



ILLUMINATION
STATION JOHN 8:12

VBS 2026

GRADES 3-4

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.



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.

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)



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



1. ASK GOD TO MAKE YOUR HEART READY.

- Study the 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 Grades 3–4 Bible Study Leader Pack* (9798384537380), and a *VBS 2026 Kids Activity Book* (9798384535041) 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!



TABLE OF CONTENTS

© 2025 Lifeway Press®
No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher.
Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to Lifeway Press, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707.

ISBN: 9798384535072
Item: 005853154

Printed in the United States of America
We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.
To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Illumination Station™ and any other trademarks, service marks, logos, and graphics used herein are the trademarks or registered trademarks or service marks of Lifeway. Other trademarks, service marks, graphics, and logos used in connection with this product may be the trademarks of their respective owners. You are granted no right or license with respect to any of the trademarks or service marks mentioned above or any use of such trademarks or service marks except as specifically stated within this product.

Send questions/comments to:
VBS Publishing Team Leader by email to vbs@lifeway.com
or by mail to
VBS Publishing Team Leader,
VBS 2026 Grades 3–4 Bible Study Leader Guide
200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707
or make comments on the web at lifeway.com.

PUBLISHING TEAM

Shelly Harris
Publishing Team Leader

Bethany Phillips
Content Editor

Rachel Woodruff
Production Editor

Alli Quattlebaum
Graphic Designer

Beth McGill
Production Designer

Jeremy Carroll
*Publishing Manager,
VBS and Hyfi*

Chuck Peters
*Director, NextGen
Ministries*

Melissa Edgington
Writer

Peggy Howard
*Special Needs
Adaptations*

Illumination Station™	3
Teaching and Praying for 3rd & 4th Graders	4
Make VBS Great for All Kids	5
How to Plan a VBS Session	6
Decorating and Supplies	7
Continue VBS at Home	9
Day 1: Jesus Is God's Promised Son (Matthew 16:13-20)	10
Day 2: Jesus Is God's Perfect Son (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-11; John 1:29-34)	17
Day 3: Jesus Is the Powerful Son of God (Matthew 15:29-39)	24
Day 4: Jesus Is the Proven Son of God (Mark 14:43–16:7)	31
Day 5: Jesus Is God's Plan for Forgiveness (Acts 2)	38



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.

CHARACTERISTICS OF 3RD & 4TH GRADERS

During VBS, kids have the opportunity to see how a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is crucial. They can learn that they can trust Jesus every step of the way. To help you lead kids of this age to begin and grow their relationship with Jesus, here are a few things to keep in mind.

Physically and Socially

are active, energetic, and enthusiastic by nature and need an outlet for those physical characteristics with active learning experiences

are in the process of building relationships, are usually loyal to their friends (generally of the same sex), and want to be helpful to the group or team

like to work in groups and focus on fairness

do not want to call attention to themselves or be compared to others and are more comfortable playing a game or answering questions as part of a group

are beginning to take more responsibility for their actions

Spiritually

are developing values and thinking in terms of right or wrong instead of good and bad

are learning that the Bible tells of God's plan of salvation

can memorize short Bible passages and learn and apply Bible truths about salvation

can ask serious questions about faith and religion

can follow the examples, teachings, and commandments of Jesus

are aware that God loves and values all people

Emotionally

are increasing in their self-concept

can be strong-willed at times as they seek ways to show independence

can be anxious and withdrawn, tend to complain, and are often hesitant to try new activities

are generally sensitive, their feelings are hurt easily, and they cry easily

Bible Skills

are able to locate some books in the Bible

can locate books of the Bible by using the contents page or with a leader's assistance

can find information asked for by reading a verse or passage

can pronounce some of the names of Bible people, places, and things

can discover and apply truths in a Bible passage

learn that Bible truths never change

begin to use the Bible for daily Bible reading

know the Bible teaches people how God wants them to live

PRAYING FOR YOUR 3RD & 4TH GRADERS

Praise God for this opportunity to teach kids 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 possible distractions a VBS session can bring.

Pray that God will help you explain difficult concepts to young kids and kids who are new to church.

Ask for specific connection points with each child 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 kids 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 kids.

- 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 kid who requires assistance because of a disability.

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

HOW TO PLAN A VBS SESSION

1. Read over each session. Decide which activities will best fit your group, time allotment, and the supplies you have.
2. 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.
3. Collect the supplies you need for each day of VBS. Consider using separate boxes for each day, and one for everyday supplies. (See pages 7–8.) Prepare items from the *VBS 2026 Grades 3–4 Bible Study Leader Pack* (9798384537380).
4. Relax and enjoy the chance to build relationships with your kids.
5. Be flexible. Adjust your plans to make this the best experience possible for you and your kids.

Consider this info about the way this leader guide is organized.

- ❑ Each session has a three-page section labeled “Teach the Bible Study.” This is a 30-minute core Bible-teaching time that is divided into smaller portions. This is laid out to take you through an ideal session of VBS, but it is completely customizable. You can choose what you want to include!
 - Start It—An opening activity to kick off your session.
 - Learn It—When you will teach the day’s Bible story. **If there’s time for nothing else, make sure you include this.** The Bible story is printed in this leader guide and on the back of the day’s Bible story picture. Note that this year, some words are in bold. If you have a younger age group or a shortened time, you can tell only this part of the story. If you have older kids and plenty of time, tell the entire story. These words are written with kids in mind and are meant for you to use! But still plan to open your Bible as you tell the story. Kids need to see that this event really happened and is written about in God’s Word.
 - Know It—A time to learn the VBS theme verse: John 8:12. Activities will help kids progressively memorize the verse throughout the week.
 - Live It—An application activity to help kids see how the truths they’ve learned work in real life. This section often integrates the Kids Activity Book.
 - End It—A brief time to wrap up the session.
- ❑ Additional Activity Options are included at the end of each session if your Bible study time is longer than 30 minutes or if you will have two Bible study times (opening and closing). Consider planning a few of these activities to keep in your back pocket in case the schedule changes or you have some extra time.
 - The first two activities are application activities.
 - The third activity is a Bible skills activity.
 - The fourth activity is a chance for kids to learn the day’s Bonus Verse.



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. For accountability and safety, always leave your room door open, or if the door has a window, keep it uncovered. Use a string or two of Christmas lights in your room decor so you can turn off the overhead light without creating total darkness.

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.

SUPPLIES

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) for pens and supplies
- VBS 2026 Supersized Backdrop (9798384538561)
- Find more ideas in the VBS 2026 Decorating Made Easy book (9798384536987).

