

VBS 2026 VBX®

PREteen

Bible Study Leader Guide



SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH KIDS



The word ***gospel*** means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



GOD RULES. The Bible tells us God created everything, including you and me, and He is in charge of everything. (Genesis 1:1; Revelation 4:11; Colossians 1:16-17)



WE SINNED. Since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



GOD PROVIDED. God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9)



JESUS GIVES. Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18)



WE RESPOND. We can respond to Jesus. The ABCs of Becoming a Christian is a simple tool that helps us remember how to respond when prompted by the Holy Spirit to receive the gift Jesus offers.

ADMIT to God that you are a sinner. The first people God created chose to sin and disobey God. Ever since then, all people have chosen to sin and disobey. (Romans 3:23) Tell God that you messed up and you are sorry for doing your own thing, and turning away from Him through your thoughts, words, and actions. Repent, turn away from your sin. (Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9) Repent doesn't just mean turning from doing bad things to doing good things. It means turning from sin and even from your own good works, and turning to Jesus, trusting only in Him to save you.

BELIEVE that Jesus is God's Son and receive God's gift of forgiveness from sin. You must believe that only Jesus can save you, and you cannot save yourself from your sin problem—not even by going to church or reading your Bible. Your faith or your trust is only in Jesus and what He did for you through His life, death, and resurrection. (Acts 16:31; Acts 4:12; John 14:6; Ephesians 2:8-9)

CONFESS your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Tell God and tell others what you believe. If Jesus is your Savior, you are trusting only in Him to save you. Jesus is also Lord, which means He is in charge. You can start following Him and doing what He says in the Bible. You are born again into a new life and look forward to being with God forever. (Romans 10:9-10,13)



If you sense that children are under conviction from the Holy Spirit and would like to respond to the good news, spend some time counseling and praying with them individually. If you sense that a child is not ready to pray and respond in faith and repentance, continue to prayerfully teach him about Christ during the week.



SO YOU'RE A VBS LEADER! ... NOW WHAT?



1. ASK GOD TO MAKE YOUR HEART READY.

- ☐ Study the Bible content on **page 3**.
- ☐ Read the leader devotions at the beginning of each session in this leader guide.
- ☐ Learn about the kids you'll be teaching. (See **pages 4–5**.)
- ☐ Pray! See **page 4** to learn about ways to pray for the kids you'll be teaching.



2. MAKE A PLAN.

- ☐ Ask your VBS director what you need to know.
- ☐ Use this leader guide, a *VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Bible Study Leader Pack* (9798384537403), and a *VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Book* (9798384535034) to prepare a teaching plan. See **page 6** for help planning a session.
- ☐ Gather the supplies you'll need, including any decorations. (See **pages 7–8**.)
- ☐ Keep praying.



3. TEACH!

- ☐ Relax and enjoy the chance to build relationships with your kids.
- ☐ Be flexible. Adjust your plans to make this the best experience possible for you and your kids.



4. CONTINUE THE CONNECTION.

- ☐ Use the tips on **page 9** to help you and your church stay connected to kids.

Don't be
overwhelmed!
Take things one
step at a time,
and VBS will be
a blast!



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NEED A LOW PREP OPTION?

From a sick lead teacher to a higher-than-expected attendance count, lots of things can cause you to change your VBS plans at the last minute. If you're looking for an activity that requires simple supplies and little to no preparation, look for this icon! It can help you quickly identify a low prep activity!



ILLUMINATION STATION™

Culture claims to know about Jesus, but many people are in the dark about who He really is. Some might see Jesus as just a person from history or a good man or a good teacher—but He is more than that! This summer, VBS will shine a light on the truth of who Jesus really is.

Meet us at Illumination Station for the brightest week of the year. Focus on Jesus at Spotlight Bible Study and bask in the colorful glow of sunlight streaming in at Suncatcher Recreation. Twirl in the glittering refracted light of Mirror Ball Music and pass through strands of twinkling lights on the way to Kaleidoscope Crafts. Turn it all the way up for Neon Snacks and bring it all the way down for Glow-in-the-dark Missions. Kids will explore all the ways light brightens, illuminates, reflects, and reveals while discovering that Jesus is the light who brings hope to a dark world! Like the disciples, kids will be challenged to answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" They will discover it's not a matter of opinion. Jesus is who Scripture says He is—the perfect, proven, and powerful Son of God.

Light up your summer at Illumination Station and shine a light on Jesus!

VBS MOTTO

Jesus is the Light of the world.

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

Jesus is the Messiah and Savior.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Our sin keeps us from fully knowing the truth about who Jesus really is. Jesus came as the light to shine in a world darkened by sin. Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection show us who He really is—the perfect and powerful Son of God who came to be our Savior.

VBS SCRIPTURE

Jesus spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life." *John 8:12*

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. *John 8:12 (KJV)*

DAY 1: JESUS IS GOD'S PROMISED SON

Jesus Asked Who People Thought He Was (Matthew 16:13-20)

Jesus asked His disciples who people said that He is and who the disciples said that He is. Simon Peter said Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus said Peter was blessed because God had revealed the truth to him. Jesus said Peter would share the good news about Jesus and start His church.

DAY 2: JESUS IS GOD'S PERFECT SON

The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-11; John 1:29-34)

God sent John the Baptist to get people ready for Jesus. Jesus told John that He wanted to be baptized because God said it was right so John baptized Jesus. God's voice came from heaven. "This is My Son," the voice said. "I love Him, and I am very pleased with Him!"

DAY 3: JESUS IS THE POWERFUL SON OF GOD

Jesus Performed Miracles (Matthew 15:29-39)

Large crowds came and Jesus healed sick people in the crowd. Jesus wanted to provide food. The disciples had 7 loaves of bread and a few small fish. Jesus broke the food into pieces. There was enough for everyone to eat until they were full and there were 7 large baskets of leftovers! Jesus fed 4,000 men plus women and children that day.

DAY 4: JESUS IS THE PROVEN SON OF GOD

Jesus Died and Rose to Life (Mark 14:43–16:7)

Jesus was arrested, put on trial, and nailed to a cross. After Jesus died, He was buried in a tomb. Some women went to the tomb. When they got there, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. They went in but did not find Jesus' body. Instead, a man dressed in a white robe told them Jesus is alive!

DAY 5: JESUS IS GOD'S PLAN FOR FORGIVENESS

Peter Preached About Jesus (Acts 2)

Peter told a crowd that God had proven who Jesus was by doing miracles, wonders, and signs through Him. The people were very sorry for their sins. Peter told them to repent—turn from disobeying God to obeying God—and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. That day about 3,000 people responded to Peter's message, repented, and were baptized.



CONNECTING WITH PRETEENS

UNDERSTAND HOW PRETEENS DEVELOP

Preteens can appear to be constantly on the go and are experiencing growth spurts. They can memorize easily, think quickly, and solve problems for themselves. Many preteens enjoy sports, competition, and active games, yet they are worried about fitting in and rejection.

Preteens need you to remember that they develop at different rates. They do not all have the same skills and abilities. Plan activities that use gross motor skills (such as games) and fine motor skills (such as crafts). Give preteens choices whenever possible.

UNDERSTAND HOW PRETEENS THINK

Preteens seem slow to respond but are creative, imaginative, and curious. They are critical of themselves and others. They are beginning to question authority and expect perfection. Preteens experience emotional highs and lows and may exhibit oppositional behaviors at times.

Preteens need you to listen to and respect their ideas. They want to feel needed, accepted, and loved at church. Try to capitalize on the fact that preteens have a good sense of humor to de-escalate any conflicts that may arise.

UNDERSTAND PRETEENS' SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Preteens can be sensitive to conviction from the Holy Spirit and are developing a value system based on their own understanding of biblical principles. They are beginning to apply the biblical truths they are learning in Bible study to their lives.

Preteens need you to openly answer spiritual questions using the Bible as your guide. They need you to model Christian attitudes and actions and be a Christian mentor.

Note: Consider these resources to help you learn more about kids' learning stages:

- *Ages and Stages: A Discipleship Framework for Church and Home* (9781087722122)
- *Every Age, Every Stage: Teaching God's Truth at Home and Church* (9781535988193)

NOTE: The  icon identifies an opportune time to share the gospel with preteens as led by the Holy Spirit.

PRAYING FOR YOUR PRETEENS

- ☐ Praise God for this opportunity to teach preteens the good news about Jesus.
- ☐ Pray that God will give you insights about what the kids in your group need.
- ☐ Ask God to help your kids pay attention despite the many distractions VBS can bring.
- ☐ Pray that God will help you explain difficult concepts to preteens who are new to church.
- ☐ Ask for specific connection points with each kid in your class.
- ☐ If you have received a list of kids who pre-registered, pray for them each by name. Pray also for the kids whose names you don't know yet but God knows.
- ☐ Pray that the Holy Spirit will stir kids' hearts as they hear the gospel. Pray that God will draw kids to Himself.



MAKE VBS GREAT FOR ALL KIDS!

Your VBS is filled with kids—kids with different abilities, kids who’ve never been to church, kids who come maybe 3–4 times a year, and of course, kids you see every Sunday! With such a wide array of kids, the challenge is how to make sure that all kids feel welcomed and engaged. Here are a few ways to do just that!

ADAPTATIONS FOR KIDS UNFAMILIAR WITH CHURCH

Play name games. Every day. Hearing that someone knows his name can help a new kid feel at ease. Helping him make friends who also know his name—even better.

Explain expectations. Take time to talk about what the day will look like, what rotations kids will go to, or how they will be moving around campus.

Be patient with kids who don’t know “church” rules, such as staying quiet while someone is praying, focusing during Bible story time, following safety guidelines, and so forth. Don’t embarrass any child. Speak one-on-one when guidance is necessary. (For instance: instead of calling inappropriate language “bad words,” just remind kids that “we don’t say those words here.”)

Stay away from “church-ese.” Speak their language. Define church words often. Some won’t know who Jesus is, what sin is, what it means to be born again, or what it means to be baptized.

Teach Bible skills as if no one has ever heard them so a child doesn’t feel like the odd one out. This is especially true for older kids. Many will not know how to find a specific Bible book or verse. Some may not even truly know what a Bible is.

Remind kids of details. Take time daily to remind kids of what was learned during previous sessions. This will help new kids as well as those who might struggle with remembering from day to day.



Looking for more tips for guiding kids’ behavior? Visit lifeway.com/vbs, then click on **Resources > Illumination Station > Helps** for a free download called “Tips for Guiding Behavior.”

ADAPTATIONS FOR KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Make environmental changes so that those with special needs are able to complete the task.

- Move floor activities to a tabletop so kids with mobility issues or in wheelchairs can more easily participate.
- Increase the font size of handouts or posters to improve visibility for those with vision limitations.
- Use a clear color contrast for print such as a black background with white print or a white background with black print.

Adapt activities to allow preteens the opportunity to participate with a level of achievement.

- Provide pool noodles to extend reach for kids with limited mobility to reach things like posters on the wall (point to the ____) or to use in simple tag games like “Duck, Duck, Goose.”
- Offer options that would include the child such as being the timekeeper or scorekeeper.
- Provide a large clip (like a chip bag clip) to aid in holding cards.

Modify content for the preteens.

- Provide a visual schedule (icons or pictures to represent the day’s sequence of events). Hang this on the focal wall or another easily visible location.
- Use picture cues whenever possible for learning and review.

Provide a buddy for a preteen who requires assistance because of a disability.

- The buddy can assist one-on-one with the preteen.
- The buddy can monitor safety at all times for the preteen.
- The buddy can reteach or redirect during a Bible story or activity.
- The buddy can make accommodations to the environment for the preteen as needed (such as moving chairs out of the way for a wheelchair to have table access).



HOW TO PLAN A VBX SESSION

Before entering Spotlight Bible Study, run through the following checklist to prepare for VBX®.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Read over each session. Decide which activities will best fit your group, your time allotment, and the supplies you have available.
- ☐ Mark the portions of the session you plan to include (see below), then read and re-read those segments until you know them well. Consider writing an abbreviated outline to keep with you during VBS to help you remember what's next.
- ☐ Collect the supplies you need for each day of VBS. Consider using separate boxes or bins for each day, and one for everyday supplies. (See pages 7–8.) Prepare items in the *VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Bible Study Leader Pack*.
- ☐ Relax and enjoy the chance to build relationships with your kids.

BIBLE STUDY SCHEDULE OPTIONS

My director has told me that I will use the:

- ☐ **VBX 3-hour Schedule**—Use the Bible Study Plan as written for each session. Prepare crafts and recreation for your preteens from the ideas in this leader guide. Check with your director to see what times your group will need to break for snacks and missions.
- ☐ **Traditional VBS Rotation Plan**—Use the activities in the Explore section as your “core” Bible study time. Rotate with other kids’ age groups through crafts, recreation, snacks, and missions. If additional plans are needed for Bible study time, use the activities from either the Excite or Excel sections. A schedule for this plan can be found in the *VBS 2026 Administrative Guide*.

SAMPLE VBX 3-HOUR SCHEDULE

Worship Rally	30 minutes
Excite	20 minutes
Snack	15 minutes
Explore	30 minutes
VBX Crafts	25 minutes
Missions	20 minutes
Excel	20 minutes
VBX Recreation	20 minutes

PARTS OF A VBX SESSION

-  **Excite**—Introduces the theme and Bible content with an icebreaker and introductory activity. Pick one or both activities based on your time.
-  **Explore**—Engages preteens in the Bible story and makes the Bible connection to daily life. **This is the core content.** Use these plans no matter what else you choose to include.
-  **Excel**—Reviews the Bible story and life application for the day. Pick one or both activities based on your time.

Small Group Time—Time to discuss Bible content. One leader will stay with the group all week to develop relationships.



DECORATING TIPS

Some of the week’s activities (marked with this icon) are designed to work in a semi-darkened room. While this may not be possible in all settings, you may be able to cut down on interior light by covering a few windows with dark paper or poster board and plugging in Christmas lights. For accountability and safety, always leave your room door open, or if the door has a window, keep it uncovered.

Additionally, the results of some activities may depend on the equipment you are using or the strength of your flashlight. Test activities in the room where you will be teaching and make adjustments as needed. Workarounds are provided in the teaching procedures for areas where low light is not possible.

If you are using lighting sources please check for potential choking hazards and heat elements that could burn the skin or eyes or be a fire hazard. Be cautious using flashing lights as they may trigger certain medical conditions such as seizures, migraines, and so on. Avoid using strobe lights.



DECORATIONS

Consider a few of these options to decorate your room. Keep it simple so kids can focus on learning without distractions.

- *VBS 2026 Bible Study Location Sign* (9798384538608)
- *VBS 2026 Wall Art* (9798384538592)
- *VBS 2026 Floor Prints* (9798384538219)
- *VBS 2026 Visual Pack* (9798384538585)
- *VBS 2026 String Flags* (9798384538226)
- *VBS 2026 Whirleys* (9798384538233)
- *VBS 2026 Glitter Beach Balls* (9798384539810)
- *VBS 2026 Cups* (9798384538059) to hold pens and supplies
- *VBS 2026 Supersized Backdrop* (9798384538561)
- Find more ideas in the *VBS 2026 Decorating Made Easy* book (9798384536987).

EVERYDAY SUPPLIES

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ *VBS 2026 VBX® Preteen Bible Study Leader Pack* (9798384537403) including the *VBS 2026 Music for Kids CD*
- ☐ *VBS 2026 VBX® Preteen Activity Books* (9798384535034) (1 per preteen)
- ☐ *VBS 2026 Memory Makers* (9798384538141) (1 per preteen)
- ☐ Pens or pencils (1 per preteen)
- ☐ Music player
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Markers, permanent markers, crayons, and colored pencils
- ☐ Clear, masking, duct, packing, and painter's tape
- ☐ Paper, construction paper, colorful paper

Note: Items needed every day in VBX are only listed here and do not appear in each day's specific supply list.

