. Whichever group has the longest bubble time is the winner.

Debrief

Ask the children how they figured out how to work together. Did they talk with each other? Did they use gestures or other actions? Remind the children that Esther and others needed to work together for her safety.

Day 3

MARY

Biblical background

“Here I am.” This is Mary’s simple response to a call that will change not only her life, but the entire world. The angel’s message tells her that she will be the mother of God’s son, Jesus. Mary’s courageous response puts her at great risk because she is not yet married. Her fiancé, Joseph, could respond to the pregnancy by writing Mary off as unmarriageable. Instead, he also takes a risk after receiving a visit from an angel in a dream. “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,” the angel tells him, “for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20).

Mary is an ordinary young woman who is favored by God and asked to do something extraordinary. She not only accepts the task, but thanks and praises God for it! “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant” (Luke 1:46-48). Mary acknowledges the situation with wonder and joy. She is ready to trust God’s plan.

We know that Mary is very young in this story. Though we don’t know her exact age, young women living at that time could be married when in their early teens. Children will be interested to know that a person not much older than themselves said yes to God’s call and had a huge impact on the world. God does not just use grown-ups who are smart and confident. God can use people of any age if they trust in God’s plan.

About the session

Children will participate in games and activities that encourage them to listen and trust those around them. Mary needed to trust God, and children will learn that they need to trust God, too.

Advance preparation

- Choose games appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places to play the games. Consider space and the amount of children in the group.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity (pp. 14–16).

Active Response session plan

1. **Greet the children.** Find out which session the children have just experienced and ask about it: What activities did you do? What did you learn? What did you like best?
2. **Activity time.** Explain to the children that they will have opportunities to practice listening and trusting others. Invite them to think about how Mary trusted God.
Introduce the games and allow time to play them.
3. **Closing prayer:** *Dear God, sometimes it is hard to listen and trust. Help us to listen and trust you. Amen.*

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HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today’s Bible experience

Luke 1:26-56

Summary

The angel Gabriel visits Mary to tell her that she is favored of God and will have a baby, Jesus. Mary responds to this call with joy and trust in God’s plan.

Bible memory

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
—Romans 8:28

Faith focus

We are called to trust God’s plan.

Path of Trust

Materials

- Blindfolds, one per two children
- Masking tape or other marker
- “Traps” such as carpet squares

Advance preparation

- Use the masking tape to create a path on the floor.
 - Put the traps along the path at various intervals.
1. Explain that the children need to walk along a path without stepping on the traps, but stepping over them.
 2. Divide children into pairs and give each pair a blindfold. One will put on the blindfold. Children who are frightened of blindfolds may simply close their eyes.
 3. Explain that the blindfolded child will walk along the path. The one who is not blindfolded will walk alongside and use words (not physical touch) to guide the blindfolded one along the path and avoid the traps. Allow time for one pair to begin before the second pair goes.
 4. After all pairs have walked along the path, switch blindfolds and allow time for pairs to go through again. As leader, rearrange the traps so that the path is different.

Variation

Include other traps such as hula hoops, buckets, and cones. Make sure that objects are placed in such a way that children will not fall and hurt themselves.

Debrief

Share with the children that sometimes we cannot see what God has in mind for us, but we trust God anyway. We need to listen to, and obey, God. Was it hard or easy to listen to your partner? Was it hard or easy to obey your partner?

Chain Tag

1. Choose one person to be IT. Explain that when IT tags someone, they will need to join hands and both people will be IT.
2. As more people are tagged, they need to join the chain. Only the hands on the end will be available to tag others. Continue to play until everyone is tagged.

Debrief

Talk about working together. Samuel, Esther, and Mary all had other people whom they worked with when they heard God’s call. Did IT feel left out or lonely at first? When others were tagged IT was no longer alone, but part of a group. How did the chain decide which direction to run? Did the chain ever fall apart because they were pulled in different directions?

Treasure Hunt

Materials

- Clues
- Treasure for each child such as a piece of candy, a balloon, or sticker

Advance preparation

- Write clues on slips of paper and hide them. Use the provided clues or make your own.
- Put the treasures at the end of the hunt.

