

Message Received: Hearing God's Call

CREATIVE 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 craft and activity ideas are offered for each session, 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 age 6 through grade 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, but all will extend the *Message Received* theme in fun and creative ways.

Snack time is part of the Creative Response time and food suggestions are offered in each session. Some food may be prepared ahead of time, while other food preparation can happen with the children during the session.

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 AND PREPARATION

Each session includes the Bible background, faith focus, and memory verse of the day. 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 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
- **Creative Response session plan:** offers craft and snack options

Give attention to room setup. 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 what they would like to do. Take time before the sessions to make the crafts and be sure directions are understood. This will also allow children to see a sample of the final results.

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 use listening skills by participating in activities that remind them of the importance of listening, just as Samuel needed to listen for a message from God.

Session materials

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Juice or water, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 7–9)

Advance preparation

- Prepare snack.
- Choose activities that are appropriate for your VBS groups and prepare materials.

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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.

Snack idea: Serve foods that start with the first letter of Samuel’s name to emphasize the importance of names. Suggestions include: strawberries, salsa (with chips), string cheese, star fruit, and sherbet.

Creative 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? Invite everyone to sit at the snack table. Give each child a squirt of hand sanitizer or a wet wipe.
2. **Snack time.** Before inviting children to eat, briefly remember today's Bible story. Samuel was a young boy who heard God calling him during the nighttime. After Eli told Samuel it was God who was calling, Samuel listened to the special message God had for him.

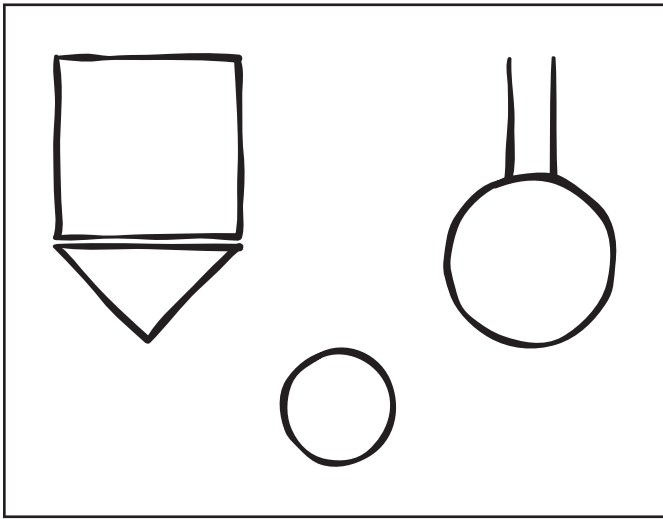
God called Samuel's name. Enjoy eating foods that begin with the letter s.

3. **Activity time.** Explain that today's activities focus on listening, just as Samuel needed to listen. Give directions for the things that have been prepared.
4. **Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the area 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, thank you that we can listen to you. Thank you for loving me and wanting to talk with me. Help me to listen. Amen.*

Listen and Draw

Materials

- White paper, one sheet per child
- Crayons or markers



1. Give each child a paper and access to crayons or markers.
2. Children will follow directions and draw what the leader says. The leader will follow directions and draw as well, but not allow children to see it until the end of the activity.
3. Suggested leader directions:
 - Draw a yellow circle in the bottom middle part of the paper, about the size of a large coin. Color it yellow.
 - Draw an outline of a big blue square almost at the top of the page, on the left side. Do not color in.
 - Draw a green triangle under the blue square—touching the blue square and triangle along one edge. Make green zigzags inside the triangle.
 - Draw a green circle in the middle of the page on the right side. Color it green.
 - Draw two brown lines from that green circle to the top of the page.
 - Compare drawings with the leader's drawing. Are they similar?
4. Leader can make up any directions, but make sure they are specific so the outcomes closely match the leaders.

Debrief

This activity required listening to many directions. Why was it necessary to listen carefully? Samuel chose to listen, even though he did not understand at the beginning. Children needed to listen for this activity, even though they did not know all of the directions at the beginning.