DAY 1

EXCITE

- ☐ Pack items 1 and 13
- ☐ Pairs of matching stickers (1 set per 2 preteens, no duplicates)
- ☐ Variety of small items (see p. 11) (1 per preteen)
- ☐ Blindfolds (1 per kid for hygiene)
- ☐ Tap light
- ☐ Sticky notes (2-by-1½-inch, 1 color per team)

EXPLORE

- ☐ Pack items 12 and 14

EXCEL

- ☐ Pack items 6, 15, and 16
- ☐ Die
- ☐ Orange sticky notes
- ☐ Yellow highlighter
- ☐ Mini black light flashlights (2)

CRAFTS

- ☐ 8½-by-10-inch pieces of cardboard (1 per kid)
- ☐ 6½-by-6½-inch ziplock bags (1 per kid)
- ☐ White liquid glue
- ☐ Black paint
- ☐ Cotton swabs (1 per kid)
- ☐ 1½-inch pieces of plastic straw (1 per kid)
- ☐ Measuring spoons
- ☐ Metallic permanent markers
- ☐ Dry erase board or small poster

RECREATION

Light the Way

- ☐ Pack items 7 and 17
- ☐ Items to create an obstacle course (see ideas on p. 16)
- ☐ String lights, LED lights, or glow-in-the-dark tape
- ☐ Tap lights (2)

Sunburst!

- ☐ Pack item 18
- ☐ Yellow balloons (12 per team plus extras)
- ☐ Large garbage bags
- ☐ Allergy alert: latex

DAY 2

EXCITE

- ☐ Pack items 19 and 20
- ☐ *Giant Inflatable Game Cube* (9781087779812) (or a large box)

EXPLORE

- ☐ Pack items 2 and 12
- ☐ Paper plates
- ☐ Clipboard

EXCEL

- ☐ Pack items 6, 15, 16, and 21
- ☐ Yellow or white balloons (1 per team plus some extras in case they pop)
- ☐ Glow sticks (1 per team plus several extras)
- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Allergy alert: latex

CRAFTS

- ☐ Pack item 22
- ☐ Black cardstock
- ☐ Transparent folders or cellophane (red, yellow, and blue)
- ☐ Metal paper brad (with short prongs) (1 per kid)
- ☐ Metallic markers
- ☐ Glue
- ☐ Hole punch
- ☐ Dry erase board or small poster

RECREATION

Light up the World!

- ☐ Pack item 23
- ☐ Bucket or garbage can
- ☐ Glow stick bracelets in 2 colors (enough for each kid to have 1, same number of bracelets in each color)
- ☐ *VBS 2026 LED Flashing Ball* (9798384539803)

Lightning Bug Tag

- ☐ Pack item 8



DAY 3

EXCITE

- ☐ Pack items 1–3
- ☐ Sticky notes

EXPLORE

- ☐ Pack item 12

EXCEL

- ☐ Pack items 9, 15, 16, and 24
- ☐ Beanbag
- ☐ Glow sticks or flashlights (1 per preteen)

CRAFTS

- ☐ Pack item 25
- ☐ Lunch sacks
- ☐ Foam core board
- ☐ Pushpins (1 per kid)
- ☐ Bamboo skewers (1 per kid)
- ☐ Decorative-edged scissors
- ☐ Small battery-operated votive candles (1 per kid)
- ☐ Scissors or craft knife (leader use only)

RECREATION

Laser Maze

- ☐ Pack items 6 and 26 or 27
- ☐ Red string

Musical Spotlights

- ☐ 10–12 hula hoops

DAY 4

EXCITE

- ☐ Pack items 1–4 and 28
- ☐ Tap light

EXPLORE

- ☐ Pack item 12 and 29
- ☐ Bookmarks (3)

EXCEL

- ☐ Pack items 6, 15, and 16
- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ Blindfolds (1 per kid for hygiene)

CRAFTS

- ☐ Glow-in-the-dark pony beads (6 of 1 color and 5 of another per kid)
- ☐ Elastic cord (10–11 inches per kid)
- ☐ Lanyard spring hooks (1 per kid)
- ☐ Cool melt glue gun

RECREATION

Mirror Ball Balance Race

- ☐ Inflatable toy mirror balls or silver beach balls (1 per pair) (consider including some VBS 2026 *Glitter Beach Balls* in the mix [9798384539810])
- ☐ Cones

Glow-in-the-dark Ring Toss

- ☐ Pack item 10
- ☐ Full 2-liter bottles or game cones (8)
- ☐ Large mailing labels or sticky notes
- ☐ 22-inch glow necklaces (8)
- ☐ Tape or rope

DAY 5

EXCITE

- ☐ Pack items 5–6 and 30
- ☐ Small mirrors (1 per preteen)
- ☐ Blindfolds (1 per preteen for hygiene)

EXPLORE

- ☐ Pack items 11 and 12
- ☐ Crepe paper streamers

EXCEL

- ☐ Pack items 15, 16, 29, and 31
- ☐ Orange paper
- ☐ Yellow highlighters
- ☐ Mini black light flashlights

CRAFTS

- ☐ Lightweight plastic bottles 2 per kid)
- ☐ Plastic neon straws (several different colors, 10 per kid)
- ☐ Neon masking tape (enough to circle each bottle)
- ☐ Neon pom-poms (several different colors, 15 per kid)
- ☐ Hole punch (regular, several for kids to share)
- ☐ Hole punch (long-reach, a few for kids to share)

RECREATION

Human Light Bright

- ☐ Contact plastic
- ☐ Multicolored balloons
- ☐ Trash bags (1 per team)
- ☐ Allergy alert: latex

Foosball Feet

- ☐ 8 pool noodles
- ☐ 1 large beach ball
- ☐ Tape, chalk, or rope to make lines



CONTINUE VBS AT HOME

Research shows the important opportunities VBS gives adults to connect with and invest in kids and families. (You can read more about the research yourself in *It's Worth It: Uncovering How One Week Can Transform Your Church*. [9781535952736]). You've spent this week intentionally investing in the kids in your class! So how do you continue connecting with kids after VBS is over?

There's no one right way to do this, but a few ideas include greeting kids in the hallways at church, volunteering with your church's ongoing kids ministry, and participating in your church's follow-up efforts so you can build relationships with kids and their families. Be on the lookout for times these families go through challenges in life and be there to support them, along with your church body.

At the end of VBS, you may also consider writing a note to each kid in your class on a *VBS 2026 Note Card* (9798384538325) or *Postcard* (9798384538639). Tell kids what you're praying for them and call out gifts you see that God has given them. Remind them that God has a special plan for their lives.

Below are several resources that can be paired with your note to send the VBS content home with kids. Encourage kids to use these resources to share the gospel with friends and family members.

- *VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Book* (9798384535034)—Whether or not you used this during VBS, send a copy home with kids! This book is filled with fun games and activities. Kids will also find a Bible story summary, Bible verse references, and information about the gospel. Encourage kids to use this to engage with the VBS Bible content for themselves.
- *VBS 2026 Memory Maker* (9798384538141)—These six tags help kids follow along during the Bible study time. Even more important, the tags help kids make a memory they can take home with them. This year, kids and preschoolers will use the same tags, adding them to a muslin bag each day, along with other keepsakes collected during VBS. Kids can carry home Memory Makers to share Bible content and fun memories with family and friends.
- *VBS 2026 Parent Guide* (9798384538745)—This is a tool for parents to use with their kids. This year's guide features activities in different categories to interest different types of learners. And it features some surprises that can only be revealed with light!
- *VBS 2026 Kids Fun Bundle* (9798384538554)—This bundle contains a Kids Activity Book, a Kids Wrap, and a Backpack. Kids can create lasting memories at VBS and use the backpack to carry them home. And it's one-size-fits-all!
- *Outreach Bible for Kids CSB or KJV* (9781087782904 or 9781087787176)—This is a great way to ensure that kids have a Bible at home. An added bonus is the kid-friendly gospel presentation and topical concordance that are included.
- *Illumination Station Devotional* (9798384545927)—This fact-filled devotional explores the theme of light to help kids know the Light of the world—Jesus! In each devotion, you'll find activities and fun facts about the ways light—from fire to lightning—brightens and impacts the world around us. And the Scriptures and devotions will help you see how Jesus is the Light who brings hope to the darkness.
- *VBS 2026 Music for Kids CD* (9798384537533)—This CD has the VBS theme song "Illumination Station" as well as daily songs that go with the five days of VBS. Kids will learn the music during Bible Study, Worship Rally, and Music Rotation and will love having a CD of their own to share with their families!
- If parents in your church don't have CD players, they can use this QR code to access the music on the streaming platform of their choice



DAY 1: JESUS IS GOD'S PROMISED SON

Spotlight Question

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God.

Bible Verses

Theme Verse: John 8:12

Bonus Verse: Matthew 16:16

Leader Devotion



Think for a moment about a teacher who significantly impacted and brightened up your life. You may have identified this teacher because of how he or she made you feel loved, valued, and understood. This week, you have an opportunity to be that kind of teacher—one who builds meaningful relationships with children, helping them feel loved and accepted in ways they may have never experienced before. Take a moment now to stop and pray, asking God to use you to make an eternal impact on the lives of the children you teach. Continue to do so again each day of VBS.

Beyond building relationships, one often-overlooked trait of exceptional teachers is their ability to ask great questions. Great questions captivate attention, inspire deep thinking, and foster renewed curiosity and wonder. They can also reveal gaps in understanding, provide opportunities for assessment, or highlight a student's mastery of a subject.

Jesus exemplified this trait as a master teacher. His use of engaging questions was a hallmark of His teaching. Consider these examples from the New Testament, where Jesus asked thought-provoking and soul-searching questions:

1. "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40)
2. "Why do you break God's commandment because of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3)
3. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say?" (Luke 6:46)
4. "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6)

Let's shine the spotlight on two of the most significant and revealing questions Jesus ever asked His disciples. After spending time with His disciples in a boat, they traveled to Caesarea Philippi—a place known for its pagan gods. Against this backdrop of pagan influence, Jesus pressed His disciples for answers to these two questions:

Today's Point

Jesus is God's promised Son.

Bible Story

Jesus Asked Who People Thought He Was (Matthew 16:13-20)

1. Who do people say that the Son of Man is?
2. But you, who do you say that I am?

Scripture records the disciples answering the first question, but the second question is responded to specifically by Peter. Peter declared, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Have you ever wondered why Peter was the first disciple to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah? Surely, there was a more faithful and less controversial disciple who could have spoken up rather than the flawed and impulsive Peter.

Jesus knew Peter's weaknesses. He knew Peter would deny Him three times, yet He washed Peter's feet anyway. (See John 13.) He knew Peter would fall asleep in the garden of Gethsemane, yet He blessed Peter when God revealed to him that Jesus was the Messiah. (See Matthew 16; 26.) Jesus knew every detail of Peter's story—his failures, doubts, and triumphs—and He still chose to love and use Peter in powerful ways.

Jesus did not write Peter off as unreliable or deem him unworthy of being used for His purposes. Instead, He entrusted Peter with the opportunity to preach at Pentecost and lead His church. (See Acts 2.) Peter's story is a reminder that God sees potential where others see character flaws, and He calls us to love, lead, and serve in ways that often do not make sense to others.

Illuminate Your Heart

- Jesus asks each of us the same question. Take this opportunity to answer it for yourself. "But you, who do you say I am?"
- It may be easy to make a declaration of words, but it is much harder to live out our belief in Jesus as our Messiah. Peter certainly struggled to walk out the words he declared. Thank God for His redemptive love for each of us and ask Him to use you this week to proclaim the good news of Jesus to each boy and girl in your care.



guessing in the dark

- Play “Illumination Station” and greet preteens as they arrive. Welcome those who are new to your church and introduce them to other preteens. Give each preteen a sticker.
- Say: “Thanks for joining us on our first day at Illumination Station! This week we will discover the truth about who Jesus really is.”
- Guide preteens to turn to page 1 of their activity books. Invite them to read and answer the “Who Am I?” questions. Next, instruct preteens to move around the room to find the other preteen with the sticker that matches their own. Give them a few minutes to share the answers they wrote in their activity books.
- Explain that they will work as a pair for the next activity. Give each preteen a blindfold. Instruct one preteen in each pair to put on a blindfold. Then distribute a small object to each blindfolded kid. Explain that she will feel the object with her hands, then describe what it feels like to her partner as she tries to guess what it is. The partner can give one word clues to assist. Once the blindfolded kid has guessed, partners can switch roles.

DEBRIEF

- Ask: “What was it like guessing what the object was without being able to see it? People in the Bible story we’ll hear today may have felt similarly. They were trying to figure out who Jesus is, but they didn’t have all the information. But God showed the answer to one person in today’s story. I’ll tell you more about that soon.”

TEAM CROSSWORD PUZZLE

- Guide preteens to form teams of 4–5 people. Display the large crossword puzzle (item 13).
- Give each team a set of sticky notes in a different color. Place the tap light by the poster, and let each team appoint a runner. The leader will read the first clue, the teams will confer together, and their runner will run to the tap light and press it before the other team. The first team to turn on the light gets to answer the question.
- If they are correct, other teammates may approach and help fill in the letters using their team’s sticky notes. The team with the most words filled in at the end wins.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “Great job everyone! You had to work as a team to come up with the answers to the puzzle and get points. We often have opportunities to work with other people, like creating a cool video or improving as a sports team. Can you think of times when you might need to work on your own to come up with the answer to a question?” (Allow preteens to share.)
- Say: “Today we’ll learn from the Bible, God’s Word, that every person must answer for him or herself the question ‘who is Jesus?’”

GUESSING IN THE DARK PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 1: “Day 1 Overview Poster”
 - Hang item 1 on the focal wall and use it to refer to the main points throughout the day.
- ☐ VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books (1 per preteen)
- ☐ VBS 2026 Music for Kids
- ☐ Music device
- ☐ Pens/pencils
- ☐ Pairs of matching stickers (1 set per pair of preteens, make sure there are no duplicates)
- ☐ Variety of small items such as coins, paper clips, candles, and small bottles (1 per preteen)
- ☐ Blindfolds (1 per kid for hygiene reasons)

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Instead of using a blindfold, offer pairs of dark sunglasses, or blindfold eye masks

TEAM CROSSWORD PUZZLE PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 13: “Team Crossword Puzzle”
 - Display item 13 on the focal wall.
- ☐ Tap light
- ☐ Sticky notes (2-by-1½-inch, 1 color per team)

ANSWERS

Across:

1. firefly
4. lamp
5. sun
7. lighthouse

Down:

2. lightning
3. flashlight
6. rainbow



BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION

BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION PREP

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books (1 per preteen)
- ☐ Pens/pencils

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

- **Messiah**—God's chosen Savior. Old Testament prophets told of a coming Messiah who would be Israel's Savior. God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. Jesus alone saves us.
- **Disciple**—Means "learner" or "pupil." The people Jesus called to follow Him during His earthly ministry are called disciples.

SHED SOME LIGHT ON IT ANSWERS

- True Statements: Jesus is the Son of God; Jesus is a healer; Jesus saves us from our sin; Jesus loves us.
- False Statements: Jesus is only a human; Jesus was Elijah come back to life; Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life; Jesus was a magician.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The  identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Designate one side of your teaching area as True and the other as False. Read the statements from "Shed Some Light on It" aloud and allow preteens to move toward the correct side of the space.

- Distribute Bibles to preteens and guide them to turn to Matthew 16 with you.
- Request that preteens listen closely as you tell the Bible story in your own words, using the following text as a guide.

JESUS ASKED WHO PEOPLE THOUGHT HE WAS

Matthew 16:13-20

The first people, Adam and Eve, sinned and disobeyed God. Ever since then, everyone has sinned. In the first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, God promised to send someone to save us from our sins. God sent Jesus to keep that promise.

One day, Jesus asked His disciples a question.

"Who do people say that I am?" Jesus asked.

The disciples told Jesus that people had a lot of ideas. Many people believed Jesus was a prophet: someone who told people special messages from God.

John the Baptist was a prophet whom God sent to prepare people for Jesus' coming. But John had died. Some people believed Jesus was John, come back to life.