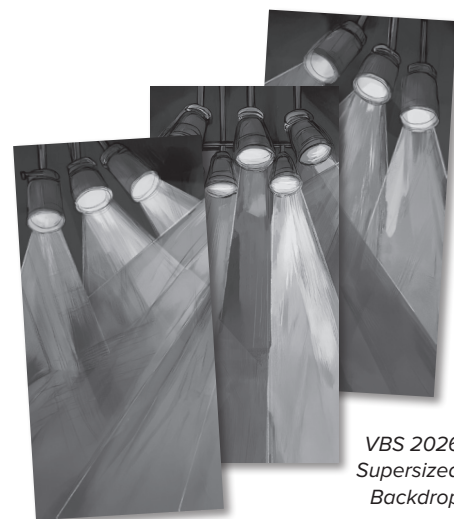
Everyday Supplies

(These items needed every day in VBS are only listed here and do not appear in each day's specific supply listing.)

- Bibles
- VBS 2026 Kids Activity Books (9798384535041) (1 per kid)
- VBS 2026 Grades 3-4 Bible Study Leader Pack (9798384537380), including the *Music for Kids CD* found in the pack
- VBS 2026 Memory Maker (9798384538141) (1 per kid)
- Music device
- Timer
- Pencils, markers, colored pencils, permanent markers, fine-point permanent markers, and crayons
- Tape (clear, masking, and painter's) and adhesive putty
- Scissors (large and child-safe)
- Sticky notes, paper, cardstock, and construction paper
- Flashlight, lantern, penlight, and laser pointer

Day 1

- Pack items 1, 6–9, 15–16
- Neon paper
- Black paper
- Neon acrylic paint or orange highlighter
- Black light flashlight
- Gallon-size ziplock bag
- Neon paper
- Yellow cardstock
- Tap lights (2)
- God's Big Idea** (*Application Activity #1*)
 - Cardstock
 - Pen
 - Yellow balloons
 - Stapler
 - Hole punch
 - Ribbon
 - Allergy Alert
- Jesus Is the Light Night-light** (*Application Activity #2*)
 - Battery-operated tea lights
 - Neon pony beads
 - Chenille stems
 - Cool melt glue gun and glue sticks (leader use)
- Prophets Shined a Light on Jesus** (*Bible Skills Activity*)
 - Highlighters
- Know and Glow** (*Bonus Verse Activity*)
 - Glow sticks in several colors



VBS 2026
Supersized
Backdrop

Supplies for Days 2–5 on page 8 >>

Day 2

- Pack items 1–2, 6–8, 10, 17–18
 - Glow sticks in 2 colors (8 of each color)
 - Wooden craft sticks
 - Blue tablecloth
 - Tap light
 - The Heavens Opened** (*Application Activity #1*)
 - Blue paper
 - School glue
 - Salt
 - Yellow watercolor paint
 - Paper plates
 - Paintbrushes
 - Cups of water
 - Flashlight Stomp** (*Application Activity #2*)
 - 4–6 flashlights
 - Spotlight on John the Baptist** (*Bible Skills Activity*)
 - No additional supplies
 - River Rock Mix-up** (*Bonus Verse Activity*)
 - River rocks (16 or 19 per group, depending on the Bible translation you are using)
 - Highlighters (yellow, orange, or green)
 - Black light flashlights (2)
-

Day 4

- Pack items 4, 6–8, 12, 14
- Red crepe paper streamers
- Black craft paper
- Highlighters
- Shine a Light on the Gospel** (*Application Activity #1*)
 - Vellum or parchment paper
- Jesus Is Alive Suncatchers** (*Application Activity #2*)
 - Waxed paper
 - Old bright colored crayons
 - Iron (leader use only)
 - Small handheld pencil sharpeners
 - Cookie cutters (such as moons, stars, suns, light bulbs, and other light sources if possible)
 - Hole punches
 - String or twine
 - Craft knife (leader use only, optional)
- Neon Gospel Hop** (*Bible Skills Activity*)
 - Neon paper
 - Black lights (optional)
- (Glow) Stick with Jesus** (*Bonus Verse Activity*)
 - Glow stick bracelets (1 per kid)
 - Half-circle of floral foam

Day 3

- Pack items 3, 6–8, 11, 19–24
 - Gallon-size ziplock bags
 - Black cardstock
 - Black paper
 - Yellow poster board
 - Wooden clothespins
 - Paper clips
 - Floodlight Storyboard** (*Application Activity #1*)
 - Black cardstock
 - Yellow cardstock
 - Brads
 - Glue
 - Poster board
 - Walk in the Light** (*Application Activity #2*)
 - Fish-shaped crackers
 - Mini round crackers
 - Sandwich bags
 - Allergy Alert
 - Jesus Silhouettes** (*Bible Skills Activity*)
 - Hole punch
 - Brads
 - Dry erase or poster board
 - The Stars Show His Power** (*Bonus Verse Activity*)
 - White paper cupcake liners
 - Black cardstock
 - Wood skewers or large golf tees
 - Foam core board
-

Day 5

- Pack items 5–8, 13–14, 25–28
- Plastic bowl
- Chairs (1 per kid)
- Red cellophane
- A Light to the Nations** (*Application Activity #1*)
 - White cardstock
- In the Light** (*Application Activity #2*)
 - Battery-operated candles
- Bible Blazes** (*Bible Skills Activity*)
 - No additional supplies needed
- Who's in the Spotlight** (*Bonus Verse Activity*)
 - No additional supplies needed

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 Kids Activity Book* (9798384535041)—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. Kids and preschoolers will use the same tags, adding them to a muslin bag each day. 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. It includes activities for every type of learner to help families connect with the VBS biblical content.. And it features some surprises that can only be revealed with light! The guide also includes a gospel presentation with the ABCs of becoming a Christian.
- *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. Added bonuses are 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 Verse

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)*

Today's Point

Jesus is God's promised Son.

Bible Story

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



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:

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.

BONUS VERSE

You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.
Matthew 16:16

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.
Matthew 16:16 (KJV)

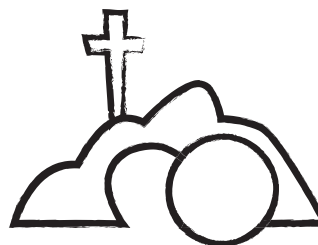
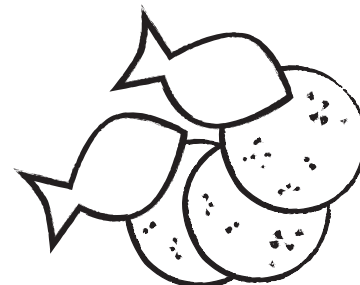
Illuminate Your Heart

- 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.