Memory Magnet

Materials

- Wooden pinch clothespins, one per child
- Magnets (long, thin to fit on clothespin), one per child
- Animals (foam or wood pieces) that fit at the end of the clothespin, one per child
- Washable paint
- Paintbrushes
- Newspapers or plastic tablecloth
- Paint shirts
- Glue (white school glue or hot glue, if adult does gluing)
- Pencils

Advance preparation

- Put newspapers or plastic tablecloth on table.
- Put small amounts of paint on foam or paper plates just before session begins—more can be added later, if needed.
- Set paintbrush and clothespin at each place.
- Set plates with animal shapes in several places around the table.

1. As children gather around the table, invite them to choose one animal shape for their project. Set the animals aside.
2. Have each child write their name on a small piece of paper and pinch it in the clothespin. That will help identify who it belongs to and it will also keep children from painting the clothespin shut.
3. Tell children to think about the animal they chose and where that animal lives. What would be around them? What colors would they see? Have several children share a few specific examples.
4. Invite them to paint their clothespins to look like their animal's home. Young children may paint it one color. Older children may paint details. Set aside to dry.
5. When dry, glue the magnets on the back of the clothespin and glue the animal on the front.
6. Have children make sure their paper is not stuck to the clothespin. Keep papers in place so clothespins can be identified.

Debrief

As the paint dries, let children know that they can use their clothespin magnets to help them respond to what others have told them. They can use it to hold notes of things to do, put it by the door to remember lunch for school, insert a note to thank parents for things they do for them, etc.

Whooo Listens

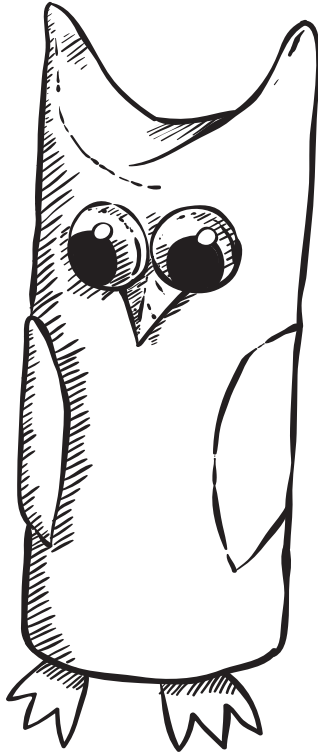
Materials

- Paper towel tubes, toilet paper tubes, gift wrap tubes—cut approximately 4 in / 10 cm long, one per child
- Construction paper (brown, white, orange, black)
- Scissors
- White school glue
- Crayons
- Tape

Advance preparation

- Cut brown and white paper approximately 4 x 6 in / 10 x 15 cm, or a size to fit around the tubes.

1. Each child chooses to make a white or brown owl. Give one tube and one brown or white cut construction paper to each child.
2. Demonstrate how to glue paper around outside of tube. A piece of tape may be needed to hold paper together until glue dries.
3. Demonstrate how to fold in the top of the tube on two sides, to form the top of the head and two ears.
4. Invite children to cut eyes, feet, wings, and a beak out of construction paper scraps, and glue on to the owl. Or, they may draw the features instead of cutting and gluing.



Debrief

Explain that owls are known for their sharp and alert hearing. We need to be sharp and alert to hear messages, too.

Name Mosaics

Materials

- Construction paper of different colors
- Background construction paper, one per child
- Pencil
- Glue

Advance preparation

- Cut colored construction paper into small shapes such as triangles or squares
1. Give each child one piece of construction paper for the background. Have them write their name in large letters on the paper.
 2. Demonstrate how to glue shapes into patterns and designs on the paper, being sure to highlight the name.

Variation

Use non-toxic, premixed or powder grout and tiles in various colors and shapes. Put the grout into a jar lid and put colorful tiles or stones into the grout. Wipe off tiles and allow to dry.

Debrief

Our names are important. God called Samuel by name, and God knows our names, too!

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 activities to remind them to show kindness to others, and the importance of working together, just as Esther did in today's story.

Session materials

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Juice or water, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 13–14)

Advance preparation

- Snack mix can be prepared ahead of time, or have children mix it together.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups and prepare materials.

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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.

Snack idea: Snack mix or trail mix that is sweet and salty. Include items such as raisins, chocolate candies, pretzels, nuts, crackers, and dried fruit.