Other people talked about prophets from long ago, in the Old Testament. They thought Jesus might be Elijah or Jeremiah come back to life after hundreds of years.

"But you," Jesus asked them, "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter, one of the disciples, answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said, "Peter, you are blessed because God has revealed the truth about who I am to you." Jesus said Peter would share the good news about Jesus and start His church.

Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Messiah, God's promised Son.

DEBRIEF

- Guide preteens to turn to "Shed Some Light on It" on page 3 in their activity books. Discuss the statements about Jesus and guide them to circle the true statements and cross out the false ones. Correct false assumptions as needed.
-  Ask: "Have you ever gotten out of bed at night when it's completely dark? You might have to navigate a maze of toys, clothes, and furniture. But if you turn the lights on, it's easy to avoid stepping on or bumping into something. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Light of the world. He shows us how to live if we've chosen to follow Him. The most important question you will ever answer is: Who is Jesus? You will have to decide if you believe He is just a good teacher or a miracle worker, or if He really is the Son of God who came into the world to set us free from sin and bring us into God's family, as the Bible says."



LOW PREP GOING VIRAL

- Suggest that preteens pretend they are the disciples, but they're active on social media, and are posting their thoughts on Jesus. Provide copies of "Going Viral" (item 14) and guide each preteen to create a "post" on paper about who they think Jesus is or about the moment Peter declared Him the Messiah. Kids can include hashtags like #JesusIsTheMessiah or #SonOfGod and use pictures or drawings to support their "post."
- Encourage creativity in the posts—for example, using emojis, symbols, or quotes from the story. Once all the kids have made their posts, allow them to "share" them with the group and discuss what each one reveals about Jesus' identity. Suggest that preteens consider taking their posts home and sharing them online with adult approval.
- Ask: "How does it impact our daily lives to know that Jesus is the Son of God?" (Allow preteens to share.)
- 🗣️ Say: "As the Son of God, Jesus has the power to heal our hearts from the brokenness of our sin (the ways we disobey God with our thoughts, words, and actions). He has authority over our lives and shows us how life works best. Repenting (or turning away from) our sin, receiving His gift of forgiveness, trusting in Jesus, and following Him changes us from the inside out. He enables us to forgive others when they say hurtful things. He helps us make wise choices even when we're tempted to do something foolish. He comforts us when we feel sad, afraid, or alone. Knowing that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God is good news. He cares about what happens to us and is involved in our world in a personal way. God loves us so much, and He wants us to experience full life with Him through faith in His Son, Jesus."

GOING VIRAL PREP

- ❑ Leader pack
 - Item 14: "Going Viral"
 - Make a copy of "Going Viral" for each preteen. Cut copies apart so each preteen gets one half.
- ❑ Pens/pencils
- ❑ Paper

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Provide emoji stickers for kids who have difficulty writing.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The 🗣️ identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

LOW PREP SMALL GROUP TIME

- Form small groups of 5–6 preteens. If possible, place preteens who are new to church in groups with preteens who are regular attenders. Remind preteens that we are all learning together, so it's OK if they have never read the Bible before or spent much time thinking about who Jesus is. Make small group time a space where all preteens feel welcome and safe to share their thoughts.
- Distribute copies of the "Small Group Discussion Questions" (item 12) for Day 1.
- Guide groups to meet in sight of other small groups so no adult is alone with preteens.

SMALL GROUP TIME PREP

- ❑ Leader pack
 - Item 12: "Small Group Discussion Questions"
 - Make a copy of the "Small Group Discussion Questions" for each group.

LEADER TIP

Assign an adult helper to be the leader for each small group. Encourage these leaders to get to know the preteens in their groups and to stay involved with preteen ministry to be part of the team that disciples these kids.





excel

(20 MINUTES)



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! PREP

- Die

AREAS OF LIFE

- 1—home
- 2—school
- 3—media choices
- 4—time with friends
- 5—time by myself
- 6—time within my community

LIGHT IT UP! PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 6: “Theme Verse Poster”
- Orange sticky notes
- Yellow highlighter
- Mini black light flashlights (2)
 - Write the words of the theme verse in yellow highlighter on the sticky notes. Create two sets.
 - Place the sticky notes on the wall, mixed up. Separate the two sets, one for each team.



LEADER NOTE

See page 6 for safety tips and practical considerations when dimming the lights.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Give each team a line of painter’s tape on the floor or table. Guide them to place their verse words along the tape as they put them in order.

WRAP IT UP PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 15: “Light Bulb Moments Poster”
 - Item 16: “Light Bulb Moments Cutouts”
 - Hang pack item 15 on the focal wall.
 - Copy and cut out item 16 (1 light bulb per preteen).
- VBS 2026 Memory Makers
- Tape
- Pens/Pencils

- Form small groups of 4–5 preteens and give each group a few minutes to create a short skit to act out today’s story, set in modern times. Encourage them to think about who people today say that Jesus is and how they would respond to Jesus’ question about His identity.
- Allow each group to act out their scene for the others.
- After the skits, ask preteens to think about what it means for Jesus to be the promised Son of God in various aspects of their lives. As time allows, roll the die and explain that each number rolled will indicate a different area of life. Ask preteens to discuss different areas as you name them. (See margin.)

LIGHT IT UP!

-  Display the “Theme Verse Poster” (item 6) and review the verse several times. Assist preteens in forming two teams. Instruct the teams to line up opposite the wall with the sticky notes. Give each team a black light flashlight and turn off or dim the room lights.
- Guide preteens to run relay-style, grab a sticky note, and bring it back to their team. Once all the sticky notes have been collected, the teams will turn on their black lights to see the words and put the theme verse in order.
- Say: “The Bible sometimes uses metaphors. Metaphors make a comparison to help us understand what something is like. In this verse, Jesus isn’t saying He’s a light bulb. When He says He is the Light of the world, He means that He represents all truth in the world. When we choose to follow Him, He shows us what is right and how to live, like a light bulb shows us how to walk in a dark room.”
- Continue: “The Bible often uses light to describe God’s truth. Walking in darkness is a way of describing what life is like apart from God. We can’t see the right path to take or how to make wise decisions. When we become followers of Jesus, it’s as if He turns on the light so that we can receive wisdom from Him and live according to God’s ways.”

WRAP IT UP

- Distribute the Memory Maker bag and today’s tag. Ask preteens what the question mark icon reminds them of from today’s Bible story. Point out the question Jesus asked His disciples.
- Say: “A *light bulb moment* happens when someone understands something for the very first time. It is like a light bulb is turned on in a dark room and a person can see or understand something all of a sudden.”
- Distribute the “Light Bulb Moments Cutouts” (item 16) and pencils. Invite preteens to write down any “light bulb moments” they had during the lesson (things they learned or understood differently, new thoughts or questions they have about what they’ve learned) and tape their cards to the “Light Bulb Moments Poster” (item 15).
- Explain that it’s good to have questions, and we do not have to understand 100% of the Bible to follow Jesus. He invites us to get to know Him by reading the Bible and spending time talking to Him in prayer. We have a lifetime to learn more!
- Say: “I’m so glad you joined us for Illumination Station today. God loves you so much, and He wants you to know and love Him too. I hope you’ll keep coming to VBS to keep learning the truth about who Jesus really is.”



JESUS IS ... TABLET

Welcome the preteens to Kaleidoscope Crafts and ask a volunteer to read Matthew 16:16. Ask preteens to recall what they learned about who Jesus is in Bible Study. (*Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God.*) Show kids the sample tablet you made. Explain that in crafts today preteens will make a tablet where they can write the answer to today's spotlight question: Who is Jesus?

ASSEMBLE

Step 1: Use masking tape to cover the cardboard with neon stripes.

Step 2: Add 2 tablespoons of white glue to the bag. Use a plastic spoon to scrape the measuring spoon off in the bag, away from the zip top.

Step 3: Add a squirt of black paint. Close the bag and knead the bag to mix the glue until the entire bag is coated with a thin layer of black. Add extra paint if the mixture seems gray.

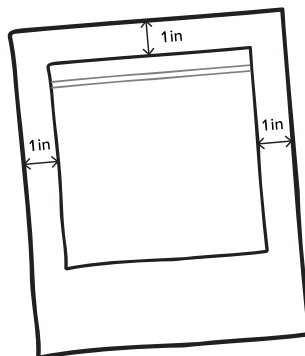
Step 4: Add tape to secure the closed end of the bag. Place the bag on the cardboard, about an inch from one short end. This will leave a larger space on the other end. Use duct tape around the edges of the bag, wrapping excess to the back to secure the bag to the board. You will need an extra strip to cover the wide edge of the cardboard. Cutting the tape at a diagonal will allow it to wrap neatly around the back.

Step 5: Cut the cotton ball from one end of the swab, leaving the other end. Use duct tape to wrap the stem of the swab.

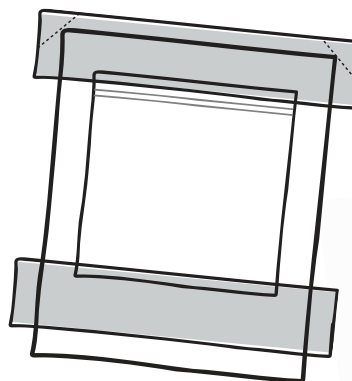
Step 6: Lay a 2-inch length of duct tape on the table, sticky side up. Cut a 1½-inch piece of plastic straw. Place the straw in the center of the duct tape, aligned with one end of the duct tape to create a holder. Stick the holder on the wide edge of your tablet and gently press the tape down without flattening the straw. Insert the swab.

Step 7: Use a permanent marker to write *Jesus Is ...* on your tablet.

Step 8: Use the swab to move the paint around inside the bag. Write who Jesus is in the paint using the spotlight question and answer on the dry erase board, or other phrases from VBS.



Step 3



JESUS IS ... TABLET SUPPLIES

- ❑ 8½-by-10-inch pieces of cardboard (1 per kid)
- ❑ 6½-by-6½-inch ziplock bags (1 per kid)
- ❑ White liquid glue
- ❑ Black paint
- ❑ Cotton swabs (1 per kid)
- ❑ Duct tape
- ❑ Several shades of neon colored masking tape
- ❑ 1½-inch pieces of plastic straw (1 per kid)
- ❑ Scissors
- ❑ Measuring spoons
- ❑ Plastic spoons
- ❑ Metallic permanent markers
- ❑ Dry erase board or small poster

PREPARATION

- Write the spotlight question and answer (see below) on a dry erase board or small poster.
- Cut cardboard into 8½-by-10-inch pieces.
- Make a sample tablet.

SPOTLIGHT QUESTION

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God.

LEADER TIPS

- You can adjust the sizes and amounts to make a smaller or larger tablet but be sure to leave a little space in the ziplock bag. If the bag is too full the duct tape will make it tighter, and the writing won't show.
- If you use dark duct tape, make sure your permanent marker is metallic or something that will show up on the dark tape.
- Additional craft ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Crafts Rotation Leader Guide* (9798384536895).





RECREATION

(20 MINUTES)

LIGHT THE WAY PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 7: “Day 1 Bonus Verse Poster”
 - Item 17: “Light the Way Poster”
- ☐ Items to create an obstacle course (see ideas below)
- ☐ String lights, LED lights, or glow-in-the-dark tape
- ☐ Tap lights (2)
- ☐ Masking tape
- ☐ Permanent marker
 - Set up 2 identical obstacle courses so two people can run at the same time. Options: a tunnel made from chairs/pool noodles, a hopscotch grid of hula hoops, cones to weave around, and so forth. Tape item 17 at one station.
 - Use string lights, tape, or LED lights to create a “path of light” around the course.
 - Place 1 tap light at the end of each side of the course.
 - Write phrases from Matthew 16:16 on masking tape and place one strip at each obstacle in order.

LEADER TIP

Additional recreation ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Recreation Rotation Leader Cards* (9798384536925).

SUNBURST! PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 18: “Who Do You Say That I Am?”
 - Make one copy of item 18 for each team, each on a different paper color, and cut words apart.
- ☐ Yellow balloons (12 per team plus extras)
- ☐ Paper (1 color per team)
- ☐ Large garbage bags
- ☐ Allergy alert
 - Inflate balloons and insert one word in each. Inflate several empty balloons as well. Store balloons in large garbage bags.
 - Mark a “Start” line on one side of the playing area.
 - Display an allergy alert mentioning that kids will be handling latex.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Use oversized plastic eggs instead of balloons in case of latex allergies or if you are concerned a child might swallow balloon pieces, which are choking hazards.

LIGHT THE WAY

PLAY

- Ask a volunteer to read the “Day 1 Bonus Verse Poster” (item 7) aloud. Ask kids who said these words in today’s Bible story. (*Peter*)
- Form two even teams of preteens. Describe to kids how to complete each obstacle. Mention that they must tap and read the phrases of the bonus verse as they complete each obstacle. Point out the obstacle next to the “Light the Way Poster” (item 17). Instruct kids to slap the poster and shout the VBS motto as part of that obstacle.
- Explain that teammates must take turns navigating the obstacle course. Each kid must wait for the runner ahead of him to hit the tap light at the end before taking his turn on the course.
- The team to have all their players hit its tap light first, wins.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “Sometimes life feels a bit like an obstacle course. We have a lot to juggle, with activities, sports practice, spending time with friends, family obligations, and everything in between. It can feel like a lot, and it’s easy to get overwhelmed. But the good news is what Peter already knew about Jesus in this verse: He is the Messiah! Jesus came into this world to light our way. He guides us along the path toward peace. This doesn’t mean life will always be easy, or that things will always go our way. But as the promised Son of God, Jesus offers us a life of peace with God, peace with others, and even peace within ourselves. Jesus offers us new life, free from sin and shame.”

SUNBURST!

PLAY

- Distribute balloons across the playing area at random and explain to kids that these “tiny suns” contain important information. Form teams of six and assign each team a color of paper to look for. Instruct teams to line up at the starting line. Preteens will run relay-style to grab balloons and pop them, looking for a slip of paper inside.
- If the paper is her team’s color, a preteen will return it to her team. If not, she will place it in the middle of the playing area. Preteens who do not wish to pop a balloon may use their turns to check for slips of their team’s paper in the play area. Once all the slips are collected, preteens will put them in order: “Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God.” to finish the game. The first team to finish may stand and shout the answer.

DEBRIEF

-  Say: “In today’s story, Peter knew the truth about Jesus: He is the Messiah, the Son of God. The word *Messiah* means ‘anointed one’ or someone God chose to do a special job. What special job did Jesus have? (Allow preteens to share.) Jesus came to earth to rescue us from sin and show us what God is like. Jesus is also God’s Son. This means He is fully God and fully man. In our Bible story we heard how people had different ideas about who Jesus was. If someone were to ask you who you think Jesus is, how would you answer? (Allow preteens to respond.) It’s not enough to simply know what’s true about Jesus. We also must choose to believe it, turn away from the ways we disobey God, and receive His gift of salvation. When we do, we enter a new way of living, with Jesus leading the way.”

DAY 2: JESUS IS GOD'S PERFECT SON

Spotlight Question

Was Jesus just an ordinary man?

Jesus is the perfect Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world.

Bible Verses

Theme Verse: John 8:12

Bonus Verse: Mark 1:11

Today's Point

Jesus is God's perfect Son.

Bible Story

The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-11; John 1:29-34)

Leader Devotion

Children are often drawn to the tangible act of baptism before fully grasping its meaning and symbolism. As one of the two church ordinances that make theology visible and tangible, baptism is a powerful representation of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. However, while baptism comes after salvation, some children mistakenly associate it with salvation itself rather than recognizing it as an outward expression of their faith.

As we have opportunities to teach children about baptism, it is good to illuminate the fact that Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist served at least three key purposes, none of which involved salvation. Jesus did not need to repent or be saved from His sin because He was without sin. (See 2 Corinthians 5:21.) Instead, Jesus' baptism affirmed Him as the Son of God, marked the beginning of His public ministry, and set an example for believers.