LEADER PACK ITEMS USED TODAY:
1, 6–9, 15–16

Notes

Use these icons as directed on leader pack item 6.



START IT PREP

- Neon paper
- Black paper
- Scissors
- Black marker
- Neon acrylic paint or orange highlighter
- Black light flashlight
 - Before the session, cut slips of neon paper, one per kid, and write the following team names on them (an equal number of each): Sunshines, Glow Sticks, Flashlights, Campfires.
 - Use neon acrylic paint or markers to write *Jesus* on pieces of black paper and hang them all around the room. Alternative: Use Christmas lights to spell *Jesus* across the wall.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION


For kids with cognitive disabilities, offer pictures to show things that are easier to do in the light such as a sunny field with crops growing or a book illuminated by a lamp.

LEARN IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 6: "Illumination Station Banner"
 - Item 7: "Illumination Station Banner Add-ons"
- Bible
- Gallon-size ziplock bag
- Permanent marker
- Neon paper
- Yellow cardstock
- Tape
- Black paper (optional)
 - Before the session, cut small slips of neon paper and write a different profession on each one. (Examples: doctor, teacher, mail carrier, coach)
 - Set up the banner and add-ons as directed on the items.



Start It (4 minutes)

1. As the kids come in, ask each of them to pick up a slip of paper with a team name on it. Guide the kids to find their teammates and sit together.
2. Say, "Welcome to Illumination Station! This week we're going to be shining a spotlight on who Jesus really is."
3. Ask the teams to think about why we need light. Ask: "What are some things that are easier to do in the light than in the dark?" (For example: reading, growing plants, finding our way on a path.) Give the kids a minute or so to discuss, and then let them shout out their answers.
4. Explain that many people in the world are in the dark when it comes to knowing who Jesus is. It's like they're trying to walk along a road in the dark. But the Bible teaches us who He is!
5. Say: "This week we'll learn that we don't have to be in the dark about Jesus. We'll learn from the Bible who He is. The Bible teaches us that there is no darkness in Jesus. He is light! Get ready! This week we're putting the spotlight on Jesus!"
6.  Turn on the black light flashlight and ask a helper to dim the lights. Shine the black light around the room at the signs. Give the kids a few seconds to realize all of the *Jesus* signs are glowing in the dark. Bring the lights back up to full light.

Learn It (12 minutes)

1. Ask the kids to get ready to shout their team name (assigned in Start It) when you give the signal. Turn to each team and ask, "Who are you?" and let them shout the name that was on the slips of paper they picked up when they came in.
2. Explain that kids are going to play a game called "Who Am I?"
3. Ask a volunteer from one of the teams to choose a slip of paper with a profession on it and secretly show it to his team. Then lead the entire team to stand up and silently act out the profession while the other teams try to guess what the job is. Let the teams take turns acting out professions.
4. Say: "Today's spotlight question is: 'Who is Jesus?' Let's turn to the Bible to find out."
5. Remind the kids that the Bible is where we go to learn about who Jesus is.
6. Open your Bible and tell the Bible story in your own words. Use the text below as a guide.

Jesus Asked Who People Thought He Was

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.

Matthew 16:13-20

7. Ask: “If Jesus asked you who you think He is, what would you say?”
8. Say: “According to the Bible, He is the Messiah, the promised Son of God.”
9. Point out the “Illumination Station Banner” (item 6) and attach the Day 1 “Illumination Station Banner Add-on” (item 7).
10. Say: “Jesus is the person who God talked about way back when Adam and Eve first sinned.” Explain that sin is anything we think, say, or do that disobeys God.
11. State that as soon as Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they had a relationship problem with Him. They used to walk and talk with God, but once they sinned, their relationship was broken. God promised that one day someone would come who would fix their relationship.
12.  Say: “When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, they created a problem for all of us, too! The Bible teaches that we all have a sin problem. Since sin entered the world, the Bible says every single person has sinned. God knew we needed help from Him, so He sent Jesus.”
13. Use the banner “flashlight” to show the kids the icon of a question mark in a speech bubble. Ask how it reminds them of today’s Bible story.



Know It (6 minutes)

1. Lead the Flashlights to join the Campfires, and ask the Glow Sticks to join the Sunshines, forming two teams, lined up on one end of the room.
2. Place two tap lights at the other end of the room. To make them more secure, consider taping the lights to a table.
3. Display the “Theme Verse Poster” (item 8) and read it aloud together.
4. Say: “Some people are in the dark about who Jesus is. But this week we are going to shed light on the truth! We’re learning that Jesus is the Light of the world!”
5. Let the kids race two at a time to the other end of the room. The team member who can push her light and turn it on first leads everyone in saying the Bible verse. Award points to the team that turns the light on first. After several rounds, the team with the most points wins!

HELPFUL INFO


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.

Why are some parts bold?

These stories have been designed to help you be flexible! For younger kids or a limited amount of time, tell only the part in bold. If you have older kids and plenty of time, tell the entire story.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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

LEADER TIP

Talking about salvation with a child can be a private conversation, but do not be alone with a child. Always have another adult within eyesight. When possible, involve a child’s parents or guardians in this important conversation!

KNOW IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 8: “Theme Verse Poster”
- Tap lights (2)



LEADER NOTE

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

LIVE IT PREP

- VBS 2026 Kids Activity Books
- Pencils
- Bibles



Live It (6 minutes)

1. Give the kids their activity books and pencils and ask them to turn to pages 2 and 3. Briefly review today's Bible story.
2. Say: "Did you know that during all that time between when Adam and Eve lived and when Jesus came to earth God gave special messages for His people about what the Messiah they were waiting for would be like."
3. Lead the kids to match up the candle holders to complete phrases about the Messiah. Then let the kids pair up with Bibles to look up the Bible verses under "Brighter Idea" that these phrases are based on.
4. Say: "God promised His people that the Messiah would do all of these good things, and when Jesus arrived, He did! God always keeps His promises!"

SPECIAL NEEDS

ADAPTATION

Write the answers to "Candle Do This" on white paper in white crayon. Allow kids to paint with watercolors to reveal the answers.

ANSWERS:

Isaiah 11:2—He would be wise and understanding.

Isaiah 35:6—He would heal people who couldn't walk or talk.

Isaiah 61:1—He would bring good news.

Matthew 1:21—He would save people from sin.