Be aware of anyone with gluten intolerance and nut allergies. Have alternatives on hand for these foods.

Creative 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? Invite everyone to set at the snack table. Give each child a squirt of hand sanitizer or a wet wipe.
2. **Snack time.** Before inviting children to eat, briefly remember today's Bible story. Share that today's snack is both sweet and salty. These are opposite foods. In the story, Esther and Haman were opposite in how they treated people. But Esther found out that when people work together, the whole group benefits from the efforts.

If children will create their own snack mix, demonstrate how to choose and combine foods.

3. **Activity time.** Explain that today's activities focus on people working together, and are good reminders of what Esther did. Give directions for the things that have been prepared.
4. **Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the area 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, you teach us how to work together. Help us to know what is right and what we can do to work with others. Help us to be brave like Esther. Amen.*

Prayer Beads

Materials

- Metal keyrings, one per child
 - Beads that will string on ribbon, such as pony beads
 - Narrow ribbon (approximately 8 in / 20 cm per child)
1. Give each child a keyring and a ribbon. Demonstrate how to tie the ribbon to the ring.
 2. Share that queens often have fine jewelry and maybe Esther did too. Invite children to add beads to their ribbons to represent fine jewelry, following the colors in step 3.
 3. Let children know that the colors of the beads each represent someone they can pray for. Use your own ideas or the ideas below:
 - White: pray for teachers and friends at school
 - Blue: pray for parents
 - Yellow: pray for someone who needs cheering up
 - Red: pray for brothers, sisters, and cousins
 - Orange: pray for grandparents
 - Purple: pray for the country's leaders
 4. Demonstrate how to tie the last bead at the end, or put a knot in the ribbon to hold beads on the ribbon.
 5. Children can hook prayer beads onto their backpacks or hang them in their bedrooms.

Debrief

You may want to pause and pray for the people the beads represent. Call out the colors and their categories, allowing space between each for children to pray silently for someone in the categories.

Flower Cheer

Materials

- White, 8–12 cup coffee filters, one per child
- Bingo marker paints or sponge paint markers/paints
- Scissors
- Newspaper or plastic tablecloth

Advance preparation

- Cover table surface with newspaper or tablecloth.
1. Separate coffee filters so none are sticking together. Give one to each child.
 2. Demonstrate how to fold the coffee filter two times so that it is one-quarter the original size. Have children write their names on their filter.
 3. Demonstrate how to cut scalloped edges around outside edge of the filter, to look like flower petals. Edges may also be left uncut.
 4. On the covered surface, invite children to use the bingo marker paints and to paint the filter while still folded. Allow paint to soak in and then turn filter over and paint the other side to match. Paint should come through to mark where to paint.
 5. Show children how to open the filter to make a flower. Allow to dry. Put all of the flowers together on the table and look at the “garden” of flowers.
 6. Encourage children to give their flower to someone who needs to be cheered up.

Debrief

Talk about how all of the flowers, when combined, make a beautiful flower garden. When people work together such as Esther and her friends did, they make beautiful things too! Giving the flowers to cheer someone up is a great way to make the garden grow.

Glass Orchestra

Materials

- Glass jars of various sizes, one per child
 - Water
 - Spoon, one per child
1. Give each child a jar and invite them to put water into it. Some should fill their jars, while others put only a little water into their jars.
 2. Give each child a spoon. Demonstrate how to gently tap the side of the jar to make a sound. Allow time for children to hear the sound their jar makes, then have children individually tap their jars so that everyone can hear all of the sounds.
 3. Take advantage of the sounds and choose options that will work for your group: place jars from lowest to highest sound, experiment with rhythms and sounds, have everyone tap at the same time to hear one loud sound, play a simple song as a group, switch jars so children can tap a different sound, etc.

TIP: Adjust water amounts after hearing the sound each jar makes in an effort to create cohesive sounds and beautiful music.

Debrief

Just as Esther and others worked together by fasting and praying to accomplish something big, we can also work together to accomplish something. We can play the jars individually, or work together to create a musical orchestra.