Matthew 3:13-17 provides clear evidence to answer today's Spotlight Question: Was Jesus just an ordinary man? Jesus is the perfect Son of God, who came to be the Savior of the world. When Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, John pushed back, recognizing Jesus' greatness and even suggesting that John should be baptized by Jesus instead. Jesus' response to John revealed His identity as the Son of God. However, it was not just the words of Jesus that affirmed Jesus as God. All three persons of the Trinity made themselves known at Jesus' baptism. The Spirit of God descended like a dove and God's voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" (verses 16-17).

Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew 4 recounts the temptation of Jesus that occurred just before the public ministry of Jesus began and the disciples were first called to follow Him.

Matthew 4:1 indicates it was the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights before the temptations began. God had a purpose for the baptism of Jesus as it demonstrated obedience to His plan for redemption and salvation. Notably, temptation followed His obedience—it was not a consequence of disobedience but rather a testimony of His unwavering faithfulness to live out His purpose.

Finally, the baptism of Jesus provides an example for all believers to follow. Through His baptism, Jesus modeled submission to God and provided a picture of what His death, burial, and resurrection would mean to all who follow Him.

The baptism of Jesus powerfully declared His identity as the perfect Son of God and His obedience to the Father's plan. Though sinless, Jesus humbly set an example for us. The voice from heaven and the presence of the Holy Spirit affirmed that He was no ordinary man—He is the perfect Son of God and the Savior of the world.

Illuminate Your Heart

- Have you followed Christ's example of submission by being baptized? If not, pray about setting up a meeting with a church leader.
- Is your focus on the perfect Son of God? If you are distracted and looking elsewhere, decide now to turn back to Him. He is eager to receive you. If your eyes are still on Him, worship Him afresh for what He has done for you.
- As children hear today's Bible story and reflect on Jesus' baptism, help them understand that baptism does not save them but is an important and meaningful act of obedience that follows their decision to ask for forgiveness of their sins and place their trust in Jesus.





excite

(20 MINUTES)

WHERE DO WE TURN?

PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 19: "Where Do We Turn? Poster"
 - Item 20: "Where Do We Turn? Cards"
 - Hang pack item 19 on the focal wall
 - Cut out the cards from item 20.
- ☐ VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books
- ☐ Pens/pencils
- ☐ Tape
- ☐ VBS Music

WHERE DO WE TURN?

- Welcome preteens as they arrive. Play "Illumination Station" and help preteens meet new friends and reconnect with preteens they met yesterday.
- Guide preteens to turn to page 5 in their activity books and circle their choices in "Would You Rather? Bible Edition."
- Challenge preteens to get in groups based on their birthday month (for example: all January birthdays in one group). Combine any groups with only one member. Once groups are formed, encourage preteens to share their answers.
- Say: "Everyone has different opinions about things, and for this activity there were no right answers. But sometimes there is only one right answer to a question and we need to turn to another source to get it."
- Ask: "What are some ways you can discover what is true, depending on the situation?" (Allow preteens to share.)
- Distribute a "Where Do We Turn? Card" (item 20) to each group. Allow them to decide together which section of item 19 is the best place to turn for answers in each particular situation, then bring their card up and tape it by that section. Point out that for this activity, Google, Siri, and Alexa are not options.

DEBRIEF

- Ask: "Where should we turn if we want to find out the truth about Jesus?" (*Allow preteens to answer.*) Say: "The Bible is God's Word and tells us what is true about Jesus and ourselves. The world is full of places to get information, but the Bible is the only reliable source of truth because it comes from God and He cannot lie."
- Say: "Here at Illumination Station, we want to find out what is true about Jesus. Yesterday we learned that Jesus is the Messiah, God's promised Son. But was Jesus just an ordinary man? No way! Jesus is the perfect Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world."

SHOE TOUCH RUN

PREP

- ☐ Giant Inflatable Game Cube (9781087779812) (or a large box)
- ☐ Sheets of paper with the numbers 1–6 written on them
 - Tuck a sheet of paper into each pocket on the cube, or tape them to the sides of the box.



SHOE TOUCH RUN

- Direct preteens to spread out around the room. Choose one kid to roll the cube. Preteens must get into groups of the number rolled. For example, if a three is rolled, preteens will get in groups of three.
- Explain that once they are in their groups, the preteens will have to put their feet together in various ways and that you will call out a different way before each roll (heel to heel, toe to toe, heel to toe, etc.). Choose a different preteen to roll the cube for each round.

DEBRIEF

- Say: "In today's Bible story, we'll hear about a man named John the Baptist. His last name wasn't Baptist. That's how people refer to him because he baptized people when they decided they wanted to repent of their sin and turn to God. John knew about Jesus (after all, they were related), and John knew that Jesus was the promised Savior. He told people that he wasn't even worthy to untie Jesus' sandals! John didn't care about being a famous preacher. He wanted people to know that Jesus had come to set people free from their sin and welcome them into God's family."

SPECIAL NEEDS

ADAPTATION

Allow a child in a wheelchair to be a "hub" where other children run to create their number sets. Designate other "hub" preteens so you have enough for the whole group. Alternatively, allow a child with mobility challenges to toss the cube for the entire group.



BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION

- Distribute Bibles to preteens and guide them to turn to Mark 1 with you.
- Request that preteens listen closely as you tell the Bible story in your own words, using the following text as a guide.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-11; John 1:29-34

When John the Baptist was alive, he had a very important job. God sent John to get people ready for Jesus—the Savior of the world.

People heard John’s message and started to repent of their sin. They wanted to stop disobeying God, so they asked God for forgiveness. Then John baptized them. He lowered them in the water and brought them back up to show that they had asked God for forgiveness.

John preached, “Someone is coming who is greater than I am—someone who is so important that I’m not worthy to untie His sandals. I baptize people with water, but He will baptize people with the Holy Spirit.” The someone greater John was talking about is Jesus.

Jesus went to see John the Baptist at the Jordan River.

Jesus told John that He wanted to be baptized. But John didn’t think he should baptize Jesus. “I need You to baptize me,” John said. John was confused. He baptized people who admitted their sins, but Jesus never sinned!

Jesus said, “Allow Me to be baptized. God says this is right.” So John agreed, and he baptized Jesus.

As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened and the Spirit of God came down on Jesus like a dove. God’s voice came from heaven. “This is My Son,” the voice said. “I love Him, and I am very pleased with Him!”

John knew who Jesus was. John called Jesus “the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sin of the world.”

Jesus was more than just an ordinary man. He is the perfect Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world.

BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION PREP

- ☐ Bibles (1 per preteen)
- ☐ VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books
- ☐ Pens or pencils

HELPFUL DEFINITION

- **Savior**—God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. Jesus alone saves us.

2

DEBRIEF

- Guide preteens to turn to page 5 in their activity books. Explain that they should decide which color cord leads to the correct answer in “Who is He?” Explain that while some of the options in this picture are a reminder of who some people in Day 1’s Bible story thought Jesus was, kids heard the right answer yesterday, and in today’s story, too. (*the Son of God*)
- Ask: “What did God say as Jesus came out of the water? (Read Mark 1:11.) God declared that Jesus is His Son! In our Day 1 story, Peter told who Jesus is. Here, God Himself said it. We can trust that these words are true because God said them!”
- Say: “Do you remember what John called Jesus? (Read John 1:29.) *The Lamb of God* seems like a funny thing to say. But John didn’t mean that he thought Jesus was a farm animal. In those days, lambs were used as sacrifices for sin. Symbolically, the lamb would die in someone’s place, taking away his sin. Calling Jesus the Lamb of God was a way of saying that Jesus is the only One whose sacrifice could take the punishment for all the sins of the world.”



EXPLORE

(30 MINUTES)

BULL'S-EYE! PREP

- ❑ Leader pack
 - Item 2: “Day 2 Overview Poster”
 - Display item 2 on a focal wall.
- ❑ Paper plates
- ❑ Markers
- ❑ Clipboard

BULL'S-EYE DRAWING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Draw a medium-size circle.
2. Draw a slightly smaller circle inside the first circle.
3. Draw an even smaller circle inside the second circle.
4. Draw a dot in the middle of the last circle.
5. Draw a straight line from the dot all the way to the outside of the largest circle.
6. Draw the letter V at the end of the straight line in the center of the plate, with the base/point of the V pointing toward the center.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Allow a preteen to place her plate on the table or floor to draw and wear a blindfold mask.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The  identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

SMALL GROUP TIME PREP

- ❑ Leader pack
 - Item 12: “Small Group Discussion Questions”
 - Make a copy of the “Small Group Discussion Questions” for each group.

LEADER TIP

Assign an adult helper to be the leader for each small group. Encourage these leaders to get to know the preteens in their groups and to stay involved with preteen ministry to be part of the team that discipled these kids.



BULL'S-EYE!

- Say: “Let’s play a quick game to put your drawing skills to the test.”
- Ask for a volunteer to help you distribute paper plates and markers.
- Explain to the preteens that they need to put the paper plate on their heads and draw on the paper plate based on the instructions you provide. Whichever drawing ends up closest to the leader’s drawing wins! Read the instructions in the margin one at a time, pausing to give kids time to complete each step. Follow the instructions yourself by placing your paper plate on a clipboard and drawing where you can see the plate, but preteens can’t.
- After they complete their drawings, guide preteens to reveal their paper plates. Hold up your drawing next to everyone’s paper plate and choose the top two or three. Then ask the group to vote for the winner.
- Say: “As you can see, I had you draw a target with an arrow hitting the bull’s-eye. I think it’s fair to say none of us quite hit the bull’s-eye on that assignment though. It’s pretty difficult to follow instructions perfectly. Our spotlight question for today will help us understand whether or not Jesus hits the bull’s-eye.”
- Read aloud the spotlight question and answer from item 2.
-  Continue: “We are well aware that none of us is perfect. And that is exactly what set Jesus apart from all of the other people who have ever existed. Unlike any other person, Jesus is completely perfect! He did not sin—ever. And this is so important, because in order for us to be rescued from our sin, we needed someone to live a sinless life and be the one perfect sacrifice who took the punishment for all of our sin. We needed more than just an ordinary man. We needed the perfect Son of God, Savior of the world!”



SMALL GROUP TIME

- Form small groups of 5–6 preteens. If possible, place preteens who are new to church in groups with preteens who are regular attenders. Remind preteens that we are all learning together, so it’s OK if they have never read the Bible before or spent much time thinking about who Jesus is. Make small group time a space where all preteens feel welcome and safe to share their thoughts.
- Distribute copies of the “Small Group Discussion Questions” (item 12) for Day 2.
- Guide groups to meet in sight of other small groups so no adult is alone with preteens.



LIGHT BULB RELAY

- Form two teams (more if your group is large.) Direct teams to each stand in a line. Place a set of theme verse cards you made at the back of each line.
- Give a balloon “light bulb” to the first kid in each line. She will pass the balloon over her head. The next player will pass the balloon between his legs, and so forth.
- Once the balloon gets to the last player, he will grab a card, run to the front with the balloon and begin passing it back again. Once the team gets all their cards to the front, they will put them in order and sit. The first team to sit wins.
- Say: “Great job! Our theme verse comes from the book of John. John was one of Jesus’ closest disciples and friends. John understood that Jesus had come into the world to save us from sin and bring us into God’s family. This quote from Jesus uses *darkness* to describe what it’s like living apart from God and outside His family. But God loves us and He doesn’t want us to live that way!”
- Guide preteens to open their activity books to page 5 and answer the “Turn on the Light” question. Invite preteens to share their answers as time allows.



WHO CAN DO IT?

- Invite preteens to stand. Explain that you will call out a statement (item 21) and kids must run to the appropriate poster. Play several rounds as time allows.
- Say: “When God spoke in today’s story, what did He say? (Read Mark 1:11.) God declared that Jesus is His Son, meaning Jesus is fully man and fully God. Why is it good news for us that Jesus is fully God?” (Allow preteens to share.)
- Continue: “As God, Jesus never did anything wrong. Because He is perfect, Jesus could take the punishment for the sins of all people. No other human could be the right sacrifice because we all deserve to be punished for our own sin. But because Jesus never sinned, He was able to give His perfect life for us. That’s something only God can do!”
- Say: “Jesus took our sin and died the death we deserve. He gave us His perfect obedience and righteousness. If we have received this gift from Jesus, when God looks at us He doesn’t see our sin. Instead, He sees the perfection of Jesus. Our sin has been paid for, so we can have a relationship with God.

WRAP IT UP

- Distribute the Memory Maker and briefly review the story using the river icon.
- Distribute “Light Bulb Moments Cutouts” (item 16) and pencils. Invite preteens to share new thoughts or questions they have about what they’ve learned and tape them to item 15. Explain that it’s good to have questions, and that Jesus invites us to get to know Him by reading the Bible and spending time talking to Him in prayer. We have a lifetime to learn more!
- Say: “This week we are shining a light on who Jesus truly is. Jesus wasn’t just a guy who lived two thousand years ago. He is the perfect Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world. This truth matters for us today, because it means we have a way to be truly forgiven for all the wrong things we say, think, or do. God loves us so much, and He wants us to be a part of His forever family.”

LIGHT BULB RELAY PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 6: “Theme Verse Poster”
- ☐ VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books
- ☐ Yellow or white balloons (1 per team plus some extras in case they pop)
- ☐ Glow sticks (1 per team plus several extras)
- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Pens/pencils
- ☐ Allergy alert
 - Inflate the balloons and place activated glow sticks inside. (Don’t do this too far in advance.)
 - Write the words of John 8:12, one word on each index card. Make a set for each team you will have. Mix up each set so they are out of order, but keep sets separate from each other.
 - Display an allergy alert mentioning that kids will be handling latex.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Instead of passing balloons, pass a textured item such as a ball or diving toy instead.

WHO CAN DO IT? PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 21: “Who Can Do It?”
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ Construction paper (2 sheets)
- ☐ Marker
- ☐ Tape
 - Write *Only God Can* on one piece of paper and *People Can* on the other. Hang them on opposite sides of your teaching area.

WRAP IT UP PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 15: “Light Bulb Moments Poster”
 - Item 16: “Light Bulb Moments Cutouts”
 - Hang pack item 15 on the focal wall.
 - Copy and cut out item 16 (1 light bulb per preteen)
- ☐ VBS 2026 Memory Makers
- ☐ Tape
- ☐ Pens/pencils



CRAFTS

(25 MINUTES)

COLOR WHEEL SUPPLIES

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 22: “Color Wheel Template” (or die cut letter O)
- ☐ Black cardstock
- ☐ Transparent folders or cellophane (red, yellow, and blue)
- ☐ Metal paper brads (with short prongs) (1 per kid)
- ☐ Metallic permanent markers
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Glue
- ☐ Hole punch
- ☐ Dry erase board or small poster

PREPARATION

- Use the template to trace and cut 6 round “frames” for each preteen out of black cardstock.
- Use the template to cut an “insert” (or circle that is a little larger than the center of your die cut Os) from each color folder for each preteen.
- Write *Jesus is God’s perfect Son* on a dry erase board or small poster.
- Make a sample Color Wheel.

LEADER TIPS

- You may want to adjust the size to fit a die cut if you have one available.
- Additional craft ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Crafts Rotation Leader Guide* (9798384536895).

COLOR WHEEL

Welcome the preteens to Kaleidoscope Crafts. Ask a volunteer to recall the events in today’s Bible story. (*Jesus was baptized.*) Ask a preteen to read John 1:29. Remind the preteens that John was encouraging the people who had been looking to him to now look at Jesus. He was explaining that Jesus is the only way to be saved from our sins. Show preteens the color wheel you made. Explain that today in crafts, they will make a color wheel that they can use to look at things in a new light.

ASSEMBLE

Step 1: Glue two layers of the larger circle together with a plastic circle between the layers. Make one for each insert color.

Step 2: Stack all three completed circles together and punch a hole through all the layers on one edge. You may need to punch each separately, just be sure the holes line up.

Step 3: Push the prongs of a brad through the holes. Turn the craft over and open the prongs to secure the brad.

Step 4: Write portions of the phrase *Jesus is God’s perfect Son* around the edges of each circle.

Step 5: Move the circles to mix the colors and see what new colors you can make.