End It (2 minutes)

1. Give each kid a Logo tag and a Day 1 tag for his Memory Maker bag.
2. Ask them what the picture on the Day 1 tag has to do with today's story. Explain that the question mark in a conversation bubble can remind kids of the question Jesus asked the disciples and the conversation that followed about who Jesus is.
3. Ask: "Who is Jesus?"
4. Use the Day 1 banner add-on (item 7) to help the kids shout: "Jesus is God's promised Son!"
5. Pray for the group, thanking God for sending Jesus and asking Him to help kids know more about who Jesus is this week.

END IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 6: "Illumination Station Banner"
 - Item 7: "Illumination Station Banner Add-ons"
- VBS 2026 Memory Makers

God's Big Idea

(Application Activity #1—10 minutes)


- Leader pack
 - Item 1: “Day 1 Bible Story Picture”
 - Item 15: “Bulb Bases”
 - Cardstock
 - Pen
 - Yellow balloons
 - Scissors
 - Stapler
 - Tape
 - Hole punch
 - Ribbon
 - Permanent marker
 - Allergy Alert—Post an allergy alert mentioning that kids will be handling latex.
 - Before the session, blow up 10 yellow balloons and attach a “Bulb Base” (assemble as directed on item 15) to the bottom of each one.
 - Cut squares of cardstock and write one of the “Review Questions” or “Discussion Questions” from the “Day 1 Bible Story Picture” (item 1) on each square. Punch a hole in each card and use ribbon to tie one question to each balloon.
 - Use a marker to write one word of the spotlight answer on each balloon. (*Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God.*) You will have one extra balloon with no question or word on it.
1. Say: “Sometimes in cartoons when someone gets a big idea, a light bulb appears over his head. That makes a lot of sense when we think about the story of Adam and Eve because the darkness of sin entered the world. And darkness makes it hard to understand the truth. But God had a big idea long before that ever happened: that He would rescue us by sending Jesus, the Light of the world.”
 2. Ask the kids to sit in a circle. Walk around the circle with the extra balloon light bulb in your hand. When you stop and hold the light bulb over someone’s head, ask her to choose a balloon and read the attached question aloud. Allow her to choose a volunteer to answer the question.
 3. When all the questions have been answered, let the kids work together to put the balloons in the correct order: Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God.

WARNING


Uninflated or broken balloons are considered a choking hazard for kids under the age of 8. Be mindful when using balloons around younger kids. Post an allergy alert for kids who are allergic to latex.

Jesus Is the Light Night-light

(Application Activity #2—10 minutes)

- Battery-operated tea lights
 - Neon pony beads (option: try glow-in-the-dark beads)
 - Chenille stems
 - Cool melt glue gun and glue sticks (leader use)
 - Fine-point permanent markers
1. Give each of the kids two or three chenille stems and let them string pony beads onto them.
 2. Give each child a tea light and lead him to use a marker to write *Jesus is the Light* around the base of it.
 3. Show the kids how to bend their chenille stems into different shapes that bend up and over the top of the bulb, leaving spaces to allow the light to shine through. Suggest simple shapes such as a heart, a lightning bolt, or an initial.
 4. Glue kids’ stems to the top surface of the tea light, so that the lights shine in the middle of their designs.
 5.  Ask the kids to explain what Jesus meant when He said, “I am the light of the world.” (*He meant that people were living in the darkness of their sin, without hope. But Jesus came to bring hope and to show people how to have a relationship with God.*)

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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



Prophets Shined a Light on Jesus


(Bible Skills Activity—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 16: “Prophets Shined a Light on Jesus”
 - Bibles
 - Pencils
 - Highlighters
 - Make a copy of item 16 for each kid.
1. Give the kids copies of “Prophets Shined a Light on Jesus” (item 16), pencils, highlighters, and Bibles.
 2. Allow them to work in groups or work together as a large group.
 3. Help the kids look up Old Testament Scriptures about the Messiah.
 4. Show them how to use the word bank to fill in the blanks next to each Scripture.
 5. Lead kids to use their highlighters to light up the bulbs at the bottom of the page that contain the circled letters from the blanks.
 6. Then let kids unscramble the letters to fill in the blank.
 7. Answers:
 - He will bring *good news*. (*g*)
 - He will be born in *Bethlehem*. (*h*)
 - He will come to earth as a *little baby*. (*i, t*)
 - He will *heal* people. (*l*)
 - Jesus is the *Light* of the world.



Know and Glow

(Bonus Verse Activity—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 9: “Day 1 Bonus Verse Poster”
 - Glow sticks in several colors
 - VBS music
1. Ask the kids to sit in a circle.
 2. Display the bonus verse (item 9) and read it together.
 3. Ask if kids remember who said these words in today’s Bible story. (*Peter*)
 4. Ask: “And what did Jesus say about Peter because Peter knew Jesus was the Messiah?” (*Peter was blessed. God had shown Peter the truth.*)
 5. Talk about what a blessing it is to come to church and hear teaching about who Jesus is. Encourage the kids to attend church after VBS week.
 6.  Give each kid a glow stick. Dim the lights for extra fun.
 7. Play VBS music and direct the kids to pass the glow sticks around the circle.
 8. Stop the music and ask the kids who are holding the yellow glow sticks to read the verse on the poster. Switch up the color each round to keep the kids guessing. Continue to play for several rounds, hiding portions of the poster as kids get more familiar with the verse.
 9. Return the lights to normal.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

For kids with limited dexterity in their hands and fingers, use lanyard glow sticks, which tend to be larger and easier to handle.

LEADER TIP

If you cannot dim the lights and you have glow stick colors that are hard to distinguish from each other, add neon tape to help kids know which color they are holding.



LEADER NOTE

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

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 Verse

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)*

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.

BONUS VERSE

A voice came from heaven:
“You are my beloved Son;
with you I am well-pleased.”
Mark 1:11

There came a voice from
heaven, saying, Thou art my
beloved Son, in whom I am
well pleased. *Mark 1:11 (KJV)*


LEADER PACK ITEMS USED TODAY:

1–2, 6–8, 10, 17–18

Notes



Start It (4 minutes)

1.  As the kids come in, welcome them back to Illumination Station, where they will shine a light on who Jesus really is!
2. Form two teams and assign each team a color of glow stick.
3. Guide kids to hunt around your space for their team's glow sticks. Mention that each team has eight glow sticks in hiding.
4. When teams have collected all of their glow sticks, allow teammates to work together to unscramble their words. Point out that one team has a slightly shorter word and one blank glow stick to keep things even.
5. When kids have unscrambled the words *ordinary* and *perfect*, ask kids to tell you what those words mean. Make sure kids understand that *ordinary* means "something that is very normal and not surprising." *Perfect* is "something with no mistakes or problems."
6. Explain that today's spotlight question is: Was Jesus just an ordinary man?
7. Say: "The answer to that question will amaze you! Jesus wasn't just a man. Jesus was and is the perfect Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world. That means that Jesus has never done anything wrong, and He never will!"
8. Add the Day 2 "Illumination Station Banner Add-on" (item 7) to the banner (item 6).