Sand Art

Materials

- Glass jars or bottles with lids, one per child
- Sand in different colors
- Bowls
- Spoons and funnels
- Newspaper

Advance preparation

- Spread newspaper on the table for easy cleanup.
 - Pour sand into bowls for children to share, and set on the table. Be sure to only put one color of sand in each bowl.
1. Give one glass container to each child. Explain that they will add sand to the container in layers to make a beautiful piece of art.
 2. Using a spoon and a funnel, demonstrate how to scoop the sand with the spoon and pour it into the funnel held over the container. Let children know that they can be creative with the layers of sand, depending on where they position the funnel and how they tilt the jar.
 3. After the containers are filled, be sure children put lids on them.

Debrief

Each grain of sand is important. Each grain of sand can be lovely by itself, but it can also turn into something beautiful when added to other grains of sand. All of them work together, just as Esther and others worked together to do something beautiful and amazing.

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 do activities to help them think about trust. The activities will help them learn to trust God and know that God wants what is best for us.

Session materials

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Juice or water, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 17–18)

Advance preparation

- Snack can be prepared ahead, or simply cut the fruit in preparation and allow children to make their own fruit kabobs.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups and prepare materials.

MESSAGE
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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.

Snack idea: Serve fruit kabobs using fruit such as oranges, bananas, apples, grapes, strawberries, and pineapple. Hold the fruit together with large toothpicks or skewers.

Creative 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? Invite everyone to sit at the snack table. Give each child a squirt of hand sanitizer or a wet wipe.
2. **Snack time.** Before inviting children to eat, briefly remember today's Bible story. Mary was a young girl whom God called to do a big task—be the mother of God's son, Jesus! Maybe Mary did not understand everything at first, but she praised God anyway and trusted that God knew the plan for her.

If children will create their own fruit kabobs, demonstrate how to make one.

3. **Activity time.** Explain that today's activities focus on trusting God, and are good reminders that Mary trusted God. Give directions for the things that have been prepared.
4. **Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the area and put materials away. Decide if the projects will be taken home today, displayed, or collected for other purposes. Make sure all projects have names on them.
5. **Closing prayer:** *Dear God, sometimes you ask us to do something we don't understand. Help us to be brave, trust you, and listen to you. Amen.*

Bird Treats

Materials

- Rice cakes, one per child
- Peanut butter
- Bird seed
- Strings approximately 30 in / 76 cm long, one per child
- Plastic sandwich bags
- Table knives or other spreaders, one per child
- Cake pan or cookie sheet

Advance preparation

- Put birdseed on the bottom of the cake pan or cookie sheet.
1. Give each child a rice cake and string. Demonstrate how to tie string around a rice cake, turn it, and tie again to form an X on each side. The ends of the string will be used to hang it up.
 2. Show children how to spread peanut butter on both sides of the rice cake.
 3. Invite children to put their rice cake in the bird seed and cover both sides.
 4. Place the rice cakes in baggies to take home, and then hang on a tree for the birds to eat. Be sure that the children write their names on their baggies with a marker.

Variation

Use pinecones instead of rice cakes. Spread them with peanut butter, then tie yarn around the tops of the pinecones, leaving extra yarn so that they can be hung onto a tree.

Debrief

Talk about caring for birds. Birds will trust and come closer to you as you care for them. The more we trust God, like Mary, the more we will be closer to God.

Secret Messages

Materials

- White paper, one sheet per child
 - Lemon juice in small cups
 - Cotton swabs
 - Light source (lightbulb, flashlight)
1. Give each child a cotton swab and a piece of paper. Set the cups so that a small group of children can share.
 2. Talk about secret messages. Ask children what they would write in a secret message to a friend. What would they write in a secret message to themselves? God has a message for us, too! Have children choose a message from this list, or think of another one:
 - God loves you.
 - You are special.
 - Jesus cares about you.
 - God has a message for us.
 3. Demonstrate how to dip the cotton swab into the lemon juice, and then use it to write the message on the white paper. Allow the message to dry.
 4. Show children how to hold the dried message to a light source and the secret message will appear!

Debrief

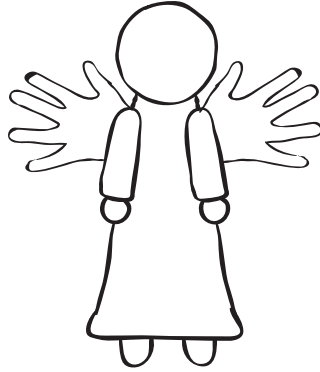
God spoke through an angel and gave a message to Mary, and Mary had to trust God. We can give messages to others, too!