LIGHT UP THE WORLD!

PLAY

- Distribute a glow stick bracelet to each preteen. Guide preteens to form two teams based on the colors of their glow sticks.
- Place the bucket or garbage can in the middle of the playing area. Direct kids to stand in a circle around the bucket alternating preteens from each team. Place “Light up the World!” cards (item 23) next to the bucket with each team’s cards set in one pile.
- Give one preteen a light-up ball to toss into the bucket. If he makes the shot, he can collect one of the cards from his team’s pile. Then all preteens from his team should take a step back from the bucket. Alternate teams tossing the ball until a team collects all its cards. That team may put their cards in order while the other team continues shooting. The first team to put their cards together and declare together, “Jesus is the perfect Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world!” wins.

DEBRIEF

- Read Isaiah 9:2 aloud to preteens.
- Ask: “What do you think it means that the world is ‘walking in darkness?’ (Allow preteens to share.) Any time we try to do things on our own terms rather than trusting God, it is as if we trying to walk in the dark. In a way, it’s as though we have turned off our minds and hearts to the light of wisdom and true life. Jesus came to change all that. He has brought light and life to us by offering up His life to pay the price for our sin and inviting us to participate in God’s kingdom. When we repent of our sins and receive God’s gift of forgiveness, He guides our steps. He helps us make decisions in life about how we will behave, think, and speak. He gives us a heart that wants to do His will rather than our own. When we know and believe that God loves us, we can trust that He wants what is best for us so we can follow His ways!”

LIGHT UP THE WORLD!

PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 23: “Light up the World”
 - Cut out pack item 23 and place in 2 piles, sorted by their background, next to the bucket in the center of the playing area.
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ Bucket or garbage can
- ☐ Glow stick bracelets in 2 colors (enough for each kid to have 1, same number of bracelets in each color)
- ☐ VBS 2026 LED Flashing Ball (9798384539803) or similar

LEADER TIP

Additional recreation ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Recreation Rotation Leader Cards* (9798384536925).

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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LIGHTNING BUG TAG

PLAY

- Read aloud the “Day 2 Bonus Verse Poster” (item 8) to preteens. Ask kids who is speaking in the verse (*God*) and at what point in today’s Bible story He said it (*just after Jesus was baptized*).
- Choose one preteen to be the lightning bug and another preteen to be the bird. All other preteens will find a partner and link arms. The lightning bug will run and avoid being tagged by the bird by finding a pair to link arms with. She may only join a pair by yelling a phrase from Mark 1:11.
- At any time, only two preteens may link arms, so the third preteen in the group will become the new lightning bug. He must leave the other two and shout the next phrase in the verse while linking arms with a different pair. The game ends when the bird tags a lightning bug or when you call time, whichever comes first.

DEBRIEF

- Ask: “Did you know that lightning bugs glow as a way to communicate with each other?”
- Say: “God communicated in this Bible verse in a very special way. He told us exactly who Jesus is: His Son! Jesus never did anything wrong. He always obeyed God and He is our perfect Savior!”

LIGHTNING BUG TAG PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 8: “Day 2 Bonus Verse Poster”

SPECIAL NEEDS

ADAPTATION

Allow a “bird” to have ¼ of a pool noodle to help him try to tag the different lightning bugs.

DAY 3: JESUS IS THE POWERFUL SON OF GOD

Spotlight Question

Was Jesus just a teacher?

Everything Jesus said and did showed that He is the powerful Son of God.

Bible Verses

Theme Verse: John 8:12

Bonus Verse: Matthew 28:18

Leader Devotion

Matthew 15:29-39 provides compelling evidence that Jesus was more than just a teacher—He is the powerful Son of God. Let's shed some light on this passage. This account takes place on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee, where large crowds gathered, bringing people who were in desperate need of healing.

Bringing those in need up a mountain to the feet of Jesus must have required physical effort and determination. Perhaps some people had already heard about the four friends who lowered a man who was paralyzed through a roof to receive Jesus' healing power (Mark 2:1-5). Regardless, their actions reflected their faith in Jesus' ability to heal.

The details of how Jesus healed each of them are left out. Scripture simply states, "They put them at his feet, and he healed them." It was not unusual for Jesus to heal multiple people in one setting, as the Gospels record several similar occasions (Luke 4:40, Matthew 9:35, Mark 6:56).

Following this incredible display of healing, another miracle occurred—one that impacted everyone present. Jesus was moved by compassion because the people had been with Him for 3 days and had nothing to eat. The disciples pointed out the obvious challenge: they were in a remote place with little access to food. When Jesus asked how much food they had, the disciples responded with just 7 loaves of bread and a few fish—hardly enough to feed more than 4,000 hungry people. Yet, as they were about to witness, in the hands of Jesus, a little is more than enough.

After Jesus took the loaves and fish, He gave thanks and then began breaking the bread to be given to the people by the disciples.

Today's Point

Jesus is the powerful Son of God.

Bible Story

Jesus Performed Miracles (Matthew 15:29-39)

The result? Matthew 15:37, "They all ate and were satisfied. They collected the leftover pieces—seven large baskets full." Jesus was no ordinary teacher; He is the powerful Son of God. He could do things no one else could, and the disciples often had a front-row seat to the miracles Jesus performed.

What must it have been like to see these miracles unfold—to watch people be healed and to see over 4,000 people fed from just 7 loaves and a few fish? In both instances, Jesus responded to a need by involving people in His work. In this event, Jesus did not go looking for people to heal. People took the initiative to come to Him. For the hungry crowd, Jesus used what was given to Him by the disciples to meet the needs of the multitudes.

As you prepare to teach children about the powerful Son of God, also look for ways to share this amazing truth in everyday conversation with your best friend or your hair stylist or your kid's baseball coach. Be prepared to give personal examples of how Jesus has proven to be powerful in your life. Never underestimate what God may want to do through your efforts to share the gospel with the people around you both inside and outside of VBS.

Illuminate Your Heart

- What are you doing to bring people to Jesus? Are you willing to give what you have when there are needs around you?
- Pray for the children and families who are being brought to the feet of Jesus this week. Ask God to show you the people in your sphere of influence who you may need to bring to VBS this week.



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

- Play “Illumination Station” and greet preteens as they arrive. Welcome those who are new to your church and introduce them to other preteens.
- Say: “Hello friends! I’m so glad you could join us for another exciting day!”
- Distribute an activity book to each preteen and guide them to turn to page 7. Direct them to fill out the “Where Would You Go?” questions in their books. Then, give them time to share one of their answers with the group.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “There are tons of questions we could ask to help us to get to know each other. What are some ways you can build deeper relationships with new friends?” (Allow preteens to share.) Suggest: “We can play games, work on a school project, chat at lunch, or go to a concert together. What about our relationship with Jesus? It’s different getting to know Jesus since He isn’t physically standing in front of us. How can we get to know Him on a deeper level? (Allow preteens to share.) If we want to learn what’s true about Jesus, we must turn to God’s Word, the Bible. That’s why reading and studying the Bible is so important—it’s how we get to know, love, and trust our Creator and Savior!”
- Point out that this is what you’ve been doing together at VBS by illuminating the truth of who Jesus really is. Ask preteens to share what they have learned this week, pointing to the “Day 1 and Day 2 Overview Posters” (items 1–2) as needed to help kids remember.
-  Say: “We’ve been learning that Jesus is the Light of the world and has offered us freedom from sin and a place in God’s family. Today we’ll hear a story about Jesus that shows something else true about Him. Our spotlight question today is: ‘Was Jesus just a teacher?’ What do you think?” (Allow preteens to share.) Direct attention to the “Day 3 Overview Poster” (item 3) and read the answer: “Everything Jesus said and did showed that He is the powerful Son of God.”



SHOW ME YOUR POWER!

- Invite preteens to complete a variety of physical challenges such as push-ups, jumping jacks, arm circles, the most high fives in a minute, seeing who can hold a plank the longest, and a wall jump. (For a wall jump, give each preteen a sticky note and let them jump as high as they can, putting the sticky note as high up on the wall as possible.) Preteens may do challenges as individuals or get in groups to compete against each other.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “Great job displaying your physical strength and abilities! What other strengths or abilities might someone have?” (Allow preteens to share.) Continue: “Strength comes in many forms. Someone may have mental strength that helps them solve complex puzzles. Others have creative strength so they can create beautiful art, music, or poetry. Today we will hear a story about Jesus that demonstrates His power over everything, even creation. Jesus has authority over everything, meaning He is in control. We’ll learn today that Jesus is the powerful Son of God. He came into this world to heal, not just our bodies, but also our hearts from the negative impact of sin. Our story comes from the New Testament book of Matthew. Let’s get ready to hear more!”

GETTING TO KNOW YOU PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 1: “Day 1 Overview Poster”
 - Item 2: “Day 2 Overview Poster”
 - Item 3: “Day 3 Overview Poster”
 - Display posters on the focal wall.
- ☐ VBS Music
- ☐ *VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books*
- ☐ Pens or pencils

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The  identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

SHOW ME YOUR POWER! PREP

- ☐ Sticky notes

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

For kids with physical limitations, make sure to include challenges with them in mind such as balancing a pool noodle length in the palm of your hand or clapping your hands in a certain pattern.



BIBLE STORY

EXPLORATION PREP

- Bibles

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

- **Disciple**—A “learner” or “pupil.” The people Jesus called to follow Him during His earthly ministry are called disciples.
- **To give glory**—To praise God and talk about His importance and shining majesty.

BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION

- Distribute Bibles to preteens and guide them to turn to Matthew 15 with you.
- Request that preteens listen closely as you tell the Bible story in your own words, using the following text as a guide.

JESUS PERFORMED MIRACLES

Matthew 15:29-39

Jesus and His disciples were traveling in an area where Gentiles lived. Gentiles are people who are not Jews, and during Jesus’ time on earth most of them did not follow God.

One day Jesus went up a mountain and sat there. Large crowds of people came including people who could not walk, people who could not speak or see, and people with many other illnesses. Jesus healed them. He could do this because He is God’s Son. The crowd was amazed to see these people healed. They gave glory to God for healing the people!

Jesus felt sorry for the people in the crowd and had compassion on them. He told the disciples, “These people have been here for three days, and they don’t have anything to eat. I don’t want to send them away hungry.”

The disciples said, “There’s nothing here. Where could we get enough food to feed so many people?”

Jesus asked, “How many loaves of bread do you have?”

“Seven,” the disciples said, “and a few small fish.”

Jesus commanded the crowd to sit down, took the 7 loaves and the fish, thanked God for them, and broke them into pieces. He handed the pieces to the disciples, who gave them to the crowds. Even though Jesus started with very little food, there was enough for everyone to eat until they were full. And there were 7 large baskets of leftovers! Jesus fed 4,000 men plus women and children that day.

Jesus was more than just a teacher. He could do things no one else could do because He is the powerful Son of God.

DEBRIEF

- Ask: “What did you hear in our Bible story? Did anything surprise you?” (Allow preteens to share.)
- Say: “This story has two major examples of Jesus’ power to do things no one else can do. What were they?” (*Jesus healed people and multiplied a little food to feed a lot of people.*)
- Continue: “Jesus healed people and did this miracle with the food for Gentiles: people who weren’t Jewish. The Jews in those days often strongly disliked Gentiles. They did not believe God would send the Messiah (God’s chosen Savior) to save Gentiles—only Jewish people. But Jesus demonstrated with these miracles that He loves everyone. God is infinite; His love, compassion, mercy, and kindness never run out, even as He welcomes more people into His kingdom.”



- Say: “Jesus invites everyone to know and love God and receive forgiveness through Him. Did these people do anything to deserve Jesus’ love and compassion? No. The Bible says everyone sins and no one deserves forgiveness. But the good news is Jesus offers it to us anyways.”
- Read Romans 5:8.
- Say: “We don’t have to have the whole Bible memorized or do good things to earn God’s love. We already have it! Jesus died for us when we were still sinners. Jesus loves you so much, He took the punishment so that you would not have to be separated from God!” (See Romans 6:23 to explain more about the punishment for sin.)

LOW PREP TALENT SHOW

- Say: “We’re going to play a quick game called Talent Show. Each of you will think of a talent or ability that you have that you can demonstrate to our group. Maybe you can count to ten in another language or you are double jointed in your fingers. Write your talent on a scrap of paper with your name, fold your paper, and hand it to me. Be prepared to demonstrate afterward if it’s something you can do safely here and you’d like to try.”
- Give preteens time to brainstorm and prepare, then collect papers. One at a time, read the talent on the paper and let kids guess whose it is. Allow kids to demonstrate as appropriate but don’t press kids who don’t want to. Be prepared with a talent of your own.
- Say: “Isn’t it interesting that we all have talents and abilities that no one in the group would have known about unless we demonstrated it? It would be easy to make assumptions about people and even to underestimate what each of us is capable of. Today’s spotlight question is meant to help us be sure that we don’t underestimate Jesus!”
- Continue: “Jesus made sure that His followers understood how powerful He truly is. He demonstrated His power and authority in all sorts of amazing ways. Can you think of any examples?” Remind preteens of the Bible story they heard earlier.
- Say: “If we were to think of Jesus as only a teacher, we would be severely underestimating Him. He was an amazing teacher and regularly taught crowds in synagogues and on hillsides, but the fact that He was a great teacher would not have been enough to rescue His people from their sin. He had to be powerful—powerful enough to conquer death itself.”
- Continue: “Thankfully, Jesus was very intentional about demonstrating that power. We can say with great confidence today that Jesus was not just a teacher. He is the powerful Son of God!”

LOW PREP SMALL GROUP TIME

- Form small groups of 5–6 preteens. If possible, place preteens who are new to church in groups with preteens who are regular attenders. Remind preteens that we are all learning together, so it’s OK if they have never read the Bible before or spent much time thinking about who Jesus is. Make small group time a space where all preteens feel welcome and safe to share their thoughts.
- Distribute copies of the “Small Group Discussion Questions” (item 12) for Day 3.
- Guide groups to meet in sight of other small groups so no adult is alone with preteens.

TALENT SHOW PREP

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens/pencils

LEADER TIP

If the group is too large and this activity would take too long, ask for a few volunteers to demonstrate talents instead.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

SPECIAL NEEDS

ADAPTATION

For preteens who seem quiet, withdrawn, or struggle with processing information that requires action, tell them at the beginning of the session this game will be played after the story. Make demonstrations optional for everyone.

SMALL GROUP TIME PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 12: “Small Group Discussion Questions”
 - Make a copy of the “Small Group Discussion Questions” for each group.

LEADER TIP

Assign an adult helper to be the leader for each small group. Encourage these leaders to get to know the preteens in their groups and to stay involved with preteen ministry to be part of the team that disciples these kids.





excel

(20 MINUTES)

STEAL THE BREAD PREP

- ☐ Beanbag
 - Place the beanbag in the middle of the playing area.
- ☐ *VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books*
- ☐ Pens or pencils

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Place the beanbag on top of a large cone or a table instead of on the floor.

SHED SOME LIGHT ON IT PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 9: "Day 3 Bonus Verse Poster"
 - Item 24: "Shed Some Light on It"
 - Display item 9 on a focal wall.
 - Cut apart the cards from item 24.
- ☐ Tape
- ☐ Glow sticks or flashlights (1 per preteen)



LEADER NOTE

See page 6 for safety tips and practical considerations when dimming the lights.