Learn It (10 minutes)

1. Guide kids to sit by the "river" at the front of your teaching area.
2. Use "Stick Puppets" (item 17) to introduce John the Baptist and Jesus as the two people involved in this story, emphasizing that these are real people and that they were relatives.
3. Ask two volunteers to get on their knees at the river and hold the stick puppets. Allow two other kids to hold the tablecloth up in front of the puppets.
4. Give several kids flashlights and direct them to shine their lights on the puppets for stick puppet theater. (Make it clear that they are not allowed to shine lights in anyone's eyes.)
5. Open your Bible and tell the Bible story in your own words while the kids act it out with the puppets. Use the following text as a guide.

The Baptism of Jesus

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.

START IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 6: "Illumination Station Banner"
 - Item 7: "Illumination Station Banner Add-ons"
- Glow sticks in 2 colors (8 of each color)
- Fine-point permanent marker
 - Write the letters of the word *perfect* on separate glow sticks of one color. Add an exclamation mark to the extra glow stick. Write the letters of the word *ordinary* on separate glow sticks of the other color. Hide glow sticks in your space. Dim the lights.
 - Pro tip: Use a string or two of Christmas lights in your room decor so you can turn off the overhead light without total darkness.

 **LEADER NOTE**

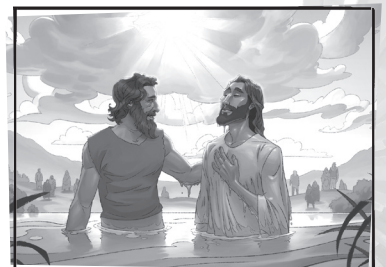
See page 6 for safety tips and practical considerations when dimming the lights.

LEARN IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 17: "Stick Puppets"
- Wooden craft sticks
- Glue or tape
- Flashlights
- Blue tablecloth
 - Before the session, cut out the stick puppets and attach each one to a wooden craft stick.
 - Place the blue tablecloth at the front of your teaching area like a river.

LEADER TIP

If you think kids will find the puppets distracting, tell the story first and then distribute puppets and flashlights to help you review the story by retelling it briefly.



Learn It continued
on next page >>

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.

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


HELPFUL INFO

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.

Why are some parts bold? These stories have been designed to help you be flexible! For younger kids or a limited amount of time, tell only the part in bold. If you have older kids and plenty of time, tell the entire story.

6. Ask: "Why was John confused when Jesus wanted to be baptized?" (*John was baptizing people who wanted to stop sinning and receive God's forgiveness. Jesus had never sinned!*)
7. Ask: "What reason did Jesus give as to why John should baptize Him?" (*Because God said this was right.*)
8. Explain that this was a special moment, because when John baptized Jesus, God the Father spoke and declared that Jesus is His Son.
9. Ask: "What else did God say about Jesus?" (*"I love Him, and I'm very pleased with Him."*)
10.  Say: "Nobody like Jesus had ever existed before, and no one like Him has existed since. He is the only perfect man who ever lived. He was both God and man. He lived the kind of life that none of the rest of us can. He lived in perfect obedience to God. The fact that Jesus lived a perfect life is the reason He could restore the relationship between God and people that was broken by sin. Jesus died to take the punishment we deserve for our sins. We'll hear more about that as we learn more about who Jesus is at VBS."

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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

KNOW IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 8: "Theme Verse Poster"
- Tap light

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Allow a kid with slower processing time to turn the tap light on and off.



Know It (8 minutes)

1. Display the "Theme Verse Poster" (item 8). Read the verse aloud and guide kids to repeat the verse with you.
2. Place the tap light in front of you and explain that when you tap the light to turn it on, kids should begin saying the theme verse as quickly as they can.
3. As soon as you tap the light to turn it off, they need to immediately become silent.
4. Anyone still talking when the light goes off will sit out.
5. As you continue to play, go faster and faster to make it more difficult to stop. Recruit kids who are "out" to help you watch for the kids who are still talking when the light goes off.
6. If you have a competitive group, play until someone wins.



Live It (6 minutes)

1. Give the kids their activity books, Bibles, and pencils, and ask them to turn to pages 4 and 5.
2. Ask a volunteer to quickly review today's story.
3. Help the kids find the Bible verses on page 5 and unscramble the words that describe Jesus. If kids are struggling remind them that the letters should be put in order from the darkest color to the lightest.
4. Challenge the kids to do the "Brighter Idea" activity. If time allows, let them share the words they came up with to describe Jesus.

End It (2 minutes)

1. Use the banner flashlight to show the kids today's icon (items 6 and 7).
2. Ask a volunteer to explain what the waves of water on the icon have to do with today's story.
3. Give each kid a Day 2 tag for her Memory Maker bag.
4. Ask the spotlight question: "Was Jesus just an ordinary man?"
5. Use the Day 2 banner add-on to help the kids shout a shortened version of the answer: "Jesus is God's perfect Son!"
6. Ask (but don't pressure) a volunteer to pray that God will help kids learn more about who Jesus is.

LIVE IT PREP

- VBS 2026 Kids Activity Books
- Bibles
- Pencils

SPECIAL NEEDS

ADAPTATION

Write the letters of each word from page 5 in the activity book on blank foam dice or interlocking blocks with masking tape. Write each letter of a word with a different marker, using different shades of the same color, going dark to light as pictured in the activity book. Use a different color for each word so kids can easily sort them.

END IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 6: "Illumination Station Banner"
 - Item 7: "Illumination Station Banner Add-ons"
- Banner flashlight from Day 1 (item 7)
- VBS 2026 Memory Makers

The Heavens Opened


(Application Activity #1—10 minutes)

- Blue paper
 - School glue
 - Salt
 - Yellow watercolor paint
 - Plastic plates
 - Paintbrushes
 - Markers
 - Cups of water
 - Before the session, use glue to make several 3½-inch diagonal lines on each piece of blue paper (one piece of paper per kid plus one extra), like shafts of light coming from the sky. Make all of the lines start in one corner and move from there. Generously sprinkle salt over the glue and shake off the excess. Allow the glue to dry.
 - Once the glue is dry, test the paint with the glue/salt lines on your extra sheet of paper according to the instructions below to see if you need to add more water to the paint. Extra water will help the paint travel further without stopping.
1. Review today's Bible story. Ask a volunteer to describe what happened in the moment when John baptized Jesus. (*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. I love Him and am very pleased with Him."*)
 2. Explain that this moment was important because God Himself was declaring that Jesus is His Son.
 3. Give the kids the prepared blue paper and a paintbrush.
 4. Set out plates with yellow watercolor paint on them.
 5. Show the kids how to get their brushes wet, get watercolor paint on their brushes, dip them once more in the water, and then touch the brush to the top of a shaft of "light" on their papers and hold them there.
 6. The paint will travel down the glue and salt line, like a beam of light.
 7. Give the kids markers and lead them to write on their papers: *This is my Son. I love Him.*
 8. Encourage the kids to use their salt paintings to retell today's story to someone at home.



Flashlight Stomp

(Application Activity #2—10 minutes)

- Pack items
 - Item 1: "Day 1 Bible Story Picture"
 - Item 2: "Day 2 Bible Story Picture"
 - 4–6 flashlights
1. Group the kids into two teams.
 2. Use the review questions on the back of the two Bible Story Pictures (items 1–2) to review the first two Bible stories.
 3. Give the teams three points for each correct answer.
 4. Every two questions, choose two to three players from each team to play flashlight stomp.
 5.  Give each of the players a flashlight and dim the lights.
 6. Ask them to stand in a circle with their flashlights pointing to the ground.
 7. The goal is to stomp within the beam of the other players' lights on the ground while trying to protect your own light. Once your light is stomped, you turn off your light and exit the circle.
 8. The team who has the final player or players in the circle wins five bonus points.
 9. Return lights to normal.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

For a child with limited dexterity in his hands, provide a headlamp. Children with limited mobility may place a hand or the end of a pool noodle in the beam of a flashlight, rather than stomping.



LEADER NOTE

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



Spotlight on John the Baptist

(Bible Skills Activity—10 minutes)


- Leader pack
 - Item 18: “Spotlight on John the Baptist”
 - Bibles
 - Pencils
 - Crayons
 - Before the session, make enough copies of “Spotlight on John the Baptist” (item 18) for each child to have one.
1. Give each of the kids a Bible, a pencil, crayons, and a copy of “Spotlight on John the Baptist” (item 18).
 2. Give the kids an option to work alone or with a partner.
 3. Say: “Let’s shine a spotlight on who John the Baptist was. Use your Bible to look up the verses and find facts about John.”
 4. Remind the kids that John was a real, historical person.
 5. If your group is unfamiliar with how to use their Bibles, spend some time showing them how to use the table of contents to find the books, and explain how chapters and verses work. Consider doing the activity together as a large group.
 6. When kids have filled in the blanks, encourage them to use crayons to make the page bright and colorful.

ANSWERS

- An *angel* told John’s dad, Zechariah, that John would be born.
- John wore a *camel-hair garment and a leather belt*.
- John ate *locusts and wild honey*.
- What did God say about Jesus when John baptized Him? *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.*
- John lived in the *wilderness*.
- What was John’s message? *Repent.*
- John used water to *baptize*.
- What is “repentance”? *To turn away from sin and toward God.*

River Rock Mix-up

(Bonus Verse Activity—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 10: “Day 2 Bonus Verse Poster”
 - River rocks (16 per team if you are using the CSB translation or 19 if you are using KJV)
 - Highlighters (yellow, green, or orange)
 - Black light flashlights (2)
 - Display the “Day 2 Bonus Verse Poster” (item 10).
1. Direct kids’ attention to the bonus verse poster.
 2. Say: “The words that God the Father said at the river when the heavens opened highlighted who Jesus is. Who is He?” (*the Messiah, God’s promised Son, God’s perfect Son who came to be the Savior of the world*)
 3. Ask the kids to get back together with their groups from Start It.
 4. Give each team a set of river rocks and a highlighter.
 5. Ask kids to write one word of the verse on each rock. Ask if they remember the name of the river where Jesus visited John. (*Jordan River*) Explain that this game is played with what are called river rocks because they are smooth like the rocks found at the bottom of rivers.
 6.  Dim the lights and challenge kids to mix up the rocks and then place them in the right order again, using the black light.
 7. For an extra challenge, guide teams to place both sets in the center of the playing area facedown and mix them up, and then draw 3 rocks per team. Teams may then play a version of “Go Fish” where they attempt to complete their own set of verse words before the other team. Kids should say “Mark 1:11” when telling another player to draw.
 8. Return lights to normal.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

For a child who struggles with reading, preprint a word and tell him what it says so he is prepared to put it in the correct place. For a child who needs a sensory item, write words on the back of textured silicone fidget stones. A child may not wish to place her rock but she can repeat the word when it is her turn.



LEADER NOTE

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

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 Verse

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)*

Today’s Point

Jesus is the powerful Son of God.

Bible Story

Jesus Performed Miracles (Matthew 15:29-39)



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. 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.

BONUS VERSE

Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." *Matthew 28:18*

Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. *Matthew 28:18 (KJV)*

LEADER PACK ITEMS USED TODAY:

3, 6–8, 11, 19–24

Notes



START IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 6: “Illumination Station Banner”
 - Item 7: “Illumination Station Banner Add-ons”
 - Item 19: “ULX Illustration”

LEARN IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 20: “Multitude”
 - Item 21: “Light Bulb and Story Pictures”
- Bible
- Gallon-size ziplock bag
- Black cardstock
- Black paper
- Scissors
- Black permanent marker
- Crayons or markers
 - Before the session, cut out the light bulb from “Light Bulb and Story Pictures” (item 21), and place the rest of the page, containing the smaller pictures, inside the ziplock bag. Use a permanent marker to trace them onto the outside of the bag. Move the paper around to spread out the pictures. Remove the page with the pictures on it and place black paper inside the bag. Color the light bulb yellow and attach it to a strip cut from the black cardstock. As you tell the story, hold the black “handle” on the light bulb and stick it inside the bag, on top of the black paper. Reveal each picture as you tell the story.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Use a feelings chart to help kids answer the questions in step 3.

HELPFUL INFO

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.

Why are some parts bold? These stories have been designed to help you be flexible! For younger kids or a limited amount of time, tell only the part in bold. If you have older kids and plenty of time, tell the entire story.