Angel with a Message

Materials

- Yellow construction paper, one per child
- White triangles, one per child*
- Circles, cut from construction paper, approximately the size of a large coin
- Glue
- Scissors
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Glitter (optional)

1. Demonstrate how to trace both hands on the yellow paper (younger children may need help). Be sure that the hands are next to each other and at an angle.



2. Show children how to glue the white triangle between the hands, as the angel's body. Glue the circle to the body to be the angel's head.
3. Demonstrate how to add glitter to the angel's wings (optional). Add glue to the wings and sprinkle with glitter. Shake off excess glitter onto a paper plate to reuse.
4. As the angel dries, invite children to write the Bible memory verse as a special message next to it: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." —Romans 8:28

*To create triangles, fold a piece of construction paper in half and cut along the fold line. Then, cut each rectangle from one diagonal corner to the other.

Variation

Use fingerprint to create handprints as the wings. Or, make an upside-down footprint between the wings as the angel's body.

Debrief

Remind children that the angel had a special message for Mary, and Mary needed to trust God. The angel spoke to Mary with authority, and that may have helped Mary believe that she could do what God asked of her.

Potpourri Shape

Materials

- Construction paper, one per child
- Markers, scissors
- Ribbon
- Potpourri
- Glue
- Newspaper
- Advanced preparation
- Spread newspaper on the table for easy cleanup.

1. Give each child one piece of construction paper, a marker, and a scissors. Invite them to draw an outline of a shape onto the construction paper. Some may want to draw a usual shape such as a circle or triangle. Others may want to be more creative and draw a shape from today's story such as an angel, or create a shape from their imagination. Cut out the shapes.
2. Demonstrate how to glue the ribbon as a small loop onto the shape. This will be used to hang it up.
3. The children will put a little bit of glue onto the side opposite the glued ribbon. Sprinkle potpourri onto the glue. Shake off excess.

Debrief

Good things happened to Mary because she trusted God's message from an angel. Good things happen when we trust God, too. Encourage children to hang their potpourri shape in a place where it will provide a nice fragrance and be a reminder to 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 activities that use listening skills and help them think about fishing and following Jesus.

Session materials

- Snack
- Napkins and spoons
- Juice or water, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 21–22)

Advance preparation

- Prepare snack.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups and prepare materials.

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.

Snack idea: Serve goldfish-shaped crackers with pretzel sticks (as fishing rods).

Snack idea: Make ponds with fish. Make blue gelatin according to package directions and put it into individual clear serving cups. When almost set, add gummy fish. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Creative 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? Invite everyone to sit at the snack table. Give each child a squirt of hand sanitizer or a wet wipe.
- 2. Snack time.** Before inviting children to eat, briefly remember today's Bible story. The men were fishing, and Jesus called them to follow him. Ask what the snack has to do with today's Bible story.
- 3. Activity time.** Explain that today's activities focus on listening, fishing, and following Jesus. Give directions for the things that have been prepared.
- 4. Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the area 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 Jesus, may we hear you calling us. Give us courage to follow and do what you want us to do. Amen.*

Water on the Lake Sticks

Materials

- Empty paper towel cardboard tubes, one per child
 - Cardboard circles that fit the ends of the tube
 - Aluminum foil
 - Dried beans or rice
 - Tape (masking, clear, or duct tape)
 - Markers, stickers, wrapping paper
1. Show children how to use tape to fasten one cardboard circle to one end of the tube. Younger children will need help with this step.
 2. Give children two pieces of aluminum foil and have them either roll them into balls or twist it into ropes. Children will put them inside the tube, along with the beans or rice. Tube should be about one-quarter filled.
 3. Cover the second opening with cardboard and tape.
 4. Invite children to use wrapping paper, markers, and stickers to decorate the outside of the tube.

Debrief

Talk about what the men would have heard when on the lake in the boat. Gently move the tubes from side to side, up and down, simulating the sound of rain.