WRAP IT UP PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 15: "Light Bulb Moments Poster"
 - Item 16: "Light Bulb Moments Cutouts"
 - Hang item 15 on the focal wall.
 - Copy and cut out item 16 (one per preteen).
- ☐ *VBS 2026 Memory Makers*
- ☐ Pens or pencils



STEAL THE BREAD

- Form two even teams and instruct the teams to line up on opposite ends of the playing area. Give each preteen a number. There should be a preteen on each team with the same number. Place the "loaf of bread" (beanbag) in the center of the area. Call out a number, and the preteens with that number from each team will try to be the first to grab the bread and run back to their line without being tagged by the preteen from the other team with that number.
- Continue play as time allows with variations such as calling out multiple numbers, calling out a way preteens must move (such as crawl or crab walk), or introducing multiple beanbags. When you call "All in," everyone will run to try to get the bread.
- Say: "Good job everyone! For our game we all had to run after one loaf of bread. There certainly wasn't enough for every player to have her own. Even though the disciples started out with 7 loaves of bread and a few fish, in Jesus' hands, it became more than enough. When it comes to Jesus, there is always enough!"
- Point out that the disciples gave up their food when Jesus asked for it. Jesus did something with that food that they could never have imagined!
- Distribute activity books and guide preteens to answer the questions at the bottom of page 7. Invite them to consider ways Jesus might use their resources to let others know of His love. Explain that it doesn't matter how small the resource. God can use it in big ways when we are willing to follow His lead.

SHED SOME LIGHT ON IT

-  Show preteens the Day 3 bonus verse (item 9). Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Explain that this verse describes Jesus' power over everything. Including the things they saw in today's story.
- Tape a "Shed Some Light on It" (item 24) card to each preteen's back without the wearer knowing what it says. Turn off or dim the room lights and give each preteen a glow stick or flashlight. Explain that preteens will use their glow sticks to read each other's cards, and they will ask each other yes or no questions to try to determine which trait of Jesus is on their card. Preteens may ask a friend two questions (or one question and a guess) before having to move on to talk to someone else.
- Once preteens have guessed correctly, they must find the other preteen with the same card. When they have found each other, the pair will shout the words of Matthew 28:18 together.
- Say: "At VBX we are illuminating the truth of who Jesus really is. Each Bible story shows us something true about Jesus. What is a word you would use to describe Jesus? (Allow preteens to share.) Our story teaches us that Jesus is compassionate, kind, generous, powerful, and so much more. Jesus is the Light of the world! Jesus is an amazing teacher, but He is also the powerful Son of God."

WRAP IT UP

- Distribute the Memory Maker and sum up the session using the bread and fish icon to remind preteens of the Bible story.
- Distribute the "Light Bulb Moment Cutouts" (item 16) and pencils. Invite preteens to share new thoughts or questions they have about what they've learned. Explain that it's good to have questions and that Jesus invites us to get to know Him by reading the Bible and spending time talking to Him in prayer. We have a lifetime to learn more!



LUNCH SACK LUMINARIES

Welcome preteens to Kaleidoscope Crafts. Ask a volunteer to recall what we learned about Jesus' power in Bible Study today. (*He healed people and fed more than 4,000 people with a few loaves and fish*). Show the preteens the luminary you made. Remind the preteens that the hungry people in the crowd didn't have food to eat, but today we are going to make luminaries from lunch sacks to remind us that Jesus is God's powerful Son. Encourage the preteens to design their own Lunch Sack Luminaries.

ASSEMBLE

Step 1: Leave the sack folded and use decorative-edged scissors to cut along the top of the sack.

Step 2: Place the sack on a table with the foam under the sack. Lay the template over the sack. Secure with painter's tape.

Step 3: Use a pushpin to punch holes through each dot on the template. Use the skewer to make each hole bigger. Remind preteens that depending on how they position the template, some holes will also go through the sides of the sack because of how the sack is folded.

Step 4: Unfold the sack and place the candle inside.



LUNCH SACK LUMINARIES SUPPLIES

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 25: "Luminary Template"
- ☐ Lunch sacks (1 per kid)
- ☐ Foam core board
- ☐ Pushpins (1 per kid)
- ☐ Bamboo skewers (1 per kid)
- ☐ Decorative-edged scissors
- ☐ Painter's tape
- ☐ Small battery-operated votive candles (1 per kid)
- ☐ Scissors or craft knife (leader use only)

PREPARATION

- Print several copies of the "Luminary Template" (item 25). Adjust the size if needed to coordinate with the size sack you choose.
- Make a sample luminary.
- Cut pieces of foam core board for each preteen that are slightly larger than the lunch sacks.

LEADER TIPS

- Preteens may choose to make their own design but remind them that any letters will appear in reverse on the back of the sack.
- You may want to use colorful gift sacks instead of brown paper lunch sacks.
- Additional craft ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Crafts Rotation Leader Guide* (9798384536895).



Recreation

(20 MINUTES)

LASER MAZE PREP

- ❑ Leader pack
 - Item 6: “Theme Verse Poster”
 - Item 26 or 27: “Laser Maze Theme Verse Cards” (CSB or KJV)
- ❑ Red string
- ❑ Tape
 - Create a maze through the playing area by taping the ends of the red string to opposite walls at various angles. Ensure part of it is impossible for preteens to get through without touching the string.
 - Cut out the “Laser Maze Theme Verse Cards” (item 26 or 27) and tape cards in the translation of your choice to the string at various points throughout the maze. Try to keep each set of cards on separate sides of the maze.

MUSICAL SPOTLIGHTS PREP

- ❑ VBS music
- ❑ 10–12 hula hoops
 - Place the hoops in a circle around the playing area.

LEADER TIP

Additional recreation ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Recreation Rotation Leader Cards* (9798384536925).

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

If there is a preteen who uses a wheelchair in your group, use tape or chalk circles instead of hula hoops. Allow a child with mobility challenges to turn the music on and off.

LASER MAZE

PLAY

- Assist preteens to form two teams and guide them to stand at one end of the playing area. Point out the red and yellow cards that are taped inside the “laser maze” before them. Assign one color to each team. Depending on the number of kids on each team, indicate to each kid a number of cards that she may collect as she moves through the maze. Explain that her goal will be to move to the other side of the maze without touching any string. Anyone who touches the string must freeze for 3 seconds before continuing. Each team member must wait to start the maze till the previous person has finished.
- When all the members of each team have navigated the maze they must work together to put the cards they’ve collected in order, using the “Theme Verse Poster” (item 6) for help as needed. The first team to assemble the verse, wins!

DEBRIEF

- Say: “It was tricky getting through the maze without falling or touching the string. In fact, part of it was impossible! Think about our Bible story. Jesus did something no one else could: He healed people and multiplied bread and fish to feed more than 4,000 people. Jesus’ power means that we can trust Him because He is always in control. He is so much more than just a good teacher. He is God’s powerful Son!”

MUSICAL SPOTLIGHTS

PLAY

- Instruct the preteens to move in a circle through the hula hoops (or “spotlights”) as the music is played. When the music stops everyone must stand in a spotlight. With each round, remove a spotlight and continue playing.
- In this game, no one is out! Preteens will need to squeeze more and more people into the hoops as the rounds progress.
- Play as time (and safety!) allows.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “It was fun watching all of you try to gather yourselves into fewer and fewer spotlights as we went along! In our Bible story Jesus told the people who were gathered to sit down, then the disciples distributed the bread and fish. Let’s think about another cool aspect of this story. What role did the disciples play in this miracle? (Allow preteens to share.) First, they offered Jesus what little food they had and watched as Jesus made it more than enough for all the people. Then, Jesus gave the disciples the job of distributing food to the people on the mountainside. Jesus did the miracle, but He invited the disciples to participate in sharing.”
- Say: “Jesus invites you to participate in the work He is doing in the world. What are some ways you can share His love with the people in your life?”



DAY 4: JESUS IS THE PROVEN SON OF GOD

Spotlight Question

Was Jesus just someone who lived a long time ago?

Jesus lived, died, and rose to life again to be our Savior, now and forever.

Bible Verses

Theme Verse: John 8:12

Bonus Verse: Mark 15:39

Today's Point

Jesus is the proven Son of God.

Bible Story

Jesus Died and Rose to Life
(Mark 14:43–16:7)

Leader Devotion

Do you remember the first time you heard the story of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection? If you grew up in a Christian home, it may be difficult to recall that moment, and you may have never questioned whether Jesus was more than just a man who lived a long time ago. For some children in your Vacation Bible School, this week may be the first time they encounter the life-changing truth of Jesus' resurrection and the salvation He offers each of us.

If it is hard to imagine children in your classroom not knowing about Jesus, consider this: Over the past 25 years, 40 million people have stopped attending church.¹ As a result, church membership in America has dropped below 50 percent.² This means we can no longer assume that every child in Vacation Bible School is attending church regularly or has even heard the true story of Jesus. What if you are the first person to tell them the truth of the gospel? How does that impact the way you prepare for this session?

It's not just children who have never heard about Jesus and who need convictional teaching this week—it's also people who have heard about Him but are surrounded by a world that questions and devalues the life of Jesus. To navigate an increasingly post-Christian world, children need a biblical worldview that upholds the Bible as absolute truth. A 2022 study by George Barna found that only 18% of 13- and 14-year-olds listed the Bible as their primary source of truth³ and 61% "either believe Jesus Christ sinned or may have sinned while He was on earth."⁴ It is important that we continually point children to the Bible as the source of all truth and show them the evidence found in the Scriptures to support Jesus as the proven Son of God.

Throughout this week, children will be having "light bulb moments" as they are learning who Jesus is and how His life provides proof that He was more than just a teacher who lived a long time ago. Jesus did things no one else could do, like heal people who were sick or who had physical disabilities, provide sight to people who were blind, and turn a small amount of food into more than enough to feed the multitudes! He spoke with an authority no one had heard before. The ultimate proof came through the resurrection—the undeniable evidence that He is who He claimed to be.

Illuminate Your Heart

- How have you experienced Jesus personally? Thank Him for being present in your life.
- There could be no greater privilege than to tell children about the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Pray for the children in your care who may be hearing this story for the first time. Ask God to speak through you as you tell the good news of Jesus.

1. Jim Davis, Michael Graham, and Ryan P. Burge. *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Zondervan, 2023), 5.

2. Jefferey Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," Gallup, March 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

3. George Barna, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul* (Arizona Christian University Press, 2023), 27. (hereafter cited as *Raising Champions*).

4. *Raising Champions*, 28.





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(20 MINUTES)



PROVE IT!

PROVE IT! PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 1: “Day 1 Overview Poster”
 - Item 2: “Day 2 Overview Poster”
 - Item 3: “Day 3 Overview Poster”
 - Item 4: “Day 4 Overview Poster”
 - Item 28: “Prove it! Cards”
 - Cut apart cards from item 28 and stack nearby.
- ☐ VBS Music
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens/pencils
- ☐ Tap light

- Play “Illumination Station” and greet preteens as they arrive. Welcome those who are new to your church and introduce them to other preteens.
- Say: “We’ve been exploring questions about who Jesus really is. (Direct attention to items 1–3). Today we’ll answer a new question. Was Jesus just someone who lived a long time ago? What do you think? (Allow preteens to share. Then point out the information on the “Day 4 Overview Poster” [item 4].) Jesus lived, died, and rose again to be our Savior, now and forever.”
- Guide preteens to form teams of 3–4. Provide each team with paper and a writing utensil.
- Ask preteens for examples of different ways to prove something. Mention options such as a driver’s license to prove your identity or a receipt to prove how much you spent on something.
- Explain that you will read aloud a “Prove It! Card” and teams must decide how they would prove what the card is asking for. One person must write down his team’s answer and run to the tap light with it. The first team to tap the light and read a plausible answer wins the card. The team to earn the most cards wins. Encourage teammates to take turns writing the answer and running to the tap light.
- For an added challenge, play a few rounds where preteens must draw or act out the type of proof they need, instead of writing.
- Say: “You did a good job figuring out how to prove these different things. But how would you prove who Jesus really is?” (Allow preteens to share.)
- Explain that the Bible is a reliable book that tells true stories about Jesus. And in today’s story, Jesus did something amazing that proves He is the Son of God.
- Say: “The story we’ll hear today comes from the book of Mark. This book is one of the four Gospels. But it is told in all four books. Do you know the other three? (*Matthew, Luke, and John*) Let’s turn in our Bibles and get ready to hear our amazing Bible story!”

WHO’S WHO? PREP

- ☐ VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books
- ☐ Pencils or pens



WHO’S WHO?

- Distribute activity books and guide preteens to write 3 statements as instructed on page 11. When kids are finished, collect the books, and read the answers aloud. The rest of the group will guess who wrote each set of statements.
- Say: “You all wrote things that are true about you whether it’s a subject you enjoy learning about, a sport you play, where you are from, or what kind of pet you have. Details like these help people get to know us.”
-  Continue: “But there is something even deeper and truer about each of you: you are made in God’s image to know and love Him. God loves you more than you can imagine, no matter what else is happening in your life. You may be in a fight with a friend, dealing with an irritating sibling, or struggling with something else really hard. God wants to be a part of your life. During our time at Illumination Station, we are learning the truth of who Jesus is, and today we’ll discover the incredible price He was willing to pay to set us free from sin and bring us into His kingdom forever. Jesus gave up His own life. What an amazing way for Him to show us how much He loves us!”

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Allow preteens who have communication devices to present themselves using their devices with words they understand and can communicate easily.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The  identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.



BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION

- Distribute Bibles to preteens and guide them to turn to Mark 14 with you.
- Request that preteens listen closely as you tell the Bible story in your own words, using the following text as a guide.

JESUS DIED AND ROSE TO LIFE

Mark 14:43–16:7

Jesus did so many things that showed He is the powerful Son of God—things no one else could do. He healed people who could not see. He healed people who couldn't walk or talk. He made a tiny amount of food into enough to feed more than 4,000 people. He also said things that the religious leaders did not agree with. People saw and heard these things and began to follow Jesus. The religious leaders did not like Jesus because of the things He was doing and teaching. Jesus taught that He was God's Son, so they wanted to stop Him.

Jesus was arrested, put on trial, and nailed to a cross. While Jesus was on the cross, many people were nearby. Some people yelled insults at Him saying, "He saved others, but He cannot save Himself. If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." There were soldiers and religious leaders along with Jesus' mother and other friends who were watching. When Jesus died, a Roman army officer who had been watching Jesus said, "This man really was God's Son!"

After Jesus died, a man named Joseph of Arimathea (AR ih muh THEE uh) asked for permission to bury Jesus. He wrapped Jesus' body in linen cloths and placed Him in a tomb. The tomb was like a large cave cut into a rock. A large stone was rolled over the opening of the tomb.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, some women went to the tomb. When they got there, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. They went in but did not find Jesus' body. Instead, there was a man dressed in a white robe who said, "Don't be afraid. Jesus is not here. He has risen! Go and tell His disciples."

Jesus is not just someone who lived a long time ago. He has always existed. He came to earth to pay the price for our sin and He is alive today! This is important for us because He lived, died, and rose to life again to be our Savior, now and forever.

DEBRIEF

- Ask: "Had Jesus done anything wrong to deserve death?" Explain that Jesus never did anything wrong. Ask kids whether any other person has ever done that. (*No, everyone except Jesus has sinned.*) Suggest that kids check their Bibles for bookmarks. Guide the one with a bookmark at Romans 3 to read Romans 3:23 or share his Bible with a friend who wants to volunteer.
- Ask kids to recall what kind of insults people yelled at Jesus (*If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.*)
- Ask: "Could Jesus have come down from the cross if He'd wanted to? Why didn't He?"
- Say: "We've learned about Jesus' power this week at VBS. Jesus is easily powerful enough to get down from the cross. It wasn't nails that held Jesus on the cross. It was love. Jesus loves us and wanted to pay the price for our sin. But why did Jesus have to die? If God wanted to forgive our sins, why couldn't He just say, 'You are forgiven?'" (Allow preteens to share.)
- Guide preteens to check and see who has a bookmark at Romans 6:23. Ask her to read the verse or, if she doesn't want to read, to pass to another volunteer.

BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 29: "Gospel Poster"
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Bookmarks (3)
 - Mark 3 Bibles with the following verses:
 - Romans 3:23;
 - Romans 6:23;
 - Romans 5:8.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

- **Religious leaders**—Leaders who were supposed to help people know and follow God.
- **Savior**—God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. Jesus alone saves us.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.



explore

(30 MINUTES)

TEACHING TIP

If a preteen asks to talk with you privately about becoming a Christian, honor her request, but for safety and accountability, meet in an area where you can easily be seen by other adults. When possible, involve parents in this important discussion!