1. Explain that the children will follow clues to find a treasure.
2. Divide children into groups. Give the first clue to each group, but allow groups to begin the treasure hunt at different times so that not everyone is hunting at once. Tell groups that as they find each clue, they need to read it and put it back so that other groups can also find it and read it, too. They need to follow the instructions on the paper as they go to find the next clue.
 - **Hand to each group: Clue #1**—Where do you come in? Where do you go out? The next clue awaits you there. Hop to the site.
 - **Place at the main entrance: Clue #2**—Where do you go when your throat is parched? Where do you go when you need something cool and refreshing? Do a crab walk to the site.
 - **Place at the main water fountain: Clue #3**—Where do you go to find a good book? Skip to the site.
 - **Place in the library: Clue #4**—Where do you go when you are hungry? Where are meals prepared? Jump to the site.
 - **Place in the kitchen: Clue #5**—Where do you go to Mass on a Sunday morning? Where do you sing praises to God? Walk heel-to-toe to the site.
 - **Place in the sanctuary: Clue #6**—Where does the parish secretary have a desk? Where is the mail processed? Walk backwards to the site.
 - **Place in the parish office: Clue #7**—Where does the pastor study and write homilies? Where do people meet with the pastor? Hop to this site for the treasure.
 - **Place the treasures in the pastor's office.** If available, the pastor may hand out the treasures to the children.

Debrief

Mary received a message from God and the message was a treasure she hid in her heart. She trusted God. The groups needed to trust each other and work together to find a treasure. How did they experience working together for the treasure? Did everyone participate or did only some of them do all of the work?

Trusting Heart

Materials

- Large red heart shapes, one per team
- Chairs, one per child

Advanced preparation

- Make two large red hearts from paperboard or construction paper. Write the word TRUST in the middle of each.
 - Set the chairs in two rows, facing each other.
1. Divide children into two teams and have them sit down, one team per row.
 2. Give the heart to the first person in the row. Explain that the children will pass the heart down the row and when the last child gets the heart, he or she will run to the front of the row. As the last person runs to the front, all of the children will slide down one chair so that the last person becomes the first person in the row.
 3. The heart is passed down the row again and again, until everyone returns to their original chair. The first team to do so wins.

Debrief

Mary had a heart that trusted God. Why do you think she trusted God? What are ways that you can trust God?

Day 4

DISCIPLES

Biblical background

The men in today's story are doing their daily work of fishing, important work in first-century Palestine. In the middle of this hard and important work, they have a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

The account in Luke begins with a miraculous event. Simon Peter tries to catch fish, but the nets come up empty. Then, Jesus comes along and tells Simon to cast the nets at a different place. To Simon's amazement, the nets fill with fish! There are so many fish, in fact, that the boat begins to sink.

Matthew's account includes Jesus' words: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Jesus calls Simon and his brother Andrew, and another pair of brothers, James and John. The men leave their boats and nets and follow Jesus.

Following Jesus requires a shift of priorities. The men go from fishing with nets in the sea to fishing for people. Surely this is a new concept, and yet the men willingly leave the life they know to pursue the unfamiliar. Little did they know how much their life would change!

We may wonder how the men could just leave everything and follow Jesus. Yet we are also called to follow Jesus. What do we need to leave behind in order to do so? What things keep us in the familiar flow of life rather than following Jesus into a life of the unknown?

The imagery of fishing will appeal to children, but it will also be puzzling to try to understand "fishing for people." Help children to think of it as sharing Jesus' love with those they meet—family, friends, classmates, and others.

About the session

Children will participate in games and activities that encourage them to listen and follow. The games will remind children that just as the fishermen followed Jesus, they can follow Jesus, too.

Advance preparation

- Choose games appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places to play the games. Consider space and the amount of children in the group.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity (pp. 18–19).

Active Response session plan

1. **Greet the children.** Find out which session the children have just experienced and ask about it: What activities did you do? What did you learn? What did you like best?
2. **Activity time.** Explain to the children that they will have opportunities to practice listening and following. Invite them to think about the fishermen who listened to Jesus and followed him.
Introduce the games and allow time to play them.
3. **Closing prayer:** *Dear Jesus, thank you for being a great leader. Help us to listen and follow you with joyful hearts so that we can bless those around us. Amen.*

MESSAGE
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HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today's Bible experience

Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11

Summary

Jesus calls some fishermen to follow him. Jesus says that he will teach them how to fish for people.

Bible memory

Follow me and I will make you fish for people.
—Mark 1:17b

Faith focus

Jesus calls us to follow him.

Crossing the Lake

Materials

- Carpet squares or flat cardboard (boats), two per team
- Cones or other markers

Advance preparation

- Place cones to mark one side of the “lake,” and additional cones to mark the other side of the “lake.”
1. Divide children into teams of six to eight and give each team two carpet squares. Point out the two sides of the lake.
 2. Explain that the teams need to stay in their boat (on the carpet squares) and go from one side of the lake to the other, and that everyone on the team needs to go at the same time. Children must stay in their boat at all times. If one of them steps out of the boat, they need to go back to the beginning and begin again.
 3. The first team to do so wins.