Shaving Cream Pictures

Materials

- Shaving cream
 - Table that can get wet
 - Foam or plastic fish, toy boats (optional)
 - Water
 - Rag
1. Talk about the jobs that the disciples had. What were they doing when Jesus called them?
 2. Put a dab of shaving cream on the table for each child.
 3. Invite children to smooth out the cream and then draw the boats and disciples in it. Draw fish in the water, or add plastic or foam fish and a toy boat.
 4. At any time, children can smooth it over and start again. They can draw a picture of Jesus with his disciples following him.
 5. Clean up with the rag and water.

Debrief

Jesus called men who were fishermen to follow him. Who else does Jesus call to follow him? Name several occupations and ask if they can follow Jesus, too.

Jesus Calls Me

Materials

- Construction paper
 - Pencil, markers, or crayons
 - Ink pads of various colors
1. Give each child a piece of construction paper. Invite them to write “Jesus calls me” across the bottom of the paper. Children will draw a large fish outline on the rest of the paper.
 2. Encourage children to add designs on their fish, and color it.
 3. Demonstrate how to use the ink pads and fingerprints as scales. Add fingerprints on the tail for added design.

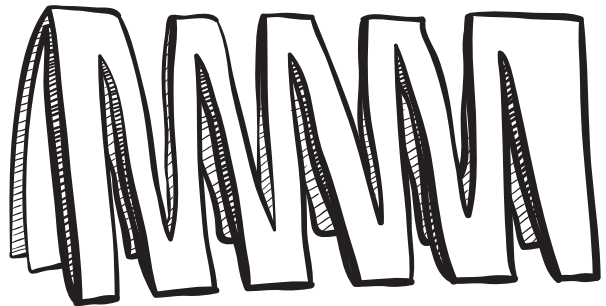
Debrief

Talk about the ways Jesus calls us and what he might be calling us to do. Are we called to do something kind for a sibling? Are we called to be friendly to someone we don't know well? Are we called to do something helpful for someone? Spend time thinking about the possibilities.

Fishing for Memory

Materials

- Half-sheets of construction paper, one per child
 - Full-sized sheets of construction paper, one per child
 - Foam fish cutouts, 11 per child
 - Markers
 - Glue
 - Scissors
1. Hand out 11 fish to each child. Invite them to write one word of the memory verse on each fish and the reference on another one, then set aside.
 2. Verse: “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” —Mark 1:17b
 3. Hand out one half-sheet of paper to each child. Demonstrate how to create a paper fishnet. Fold paper in half, either the long or the short way. Fold in half again. Cut five slits evenly across the paper from the fold. Turn paper around and cut four slits, evenly spaced in between the other slits, going the opposite direction. Be sure not to cut from one fold to another. Open the paper to become a fishnet.



4. Demonstrate how to glue the edges onto the full sheet of construction paper. Invite children to place their fish in and around the net. Glue the fish to the paper. Say the memory verse together.

Debrief

What does Jesus say will happen if we follow him? Let children know that whenever they look at their fishnet, they should remember that Jesus wants them to follow him. Fishing for people can mean we show others God's way, and there are many ways we can do that, including being kind to others, including others, etc.

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 have the opportunity to do activities that remind them to open their hearts to Jesus. They will have opportunity to experience hospitality, as Lydia shared with others who believed in Jesus

Session materials

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Juice or water, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 25–26)

Advance preparation

- Prepare snack.
- Choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups and prepare materials.

MESSAGE
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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.

Snack idea: Choose one of two options: (1) Heart-shaped cookies with purple frosting, or (2) Bread cut into heart shapes and served with hummus and vegetables.

Be aware of anyone with gluten intolerance. Have alternative foods on hand.