**Start It** (3 minutes)

1. Welcome the kids back to Illumination Station. Talk about how your group has learned that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.
2. Explain that kids have learned that Jesus is not like an ordinary man because He is perfect. Mention that today they will get a glimpse of His power.
3. Say: “Did you know that Jesus existed before the world was created? He has always existed. He’s eternal. The Bible teaches us that everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him. Imagine that! Think of how the One who created the sun says that He is the Light of the world!”
4. Say: “But there’s more! Scientists have discovered that there are objects in the universe that shine millions of times brighter than the sun. In fact scientists estimate the brightest one they’ve found is 500 trillion times brighter than the sun! Who do you think made those?”
5. Show kids the “ULX Illustration” (item 19).
6. Explain that when Jesus says that He’s the Light of the world, we need to think about what He’s saying. His power is impossible to measure. He made parts of the universe we haven’t even started to discover yet. And He loves us!
7. Say: “Today’s spotlight question is: Was Jesus just a teacher? We’re going to see in today’s story that He is much more than that.”
8. Attach the Day 3 banner add-on (item 7) and read it together.

Learn It (12 minutes)

1. Ask: “When you’re really hungry, what is your favorite snack?”
2. Ask the kids to picture a scene where thousands and thousands of people were out at the edge of the sea. They’d been there for three days with Jesus and they were hungry.
3. Ask: “How do you think they would feel? How do you feel when you haven’t eaten for a while?” Show the kids “Multitude” (item 20).
4. Explain that if every face on the poster represented 7 people, there would be 4,000 people there. But even more people were there the day Jesus was teaching! The Bible says there were 4,000 men, plus women and children.
5. Ask the kids to listen for examples of Jesus’ power in the story.
6. Open your Bible and tell the story, pausing to use the light bulb to reveal the story pictures on your ziplock bag. Use the text below as a guide.

Jesus Performed Miracles

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 (reveal the 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! (Reveal the bandage.)

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.”

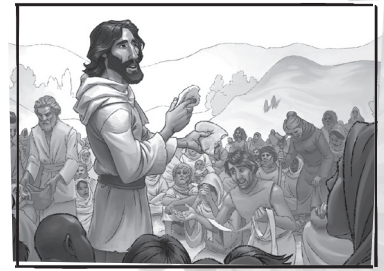
The disciples said, “There’s nothing here. Where could we get enough food to feed so many people?” *(Reveal the question mark.)*

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 *(reveal the bread and fish)* 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! *(Reveal the basket.)* 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.



Matthew 15:29-39

7. Reveal the question mark and ask: “How did Jesus show His power in this story?” *(He fed all of those people with just a little bit of food, and He healed people who were sick.)*
8. Tell the kids that both of these things are called miracles, and Jesus did many miracles during His time on earth. Ask if anyone knows of other miracles that Jesus did. *(examples: feeding 5,000 people on a different day, turning water into wine at a wedding, healing the man who was lowered through the roof, raising Lazarus from the dead)*

Know It (6 minutes)

1. Group the kids into teams of 4–5 and give each team a bag.
2. Say: “Jesus said He is the Light of the world. Today we’re going to build Bible verse suns to remind us that Jesus is the light!”
3. Challenge the teams to place the clothespins around the outside of the yellow circle in the correct order, making a sun that spells out the theme verse.
4. For an extra challenge, cover the “Theme Verse Poster” (item 8) and let kids attempt to put the clothespins in order from memory.
5. If you have a competitive group, let kids race to see who can complete the sun first.

KNOW IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 8: “Theme Verse Poster”
- Yellow poster board
- Scissors
- Wooden clothespins
- Fine-point permanent marker
- Gallon-size ziplock bags
 - Before the session, cut large circles from yellow paper. Depending on the size of your group, cut enough for each team of 4–5 to have one. Make sets of wooden clothespins with the Bible verse written on them, one word per clothespin, one set per team. Place the sets of clothespins in ziplock bags with a yellow circle in each.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Add numbers to the backs of clothespins to allow a child to self-check as they put words in order.

LIVE IT PREP

- VBS 2026 Kids Activity Books
- Bibles
- Pencils
- Paper clips

SPECIAL NEEDS

ADAPTATION

Create a larger version of the “A Place in the Sun” spinner on the back of an inverted paper plate. Add a brad and a large paperclip or a cardstock arrow that will spin. This will help kids who have trouble holding the pencil and flicking the paper clip.

END IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 6: “Illumination Station Banner”
 - Item 7: “Illumination Station Banner Add-ons”
- VBS 2026 Memory Makers
- Banner flashlight from Day 1 (item 7)



Live It (7 minutes)

1. Give the kids their activity books, Bibles, pencils, and one paper clip each.
2. Guide kids to open to pages 6–7.
3. Recruit a volunteer to give a quick recap of the Bible story.
4. Say: “Today we heard about how Jesus did miracles. Let’s use our Bibles to learn about some other miracles Jesus did.”
5. Guide kids to place their books flat on the table or floor. Show the kids how to put their pencil points through paper clips. Put the pencil point in the center of the sun on page 7, inside the paper clip to make a spinner. Flick the paper clip with your free hand to make it spin.
6. Lead the kids to look up the verses as their spinners land on them. Assist kids who are new to Bible skills. Consider looking up the verses together as a group.

End It (2 minutes)

1. Use the banner flashlight to show the kids the bread and fish icon.
2. Ask them to explain what the icon has to do with today’s story.
3. Give each of the kids a Day 3 tag for his Memory Maker bag.
4. Ask the spotlight question: “Was Jesus just a teacher?”
5. Use the Day 3 banner add-on to help the kids shout, “Jesus is the powerful Son of God!”
6. Ask the kids to think of some situation in their lives that could use some of Jesus’ power right now. Give them ten seconds to pray silently. Then pray aloud and ask God to show His power in each situation. Thank Him that even if He does not choose to change the circumstances, He is with kids and will provide them His comfort and strength in each situation.