Debrief

Ask the children how they figured out how to move across the lake. Did someone become a leader? Did others follow? Did the children work together? Jesus called the fishermen to follow him and they did. Jesus was the leader and the fishermen were the followers.

Box Towers

Materials

- Nine boxes with signs
- Bean bags, four per team
- Masking tape

Advance preparation

- Place one sign on each box. Signs should say: at recess, at church, with a grandparent, with a brother or sister, with a best friend, with a parent, with an elderly person, at the grocery store, at school.
 - Build a pyramid with the boxes, keeping the signs visible.
 - Use tape to mark a line about 10 ft / 3 m away from the pyramid.
1. Divide into teams of six to eight children and give each team four bean bags. Invite one team to stand behind the taped line, facing the pyramid. The children will work together to throw the bean bags to the boxes.
 2. For each box that falls, the team will need to give one scenario about how they would follow Jesus at that place or with that person.
 3. After throwing four bean bags, another team stands behind the line and throws their bean bags and responds to the scenarios on the boxes they knock down.
 4. Play until each team has had one or two turns. The teams not throwing bean bags can rearrange the pyramid after the boxes fall.

TIP: Before beginning, brainstorm as an entire group ways that people follow Jesus.

Debrief

There are many ways to follow Jesus. Challenge children to find ways outside of VBS to follow Jesus.

Ribbon Shapes

Materials

- 20 ft / 6 m of ribbon for each team
1. Divide into teams of about eight to 10 children each. If the group is small, divide evenly into two teams. Give each team a ribbon.
 2. Have each team stand in a line with everyone holding on to the ribbon.
 3. Invite children to create shapes and actions as they are called out. Some shapes will be created by each team individually, while others will need two teams to accomplish. Encourage teamwork so that all can participate.
 4. Shapes and actions:
 - Each team forms a circle.
 - Each team forms a square.
 - Each team forms a triangle.
 - Two teams form an X without letting go of the ribbons.
 - Two teams make one circle inside of another circle and walk in opposite directions.
 - One team makes a circle and stands still, while the other team forms a line and goes in and out around every person around the circle. Switch.

Debrief

Talk about listening and working together. How important was listening in this activity? How important was it to work together? What went well? What took a lot of patience?

Pictures

Materials

- Whiteboard and markers
- Word list

Advance preparation

- Create a list of words that go with the story, such as boat, fishing nets, men, lake, fish, Jesus, footsteps.
1. Divide children into teams and designate a whiteboard space for each.
 2. The first child on each team will go to the leader, who will whisper a word from the list. The children will then go to the whiteboard and draw the object.
 3. The first team to call out the object wins that round. Play again, with the second children on the teams drawing a picture. Continue playing.
 4. You may want to have individual whiteboards for each team.

TIP: Have other adults present to help determine which team calls out the correct word first.

Debrief

How do the drawings fit into the story? Pair children and have them retell the story to each other.

Day 5

LYDIA

Biblical background

Lydia's story is just a small one in the Bible, but it deserves to be told. As the story begins, a group of women gather along a river just outside of the city gate. Paul and his traveling companions join them.

Lydia is described as a “worshiper of God,” meaning that she is a Gentile who is religious but not a convert to faith. She hears a call from God to listen to what Paul is saying, and her life changes forever. Lydia confesses her faith and is baptized. Remarkably, Lydia's entire household is baptized along with her. Afterward, she opens up her house as a place for believers to gather.

These few verses in Acts do not tell us much about Lydia; however, we can learn more about her by knowing the culture of that time. Though living in Philippi, Lydia is from the city of Thyatira (thai-uh-TAI-ruh), a place known far and wide for its textile industry. Lydia herself is a dealer in purple cloth, reserved for the wealthy and those of high status. She moves in circles of power and influence. Her house is likely a large and comfortable space for believers to gather.

Lydia is socially and financially accomplished. Yet she responds to God's call by opening her heart. This story is a good reminder that we can tell others about God, such as Paul did with Lydia, but that it is God who causes the results.

Children feel a spiritual connection to God whether or not they can put it into words. We can nurture them in their faith journey by providing love, acceptance, and examples of following Jesus.

About the session

Children will participate in games and activities to help them think about others. Lydia opened her heart to Jesus and invited people to her house, and children can also open their hearts to Jesus and spend time with others.

Advance preparation

- Choose games appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places to play the games. Consider space and the amount of children in the group.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity (pp. 22–23).