Creative Response session plan

- 1. Greet the children.** Welcome children as guests, modeling hospitality. 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? Invite everyone to sit at the snack table. Give each child a squirt of hand sanitizer or a wet wipe.
- 2. Snack time.** Before inviting children to eat, briefly remember today's Bible story. Lydia knew God and opened her heart to Jesus. Then she opened her house and showed hospitality to others who also knew Jesus. Ask what the snack has to do with today's Bible story.
- 3. Activity time.** Explain that today's activities focus on opening our hearts to Jesus. Give directions for the things that have been prepared.
- 4. Clean up.** Encourage children to clean up the area and put materials away. All projects need to be taken home today, this last day of Bible school.
- 5. Closing prayer:** *Dear Jesus, help me to listen to you. Help me to be kind to those around me. Amen.*

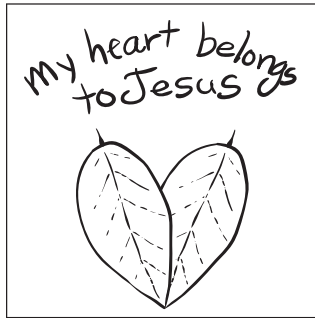
Purple Heart Prints

Materials

- Leaves with straight sides and no lobes (see illustration)
- Purple paint
- Paintbrushes
- White handkerchief, one per child
- Cloth markers or sharpie markers
- Paper towels
- Newspaper or plastic tablecloth
- Paint shirts

Advance preparation

- Cover the table with newspaper or tablecloth.
1. Invite children to write one of these phrases on the top or bottom of the handkerchief:
 - I will follow Jesus
 - I love Jesus
 - My heart belongs to Jesus
 - My heart is open for Jesus
 - Welcome, Jesus
 - Other phrases
 2. Demonstrate how to put a leaf on the paper towel. Paint the leaf purple.
 3. Show how to gently turn the leaf over in the middle of the handkerchief and press carefully. Lift it off. Repeat the process and put the second leaf beside the first to make a heart shape.



Variation

Instead of cloth, use note cards and invite children to write an encouraging note to someone.

Debrief

Lydia sold purple cloth, an important and royal color during her time. Tell the children that they can look at the cloth and remember that Jesus loves them and that they are important to him.

Purple Creations

Materials

- Purple, yellow, and green play dough*
 - Small plastic baggies
1. Give each child a small amount of purple play dough. Invite them to make a purple flower, adding a yellow center and green stem and leaves. Or, children may want to be creative and make things from their imaginations.
 2. Place in baggies for children to take home.

Debrief

Flowers grow and bloom. When we follow Jesus, we can grow and bloom, too! Remind children that Lydia sold purple cloth, an important and royal color during her time. Tell the children that they can look at the flower and remember that Jesus loves them and that they are important to him.

*Play Dough

Mix together in bowl:

- 2 c. / 500 mL flour
- 2 T / 60 mL alum

Heat to boiling:

- 1 ½ c. / 375 mL water
- ½ c. / 125 mL salt
- 1 T / 15 mL oil
- Food coloring

Stir liquids into dry ingredients. Knead until smooth. Store in airtight container.

Recipe from: Longacre, Doris Janzen. *More-with-Less Cookbook*, updated ed. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011.

Open My Heart

Materials

- Crayons (fluorescent crayons work best)
- Paper, one sheet per child
- Tempera or watercolor paint (dark works best)
- Paintbrushes
- Paint shirts
- Newspaper or plastic tablecloth

Advance preparation

- Cover the table with newspaper or table cloth.
 - Use water to make the paint thinner.
1. Give each child a piece of paper. Invite them to write “Open My Heart” with the crayon, pressing heavily. Encourage them to create colorful designs on their papers, around the words.
 2. Demonstrate how to paint over the words, covering the entire paper. The paint will resist the crayons and the message and design will shine through. Allow to dry.

Debrief

Hearts that are open to Jesus will shine through all kinds of things! Lydia opened her heart and it shone as she hosted other people in her house.

Let Your Light Shine

Materials

- Small jars, one per child
- Battery-operated tea lights, one per child
- Glue
- Cotton swabs
- White, silver, or light blue glitter

Advance preparation

- Dilute one part glue with one part water.
1. Demonstrate how to use the cotton swabs to paint the glue over the entire inside of the jar.
 2. Immediately after painting the glue, show children how to pour glitter into the jar. Put a lid or hand on the jar and shake it to distribute glitter all over the glue. Dump out excess glitter.
 3. Carefully put the candle into the jar and turn it on.

Debrief

Hearts that are open to Jesus will shine through all kinds of things! Lydia opened her heart and it shone as she hosted other people in her house. Tell the children that they can look at the candleholder and remember to let their lights shine.