CAN'T BE UNDONE PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 29: "Gospel Poster"
- ☐ VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Books
- ☐ Pens/pencils

LEADER TIP

Be sensitive to kids who may have lost someone recently, especially if that person was not a believer in Christ.

- Say: "The Bible says that the cost of sin is death, and someone must pay the price. Jesus is the only One who never sinned, so He is the only One who could take that punishment. He took on all of our sins to offer us a way to have a relationship with our Creator God. The story of Jesus' death and resurrection is a beautiful picture of God's love for us. Listen to this."
- Guide a preteen to look for the bookmark at Romans 5:8 and read the verse or share with another volunteer who wants to read.
- Explain that we all have a choice of how to respond to Jesus' sacrifice for us. Show kids the Admit, Believe, and Confess sections on the "Gospel Poster" (item 29) to show how someone who wants to receive Jesus' gift can respond.
- Allow time for kids to ask questions or for you to clarify points from the poster as needed. Tell kids you will be available if they have more questions later.



CAN'T BE UNDONE

- Distribute activity books and guide preteens to complete the "Can't Be Undone?" activity on page 11.
- Discuss the activity as kids complete it. Kids may disagree on some items and that's OK. Let them explain their logic. For instance: you can't "undo" untying a shoe, but you can always tie it again.
-  Direct attention to the picture of the tomb in the middle. Say: "Usually, we think that death is something that cannot be undone. It seems final. But Jesus has shown us otherwise! Death could not hold Jesus, and that proves He is the Son of God! And the best news is that because Jesus is more powerful than death, when we have chosen to receive His gift of forgiveness, we don't have to fear it either. Because Jesus took our punishment of death, we can live with God forever! We can have this hope if we receive His gift."
- If you have extra time, allow kids to complete the maze on pages 8–9, using the icons to review the "Gospel Poster" (item 29).

SMALL GROUP TIME PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 12: "Small Group Discussion Questions"
 - Make a copy of the "Small Group Discussion Questions" for each group.

LEADER TIP

Assign an adult helper to be the leader for each small group. Encourage these leaders to get to know the preteens in their groups and to stay involved with preteen ministry to be part of the team that discipless these kids.



SMALL GROUP TIME

- Form small groups of 5–6 preteens. If possible, place preteens who are new to church in groups with preteens who are regular attenders. Remind preteens that we are all learning together, so it's OK if they have never read the Bible before or spent much time thinking about who Jesus is. Make small group time a space where all preteens feel welcome and safe to share their thoughts.
- Distribute copies of the "Small Group Discussion Questions" (item 12) for Day 4.
- Guide groups to meet in sight of other small groups so no adult is alone with preteens.





IN THE SPOTLIGHT

- Instruct preteens to form groups of 5. Review John 8:12 using item 6. Explain that each group will create their own set of 5 motions for the words/phrases of the verse. Allow time for each group to plan their motions.
-  Guide each group to form a line. Dim the lights, and walk down a line of kids, shining the flashlight on each preteen's hands, one at a time. As your light hits the first kid's hands, she should do the first motion in the verse. Each preteen in that group should follow with the next motion. Give each group a turn to showcase their set of 5 motions.
- Ask: "After hearing the story of Jesus winning against death, do you have any new thoughts about this verse?" (*Allow preteens to respond.*)
-  Say: "The Bible often compares bad things like sin to darkness. One really bad kind of darkness we have in the world is death. We wouldn't have death without sin. But the fact that Jesus is stronger than death means that we can have the light of eternal life with Him! If we receive His gift of forgiveness and repent of our sins, we will live forever with Him."

BLINDFOLD TRUST WALK

- Assist preteens in finding a partner. Blindfold one of the partners and explain that one partner will have to guide the other verbally through one of the masking tape paths. Once they have reached the end, preteens will switch places to return to their starting point. (Provide each pair with a new blindfold.)
- Ask: "Was it easy to trust your partner? You had to listen closely to the sound of his voice so you could stay on the path. You also had to trust that he would lead you in the right direction: that he wouldn't guide you off course or into a wall or furniture."
- Continue: "How is a trust walk like following Jesus? (Allow preteens to share.) We don't always know what's going to happen in life. Following Jesus means trusting that He will lead us where we need to go. We can trust Him because He loves us, and He is good. God wants what is best for us, and the very best thing is knowing God and having a real relationship with Him. We can only do that by trusting in Jesus to save us, receiving His gift of forgiveness, and repenting of our sins."

WRAP IT UP

- Distribute the Memory Maker and sum up the session using the cross and tomb icon to remind preteens of the Bible story.
- Distribute the "Light Bulb Moment Cutouts" (item 16) and pencils. Invite preteens to write down any new thoughts or questions they have about what they've learned and tape the cutouts to the poster (item 15). Explain that it's good to have questions, and that Jesus invites us to get to know Him by reading the Bible and spending time talking to Him in prayer. We have a lifetime to learn more!
- Say: "Jesus is the proven Son of God. He is alive! His death was enough to pay for our sin. Now anyone who receives His gift of forgiveness and repents of his or her sins is forgiven and welcomed into God's kingdom."

IN THE SPOTLIGHT PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 6: "Theme Verse Poster"
 - Display the "Theme Verse Poster" (item 6) on the focal wall.
- ☐ Flashlight

LEADER TIP

You may choose to research and teach preteens the American Sign Language signs for a few of the verse words. You may also choose to remind preteens of the motions from the "Illumination Station" theme song for inspiration.



LEADER NOTE

See page 6 for safety tips and practical considerations when dimming the lights.



4

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The  identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

BLINDFOLD TRUST WALK PREP

- ☐ Masking tape
- ☐ Blindfolds (1 per kid for hygiene reasons)
 - Create several pathways through the room using masking tape on the floor.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Instead of using blindfolds offer pairs of dark sunglasses or blindfold eye masks.

WRAP IT UP PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 15: "Light Bulb Moments Poster"
 - Item 16: "Light Bulb Moments Cutouts"
 - Hang the "Light Bulb Moments Poster" on the focal wall.
 - Copy and cut out item 16 (1 per preteen).
- ☐ VBS 2026 Memory Makers
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Tape



CRAFTS

(25 MINUTES)

GLOW-IN-THE-DARK ZIPPER PULL SUPPLIES

- ❑ Glow-in-the-dark pony beads
(6 of one color and 5 of another per kid)
- ❑ Elastic cord (10–11 inches per kid)
- ❑ Lanyard spring hooks (1 per kid)
- ❑ Cool melt glue gun

PREPARATION

- Put the beads under bright lights or in sunlight for several hours to charge them.
- Within the set of 6 matching beads, glue 3 beads together with the holes of each side of the center bead touching the sides of the outer beads. (See illustration below.)



- Cut cord into 10–11-inch lengths.
- Make a sample zipper pull.

LEADER TIPS

- The length of string may change depending on the weight of the cord. Test with your cord when you make your sample.
- Additional craft ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Crafts Rotation Leader Guide* (9798384536895).

GLOW-IN-THE-DARK ZIPPER PULL

Welcome the preteens to Kaleidoscope Crafts. Ask a volunteer to recall what happened in today's Bible story. (*Jesus died on the cross and rose again. He is the proven Son of God, our Savior.*) Show the preteens the sample zipper pull you made. Tell the preteens that today they will make a cross-shaped zipper pull that will glow in the dark. Encourage preteens to attach the zipper pull to a jacket or backpack.

ASSEMBLE

Step 1: Fold the cord in half and put the loop through the ring at the bottom of the lanyard spring hook. Thread both ends of the cord through the loop of cord, securing it to the hook. Thread the left cord through the first bead (of the set of 5 of 1 color) from the left and the right cord through the same bead from the right. Continue this pattern for the next four beads (all in the same color).

Step 2: Change to the second bead color. Thread the left cord through the next bead from the left and the right cord through the same bead from the right.

Step 3: Thread the right cord through the bead glued to the right of the center bead. Thread the left cord through the bead glued to the left of the center bead.

Step 4: Thread the left cord through the next bead from the left and the right thread through the same bead from the right. Do the same for the final bead. Your beads should form a cross.

Step 4: Bring both cords together and tie a double knot. Clip the cords close to the knot. You may need a friend to hold the cross while you stretch the cords and tie the knot.





MIRROR BALL BALANCE RACE

PLAY

- Challenge preteens to find someone wearing the same color they are wearing to be their partner for the following game.
- Instruct pairs to line up at the “Start” line. Give each pair a ball and explain that they will hold it between them using only their elbows. The first pair to get to the “Finish” line wins. If a pair drops the ball, they must balance it once more between them before they can continue.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “It was frustrating to drop the ball, but you could keep going! The game wasn’t over just because the ball fell. Think back to today’s Bible story. Jesus’ disciples probably felt like their world was coming to an end when Jesus died. But Jesus’ death was not the end of the story: it was just the beginning! Jesus rose from the grave. His death and resurrection ensure that everyone who receives His gift of forgiveness and repents of his or her sin will be given new life too. Our sin doesn’t hold us down anymore. It no longer has power over us, because when we give our lives to Jesus, He wipes away all the guilt and shame, and replaces it with freedom and joy!”

GLOW-IN-THE-DARK RING TOSS

PLAY

- Guide kids to read Mark 15:39 from the “Day 4 Bonus Verse Poster” (item 10). Prompt them to identify the speaker from today’s story. (*the Roman army officer*)
- Form two relay teams. Give each team four glow necklaces to activate and fasten into hoops. Place a set of labeled bottles about eight feet away from each relay team’s side of the starting line and darken the room as much as possible.
- When the race begins, lead each team to say in unison the first phrase of the bonus verse. When they have done so, player 1 may toss a glow hoop toward the first bottle. If he misses, he should retrieve the hoop, give it to the next player in line and move to the back of the line. After the entire team says the phrase again, player 2 may toss her glow hoop toward the bottle.
- Once a player successfully rings the first bottle, the hoop should be left in place. Teams should say the second phrase of the verse together before players aim their hoops toward the corresponding bottle.
- Continue in the same way until one team successfully rings all four phrases in order.

DEBRIEF

- Ask: “What did the Roman army officer say when Jesus died?”
- Say: “This man recognized that Jesus really was the Son of God, and he wasn’t even one of the people who was close to Jesus. Everyone has an individual response to the truth of who Jesus really is. That’s an important choice you will make too. The most important question you will ever answer is: Who is Jesus? He is truly God, and He has come to rescue you from your sin and bring you into the abundant life you were created to live.”
- Ask: “How do you think the Roman army officer’s discovery may have changed his life?” Discuss possibilities that occur to preteens.
- Say: “Believing that Jesus is really God’s Son can change your life. I’m praying that each of you will put your faith in Jesus and follow Him!”

MIRROR BALL BALANCE RACE PREP

- ❑ Inflatable toy mirror balls or silver beach balls (1 per pair)
(Consider including some *VBS 2026 Glitter Beach Balls* [9798384539810] in the mix.)
- ❑ Cones
 - Mark off “Start” and “Finish” lines using the cones

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

GLOW-IN-THE-DARK RING TOSS PREP

- ❑ Leader pack
 - Item 10: “Day 4 Bonus Verse Poster”
- ❑ Full 2-liter bottles or game cones (8)
- ❑ Large mailing labels or sticky notes
- ❑ 22-inch glow necklaces (8)
- ❑ Tape or rope
 - Divide Mark 15:39 into 4 phrases. Write each phrase on a label or sticky note and fasten to a bottle or game cone. Make 2 sets.
 - Mark a “Start” line and place sets of bottles about 8 feet away.

LEADER TIP

Additional recreation ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Recreation Rotation Leader Cards* (9798384536925).



LEADER NOTE

See page 6 for safety tips and practical considerations when dimming the lights.

DAY 5: JESUS IS GOD'S PLAN FOR FORGIVENESS

Spotlight Question

Why do I need to respond to Jesus?

Jesus is the only way to receive God's forgiveness.

Bible Verses

Theme Verse: John 8:12

Bonus Verse: Acts 2:38

Leader Devotion

This week, the focus has been on helping children discover the answer to a spotlight question each day. These questions have laid the foundation for children to consider Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Today's kids will hear the message Peter preached that immediately led over three thousand people to see their need for a Savior. So now the spotlight will turn to each child with a deeply personal question: **Why do I need to respond to Jesus?**

Recognizing and believing Jesus is a great teacher, a powerful performer of miracles, and a compassionate servant leader is easy for most of us. The Bible is full of events that lead us to those conclusions. However, James 2:19 reminds us, "You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder." Unless we also acknowledge our desperate need for Him as our Savior—the One who willingly died for our sins and offers forgiveness—we miss the good news of who He truly is. Without Him, we deserve the punishment of death for our sins. In Him, we find grace, redemption, and forgiveness only He can bring.

Children need to understand why they need forgiveness to know why they need to respond to Jesus. Recognizing personal sin is one of the signs a child is ready to decide to follow Jesus. Children must know what sin is and the problem it causes for their relationship with God. Children often define sin as a wrong choice like disobeying parents, cheating on a test, or fighting with a sibling. While those wrong choices are sin, the result of that sin makes them unable to have a relationship with a holy and perfect God.

Today's Point

Jesus is God's plan for forgiveness.

Bible Story

Peter Preached About Jesus (Acts 2)

A simple definition of sin that children can easily understand is "anything we think (point to your head), anything we say (point to your mouth), or anything we do (hold out your hands) that does not please God." When children understand the impact of their sin—it separates them from God—they are often ready to answer today's spotlight question: Why do I need to respond to Jesus?

For over one hundred years, the purpose of Vacation Bible School has been to share the gospel with children so that they can understand their need for forgiveness and respond to Jesus. There is no other program, ministry, or movement that has been as effective at reaching children with the gospel than VBS. The Holy Spirit may be drawing children in your care to salvation this week. God gives us the privilege and honor of being in relationship with the children He is calling to salvation.

Illuminate Your Heart

- Have you experienced the Holy Spirit piercing your heart in conviction and leading you to repentance? (See Acts 2:37.) When was the last time you were grieved over your sin?
- Spend some time in prayer for each of the children in your care. Ask God to help them understand their need for Jesus and give them the courage to step out in faith to receive the forgiveness Jesus offers to each of them.



REFLECTING THE LIGHT

- Play “Illumination Station” and greet preteens as they arrive. Welcome those who are new to your church and introduce them to other preteens.
- Give each preteen a small mirror. Direct them to walk around the room using their mirrors to read the message on each “Reflecting the Light” card (item 30).
- Distribute paper and pencils to preteens. Challenge each kid to think of a word that describes himself and to write it backward. Once everyone is finished, let the preteens read each other’s words.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “You all came up with some great words to describe yourselves. Was it fun using the mirrors to decode your words? Some words on these cards describe things Jesus did, came to bring, or characteristics of Jesus. But one, *Helper*, describes the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. Before He died and rose again, Jesus promised that God would send His Spirit to help Jesus’ followers. He would help them obey God. He would help them communicate with God. And He would help them reflect God’s light clearly to others.”
- Continue: “Today we will hear an amazing Bible story about what happened after Jesus had been resurrected and returned to heaven. At a religious festival after Jesus was raised from the dead, Peter and the other disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave them the courage and power to share God’s message with everyone. They became a bit like mirrors, reflecting the love of God to the people around them! We’ll hear more from the book of Acts. Let’s get ready to learn together from God’s Word!”

WHO SAID IT?

- Instruct preteens to sit in a circle and choose one person to stand in the middle wearing the blindfold.
- Silently tap on one preteen’s shoulder in the group and announce that whoever’s shoulder you just tapped will disguise her voice and recite the theme verse. The preteen in the middle must try to guess who said it. Once he guesses correctly or gives up, the speaker gets to be in the middle. Encourage preteens to recite the verse from memory if possible but allow them to use the “Theme Verse Poster” (item 6) if needed.
- Play additional rounds as time allows, allowing kids to shuffle positions after the guesser is blindfolded if guessing becomes too easy.
- Guide preteens to turn to page 13 in their activity books and match the languages as you debrief.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “In today’s Bible story we’ll hear that the disciples were able to speak other languages, even though they had never studied or learned them! By sharing the message of Jesus, the disciples obeyed what Jesus had told them to do: go into the world to share His love with others. We must all respond to the message about Jesus and His love. We can respond by rejecting Him. Or we can respond by repenting of our sins and receiving His gift of forgiveness. And that’s what I hope each of you will do!”