Active Response session plan

1. **Greet the children.** Find out which session the children have just experienced and ask about it: What activities did you do? What did you learn? What did you like best?
2. **Activity time.** Explain to the children that they will have opportunities to think about others and to be kind. Just as Lydia opened her heart to Jesus and her house to other people, we can also open our hearts to Jesus and spend time with other people.
Introduce the games and allow time to play.
3. **Closing prayer:** *Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us kindness. Help us to be kind to everyone around us. Help us to open our hearts to you. Amen.*

MESSAGE
RECEIVED

HEARING GOD'S CALL

Today's Bible experience

Acts 16:11-15, 40

Summary

Lydia already knows God but hears from Paul a call to open her heart and be baptized. She extends hospitality to others who follow Jesus.

Bible memory

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.
—2 Corinthians 5:17a

Faith focus

God calls us to open our hearts to Jesus.

Purple Hunt

Materials

- Pieces of purple cloth

Advance preparation

- Hide the cloths in various places around the space, either indoors or outside.
1. Divide children into groups of three or four.
 2. Explain that children should stay with their group the entire time, and to always be kind and welcoming to everyone as part of the activity.
 3. Explain that each group will work together to look for the purple cloth pieces. When they find a cloth they will take it, and keep looking for more.
 4. When groups have had adequate time to find the cloths, bring them back together into one large group.
 5. Have each group share one idea about how to be welcoming to others at school, church, or home, for each piece of cloth they found.

Debrief

Talk about how the group needed to work together to find the cloths. They needed to listen carefully to each other.

Know Your Neighbor

Materials

- Blanket or cloth that cannot be seen through; purple is a good color for this story
1. Invite children to say their names to the group. Divide children into two teams.
 2. Designate one child from each team to hold the blanket from the floor to higher than their heads. They may need to stand on chairs.
 3. One child from each team stands at the blanket, unseen from the other team.
 4. The blanket holders count one, two, three and then drop the blanket.
 5. The two children standing on either side of the blanket try to say the name of the one on the other team first.
 6. Continue playing so that everyone has a turn to stand at the blanket. Be sure to also take turns as blanket holders.

Debrief

This activity is a good way to review VBS stories. Names are important in this game. Who did God call during the night? (Samuel) It was important to work together in this game. Who asked people to fast and pray and work together so that she would be safe? (Esther) It was important for trust that the blanket holders would not give away any clues about who was standing at the blanket. Who had to trust God to do an amazing thing? (Mary) It was important to follow directions for this game. Who called the fishermen to follow him? (Jesus) It was important to gather together in order to play this game. Who had people gather at her house? (Lydia)

I Can Follow Race

Materials

- Bag with slips of paper with directions written on them, one per team
- Cones or other markers

Advance preparation

- Write words or phrases on slips of paper, then place them in the bag: hop, skip, crawl, sideways slide, heel-to-toe, and others.
 - Set up the cones at the starting line and the finish line, about 20 ft / 6 m apart.
1. Divide children into teams and position them single file behind the starting line. Point out the finish line.
 2. Place a bag by each team. Explain that each child will draw a slip of paper out of their team's bag, read it, and put it back in the bag. Then, they will need to do the action all the way to the finish line. You may want to demonstrate the actions prior to starting the race.
 3. Continue with the second child pulling out a slip of paper and following the directions and so on. The first team with everyone across the finish line wins.

TIP: It may be helpful to have additional adults help so that children do not start before the one in front crosses the finish line.

Debrief

The children needed to follow the directions on the slips of paper. How is this like following Jesus? We aren't always sure what to do, but Jesus' life can give us an idea of how to act. Remind the group how they had to gather together and work together, just like Lydia did with those who followed Jesus.

PRAISE Chairs

Materials

- Chairs for each child except one
- *Message Received* CD and CD player

Advance preparation

- Set chairs in a circle, facing inward.
 - Set up CD player and CD.
1. Explain that each child begins the game with the word PRAISE. The letters are used similar to points.
 2. Explain that when the music begins playing the children will walk around the circle, similar to musical chairs. When the music stops, the children will find a chair and sit down.
 3. One child will be without a chair. The one standing will stay in the game, but lose a letter from PRAISE. Play again, with the child left standing always losing a letter.
 4. Play until a child loses all of his or her letters. The child is out of the game and a chair is removed. Play until several children are out of the game, or until only one child is left in the game.

TIP: Keep the game moving quickly. Do not allow much time between starting and stopping the music.

Debrief

When people who love Jesus gather, such as Lydia and her friends did, they like to praise God. What are ways that we praise God? Do we ever praise God by ourselves, with no one else around? Do we ever praise God when we are with other people? Give examples.