REFLECTING THE LIGHT PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 5: “Day 5 Overview Poster”
 - Item 30: “Reflecting the Light”
 - Display item 5 to reference throughout the session.
 - Cut apart cards from item 30 and place them around your teaching area.
- ☐ Small mirrors (1 per preteen)
- ☐ Paper and pencils

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Writing backward may be challenging for those who have a cognitive learning disability or dyslexia. Allow preteens to write a word with a glow-in-the-dark marker and then shine a mini black light flashlight or glow stick on it to make it glow.

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WHO SAID IT? PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 6: “Theme Verse Poster”
- ☐ VBS 2026 VBX Preteen Activity Book
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Blindfolds (1 per preteen for hygiene reasons)



BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION

BIBLE STORY EXPLORATION

PREP

- Bibles

HELPFUL DEFINITION

- **Messiah**—God’s chosen Savior. Old Testament prophets told of a coming Messiah who would be Israel’s Savior. God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. Jesus alone saves us.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The  identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

TEACHING TIP

If a preteen asks to talk with you privately about becoming a Christian, honor her request, but for safety and accountability, meet in an area where you can easily be seen by other adults. When possible, involve parents in this important discussion!



- Distribute Bibles to preteens and guide them to turn to Acts 2 with you.
- Request that preteens listen closely as you tell the Bible story in your own words, using the following text as a guide.

PETER PREACHED ABOUT JESUS

Acts 2

There was an important religious festival seven weeks after Jesus was raised from the dead. Followers of Jesus were all together in one place and God had just given them the ability to speak in many different languages to tell people about Jesus. People were confused about what was happening.

Peter and the other disciples stood up in front of the crowd. Peter said that God told a prophet years ago that this would happen. Peter shouted, “Listen! God proved who Jesus was by doing miracles, wonders, and signs through Him.” Peter reminded the people that they saw Jesus do these things that no one else could do. God knew the people would betray Jesus and kill Him. God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to die and take the punishment for our sins.

Peter continued, “God raised Jesus back to life again, which we all saw. Now He sits at the place of highest honor in heaven, right beside God. So let it be clearly known that God has made this Jesus, whom you killed, to be both Lord and Messiah.”

When the people heard this, they were very sorry. They asked Peter and the other disciples, “What should we do?”

Peter replied, “Each of you must repent—turn from disobeying God to obeying God—and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.” Peter continued preaching for a long time. That day about 3,000 people did what Peter said. They responded to his message, repented, and were baptized.

Everyone who hears the good news about Jesus will respond in some way. How we respond to Him is important because Jesus is the only way to receive forgiveness for our sins.

DEBRIEF

-  Say: “Peter told the people they needed to repent and be baptized. *To repent* means “to turn away from sin and turn toward Jesus.” Imagine you are walking through the woods and suddenly you find you are standing at the top of a steep cliff. You wouldn’t keep walking that way! You would quickly turn around and go the other way. Repentance is a bit like that. We have been living a life of sin but we realize we don’t want to keep living that way. We want to turn to Jesus and ask Him to forgive us from our sins and help us live a new life.”
- Ask if preteens know what baptism is. Explain that baptism does not save a person. It is something people do to show the world that they have received Jesus’ gift of forgiveness and repented from their sins. It comes after repentance.



- Say: “It’s my hope that each of you will choose to respond to Jesus by repenting of your sins and receiving His gift of salvation. But everyone is ready for that at a different time. If you think you are ready, please talk to me or another VBS leader! If you are curious about this but don’t feel ready, keep asking questions. The Holy Spirit will help you know when you are ready.” Remind kids that you, their parents, and other church leaders are always ready and available to answer their questions.

COMET TAIL TAG

- Call attention to the bonus verse poster (item 11). Remind preteens that this verse comes from today’s Bible story. Prompt preteens to notice **what** Peter urged the people to do (*repent and be baptized*), **why** he urged them to do it (*for the forgiveness of sin*), and **what** he said would happen next (*you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*).
- Explain that when people repent from sin and follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to guide and strengthen them. Make sure kids understand that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God—God’s promised Helper.
- Lead preteens to point to the *what*, the *why*, and the *what next* Bible verse phrases you have posted on the walls.
- Prepare for a tag game. The player whose birthday is next will be the first “comet tail tagger.” Tape an 18-inch streamer to everyone else’s back.
- When the game begins, players (the “comets”) will run from phrase to phrase in the correct order, slapping each poster before moving on. Meanwhile, the tagger will attempt to pull the crepe paper tail off each comet.
- When a comet loses his tail, he will change roles and become an additional tagger. The last player with an intact comet tail wins the round.
- Lead everyone to say Acts 2:38 in unison. Reset and play additional rounds as time allows.

COMET TAIL TAG PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 11: “Day 5 Bonus Verse Poster”
- ☐ Crepe paper streamers
- ☐ Masking tape
- ☐ Construction paper
 - Divide Acts 2:38 into 3 phrases based on the prompts the first step of the activity. Write each phrase on a separate sheet of paper. Label the sheets *What? / Why? / What next?* Tape each sheet on a different wall.
- Provide clear space for an active game.

SMALL GROUP TIME PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 12: “Small Group Discussion Questions”
 - Make a copy of the “Small Group Discussion Questions” for each group.

LEADER TIP

Assign an adult helper to be the leader for each small group. Encourage these leaders to get to know the preteens in their groups and to stay involved with preteen ministry to be part of the team that discipled these kids.



LOW
PREP

SMALL GROUP TIME

- Form small groups of 5–6 preteens. If possible, place preteens who are new to church in groups with preteens who are regular attenders. Remind preteens that we are all learning together, so it’s OK if they have never read the Bible before or spent much time thinking about who Jesus is. Make small group time a space where all preteens feel welcome and safe to share their thoughts.
- Distribute copies of the “Small Group Discussion Questions” (item 12) for Day 4.
- Guide groups to meet in sight of other small groups so no adult is alone with preteens.

HIDDEN GOSPEL MESSAGES PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 29: "Gospel Poster"
- ☐ Orange paper
- ☐ Yellow highlighters
- ☐ Mini black light flashlights

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The  identifies an opportune time to share the gospel as led by the Holy Spirit.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Have some preprinted notes for kids to trace or copy to share with friends.



LEADER NOTE

See page 6 for safety tips and practical considerations when dimming the lights.

HIDDEN GOSPEL MESSAGES

-  Remind preteens of the good news of Jesus' sacrifice they have learned about this week at VBX. Explain that we call this good news *the gospel*.
- Say: "The gospel is the story of God's love for the world He has made. God created all things for His glory, and everything was good. But that goodness was broken when humans decided to go against what God wanted and went their own way instead. This is called sin. Since then, humanity has been in big trouble. God's good world has been filled with violence, pain, sadness, and death. But God had a plan to rescue His world and His people. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to live the perfect life we cannot live. Jesus died the death that we all deserve to take the punishment for our sin. And He rose from the dead, promising new life to everyone who receives His gift and repents of his or her sin. When we trust in Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit to help us live as God wants us to live. We can know that even when we die, we will be with God forever."
- Guide preteens to form groups of three. Distribute the orange paper and highlighters. Challenge kids to think about the message of the gospel and the hope it brings to us. Direct them to write out a message of encouragement for the other preteens in their group using what they have learned about the gospel. Point out that preteens may use the "Gospel Poster" (item 29) for help.
-  Turn off the room lights, distribute black lights, and let the preteens read the messages. Suggest preteens take messages home with them to share with others who need to hear the good news about Jesus.

INVITATION TO GOD'S KINGDOM PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 29: "Gospel Poster"
 - Item 31: "Invitation to God's Kingdom"
 - Make copies of item 31 and cut apart one or more cards for each preteen.
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Markers, crayons, or colored pencils

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Since this may be new language for some kids, have one or two examples kids can follow.



INVITATION TO GOD'S KINGDOM

- Explain that God wants us to respond to the good news about Jesus. And He also wants us to share that good news with others! The good news of the gospel is for everyone. Remind preteens that's what Peter and the other disciples were doing in today's story.
- Distribute copies of the "Invitation to God's Kingdom" to preteens and explain that they will make invitations for people they want to share the gospel with.
- Guide preteens to fill the "For" line with the name of someone they would like to tell about what they've learned at VBS.
-  Suggest that the "When" line might say *When the Holy Spirit shows you you're ready*. Suggest the preteens look up verses listed on the "Gospel Poster" (item 29) and choose references or a few words to fill in the other blanks, explaining how and why to "RSVP" or respond to the good news of the gospel. Allow preteens to decorate their invitations as time allows.

WRAP IT UP

WRAP IT UP PREP

- ☐ Leader pack
 - Item 15: "Light Bulb Moments Poster"
 - Item 16: "Light Bulb Moments Cutouts"
 - Hang the "Light Bulb Moments Poster" on the focal wall.
 - Copy and cut out a "Light Bulb Moments Cutout" (1 per preteen).
- ☐ VBS 2026 *Memory Makers*
- ☐ Pens/pencils
- ☐ Tape

- Distribute the Memory Maker and sum up the session using the exclamation point icon to remind preteens of the sermon Peter preached in today's Bible story.
- Distribute the "Light Bulb Moment Cutouts" (item 16) and pencils. Invite preteens to write down any new thoughts or questions they have about what they've learned and tape the cutouts to the poster (item 15). Explain that it's good to have questions, and that Jesus invites us to get to know Him by reading the Bible and spending time talking to Him in prayer. We have a lifetime to learn more!
- Say: "God gave His followers the ability to speak in other languages so more people could hear the good news of the gospel and God wants you to hear that good news too. I'm praying you will think about what you've learned about Jesus at VBS and choose to respond by repenting of your sins and receiving His gift of salvation!"



NOISELESS NEON TUMBLE GAME

Welcome the preteens to Kaleidoscope Crafts. Remind the preteens that this week in VBX you have been using the motto: Jesus is the Light of the world. Show the sample game you made and explain that the goal is to keep pom-poms from falling. Explain that today they will make their own game they can play to help them focus on the VBX motto.

ASSEMBLE

Step 1: Starting about ½-inch from the lip, use a hole punch to punch a few rows of holes around each bottle half. Use the long-reach punch to make a couple of rows further down. Make 20 holes total.

Step 2: Cut the straws into 6-inch lengths. (If the straws have a flexible section, discard or save for another project.)

Step 3: Place the pom-poms in one bottle. Use clear tape to attach the open ends of the bottles together, being careful not to cover any holes.

Step 4: Cut a length of masking tape long enough to go around the middles of the bottles (where the edges meet). Lay the masking tape on the table and write *Jesus is the Light of the world.* on the tape. Put the tape around the middle of the bottles to hold them together.

Step 5: Insert the straws through the holes randomly, creating a grid above the pom-poms.

TO PLAY: Form 2 teams: JESUS and LIGHT. Give each team a pencil and paper. Turn the bottle over and take turns removing straws. If pom-poms fall on a team's turn, the opposing team gets a letter. The first team to spell their name is the winner.



NOISELESS NEON TUMBLE GAME SUPPLIES

- ☐ Lightweight plastic bottles (2 per kid)
- ☐ Plastic neon straws
- ☐ Neon masking tape (enough to circle each bottle)
- ☐ Neon pom-poms (several different colors, 15 per kid)
- ☐ Clear packing tape
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Hole punch (regular, several for kids to share)
- ☐ Hole punch (long-reach, a few for kids to share)
- ☐ Paper and pencils

PREPARATION

- Cut the top from each bottle.
- Make a sample game

LEADER TIPS

- Lightweight water or soft drink bottles work best. Thicker bottles will make punching too hard.
- Let part of the group use the punches while the others cut their straws so everyone won't need the long-reach punches at the same time.
- Additional craft ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Crafts Rotation Leader Guide* (9798384536895).



RECREATION

(20 MINUTES)

HUMAN LIGHT BRIGHT

PREP

- ☐ Contact plastic
- ☐ Multicolored balloons
- ☐ Trash bags (1 per team)
- ☐ Allergy alert
 - Place 20–30 partially inflated balloons in a bag for each team.
 - Cut 3-foot strips of contact plastic, one for each team.
 - Mark a “Finish” line across the playing area from where teams will be standing.
 - Display an allergy alert mentioning that kids will be handling latex.

SPECIAL NEEDS

ADAPTATION

In case of latex allergies, consider using sticky notes instead of balloons, a different color for each team.

HUMAN LIGHT BRIGHT

PLAY

- Form teams of 3–5 preteens and instruct each group to appoint someone to hold their “light box.” Distribute a piece of contact plastic and a bag of inflated balloons to each group.
- Explain that one teammate will stand on the “Finish” line and peel off the backing to the contact plastic. He will stand holding the plastic stretched wide between his arms with the sticky side facing out. His group will take turns running back and forth and sticking as many balloons as they can to their plastic in the allotted time to light up their “Human Light Bright.” The team with the most balloons stuck to their light box at the end of the round wins.
- Set a timer for 2 minutes and let preteens begin. Play additional rounds with longer or shorter time, depending on how teams do.

DEBRIEF

- Say: “This was a silly game, but it has something to show us about the goodness of God. The gospel is the good news about Jesus, and it is so good it sticks with us and makes us want to share it! Jesus calls us to go tell others how much He loves them.”
- Read Matthew 5:14-16. Ask: “What did Jesus call His followers?” (Allow preteens to share.) Say: “He calls us the light of the world. We know the good news that Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead, to save us from our sins. We can respond to this message for ourselves and we can go into the world to tell others this amazing news!”

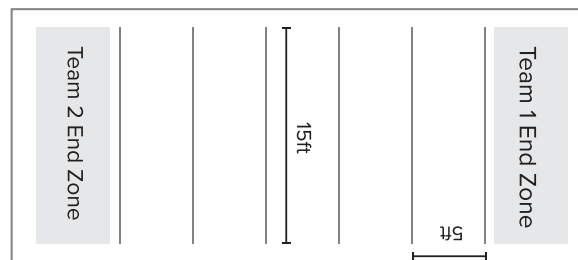
FOOSBALL FEET PREP

- ☐ 8 pool noodles
- ☐ Duct tape
- ☐ 1 large beach ball
- ☐ Tape, chalk, or rope to make lines
 - Tape 2 pool noodles together, forming 1 long noodle. Repeat this 3 more times for a total of 4 double-length noodles.
 - Use tape or chalk to make 4 parallel lines about 15 feet long and about 5 feet apart in width.
 - Make another line on either end of the playing field forming each team’s end zone.

FOOSBALL FEET

PLAY

- Form teams of 4 preteens each. Start the game by inviting two teams to come to the field. Provide each team with two double-length noodles. The remaining kids will watch and cheer.
- There should be 2 preteens on each double-length noodle. Each pair should stand on a line. Team 1 will face Team 2’s end zone and vice versa.
- Explain to kids that they must keep both hands on the noodle at all times and must use only their feet to kick the ball. Each pair is allowed to move left and right along one of their team’s tape lines, but they must stay on the line at all times.
- The leader will throw the ball into the field to kick off the first round.
- The team that gets the ball across other team’s end zone line wins. That concludes that round. The winning team will remain on the field and the losing team will be replaced by a new team of four.
- Rounds continue until every team has played and one winning team remains!



DEBRIEF

- Say: “The key to success with this game was being responsive, wasn’t it? You had to be responsive to the movements of the other team and react quickly. Likewise, when it comes to the gospel, your response matters a great deal. This week you heard all about Jesus and how to have a relationship with Him. If you haven’t already, I pray that you respond to Him today and invite Him to be the Lord of your life by receiving His gift of forgiveness and repenting of your sin. It will be the best response you could ever have!”

LEADER TIP

Additional recreation ideas can be found in the *VBS 2026 Recreation Rotation Leader Cards* (9798384536925).



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