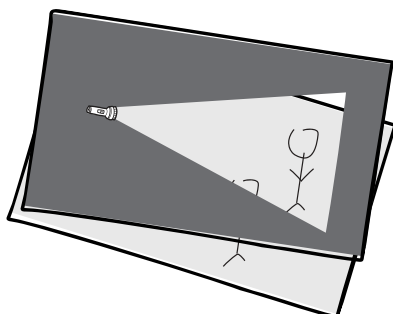
Floodlight Storyboard

(Application Activity #1—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 22: “Floodlights”
 - Black cardstock
 - Yellow cardstock
 - Pencils and markers
 - Brads
 - Kid-safe scissors
 - Glue
 - Poster board
 - Before the session, make copies of “Floodlights” on white paper. Cut them out. Use poster board to make several patterns for cutting out the shaft of light on the black paper.
1. Say: “Every story has a beginning and an end. What were the beginning and end of today’s Bible story?”
 2. Give each of the kids a piece of black and a piece of yellow paper, a pencil, scissors, a paper flashlight, a brad, and glue. Distribute patterns of the shaft of light for kids to share.
 3. Show kids how to trace the shaft of light in the middle of the black paper then cut it out, keeping the outside of the paper intact. Kids should place the paper with the piece cut out of it on top of the yellow paper.
 4. Guide kids to glue the flashlight to the black paper, at the smallest part of the light shaft.
 5. Lead them to secure the two papers with the brad right under the flashlight. Demonstrate how to move the light shaft.
 6. Direct kids to draw two scenes on different parts of the yellow paper that will show when the light shaft is in different positions: the beginning and end of today’s story.
 7. Encourage them to share the story with someone who wasn’t at VBS today.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Sketch 2 simple scenes and help kids put them in order using the words “First” and “Last.”



Walk in the Light

(Application Activity #2—10 minutes)

- Pack item
 - Item 3: “Day 3 Bible Story Picture”
 - Fish-shaped crackers
 - Mini round crackers
 - Sandwich bags
 - Flashlights (2)
 - Allergy Alert
 - Before the session, hide sandwich bags of fish-shaped crackers and mini round crackers around the room, one for each child.
 - Post an allergy alert mentioning what kids will be tasting.
1. Say: “In today’s story, Jesus proved that He is the Light of the world. He performed miracles that showed His power. He can only do things like this because He is God’s Son.”
 2. Talk about how difficult it is to know where you’re going in the dark. Explain that living life without Jesus is like living in the dark. Humans tend to make sinful choices and we have a hard time knowing what is the right thing to do. Jesus came to take the punishment for our sins and offer us forgiveness. When we have a relationship with Him, He shows us the right way to live and helps us want to do what is right. The Bible calls this walking in the light because we are following Jesus—the Light of the world.
 3. Group the kids into two teams and give the first person in each line a flashlight.
 4. Dim the lights and let the two kids search the room for a snack. As soon as one of them finds a bag of crackers, they should grab it and take the flashlight back to the next person in line.
 5. For a fun competition, let the teams race to see who can find all of their snacks first.
 6. When both teams find all the snacks, return the lights to normal and let kids sit down and eat.
 7. Use the review questions on the back of the “Day 3 Bible Story Picture” (item 3) to discuss today’s story.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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

LEADER NOTE

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

Jesus Silhouettes

(Bible Skills Activity—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 23: “Jesus Silhouettes”
 - Kid-safe scissors
 - Hole punch
 - Brads
 - Pencils
 - Flashlight
 - Bibles
 - Paper
 - Dry erase or poster board
 - Before the session, make copies of “Jesus Silhouettes” (item 23) on regular white copy paper, one for each child plus 1 extra. Cut apart one set of panels and stack them in number order, with 1 on the bottom. Turn them upside down and tap the top against a table so they are lined up from the top. Punch a hole and put them together with a brad in the top left corner. Write the following references on a dry erase or poster board: Matthew 15:30-31; Matthew 15:36-37; John 8:12.
1. Give the kids Bibles, pencils, and a copy of “Jesus Silhouettes” (item 23).
 2. Shine a flashlight behind the stack of silhouettes in your sample and show the kids how it works. Words and shapes should shine through from the back panel to add to each panel in front of it. Have them read each one as you twist the previous one out of the way.
 3. Say: “Today’s Bible story is in the book of Matthew, which is the very first book in the New Testament.”
 4. Talk about how in today’s story we saw Jesus healing people and providing food for people. Help the kids look up Matthew 15:30-31 and 36-37.
 5. After reading the first set of verses, ask: “Which pictures go with Matthew 15:30-31?” (*Jesus heals.*) Ask the kids to write the reference on the back of the “heals” panel. Repeat with Matthew 15:36-37.
 6. Say: “Our theme verse this week is found in the book of John. Let’s find it in our Bibles.”
 7. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud from his Bible and lead the kids to write *John 8:12* on the back of the “light” panel.
 8. Give the kids scissors and guide them to cut apart the panels and stack them in number order with picture 1 at the back. Guide them to line the tops of cards up.
 9. Let them punch holes as marked in the top left corner.
 10. Give them brads to hold their panels together.
 11. Let kids take turns trying out their silhouettes with a flashlight. Encourage them to use their silhouettes to tell someone what they’re learning about Jesus at VBS.

The Stars Show His Power

(Bonus Verse Activity—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 11: Day 3 Bonus Verse Poster
 - Item 24: “Big Dipper”
 - White paper cupcake liners
 - Flashlights
 - Black cardstock
 - Scissors
 - Tape
 - Pencils
 - Wood skewers or large golf tees
 - Foam core board
 - Before the session, measure the size of the cupcake liner bottoms and cut circles from the black cardstock to match the size. Place foam board on the floor.
 - Display item 11.
1. Read pack item 11 together.
 2. Say: “It’s amazing to think that Jesus has authority over the heavens and the earth. His power extends to the stars in the sky!”
 3. Display the “Big Dipper” (item 24).
 4. Explain that our minds kind of draw lines between the stars to show us the shape, like a dot-to-dot.
 5. Give the kids a small round piece of black cardstock and a pencil.
 6. Ask them to pretend that they are scientists who have discovered new constellations. Guide them to choose a shape for their constellations. Suggest that it be something recognizable, like a ladder or a heart.
 7. Let each kid draw his constellation on the cardstock with dots for the stars.
 8. Give each kid a wood skewer and ask her to lay her cardstock on top of the foam board to poke holes through the paper where the stars go.
 9. Help the kids tape the circles to the bottom of cupcake liners.
 10. Let them take turns placing their cupcake liners over the end of a flashlight and letting the other kids guess the shape that’s projected on the wall.
 11. Ask the kids to repeat the bonus verse together after viewing each constellation.

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 Verse

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)*

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.

Notes

BONUS VERSE

When the centurion ... saw the way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" *Mark 15:39*

When the centurion ... saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. *Mark 15:39 (KJV)*

LEADER PACK ITEMS USED TODAY:


4, 6–8, 12, 14

FOOTNOTES


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.



LOW
PREP**Start It** (3 minutes)

1.  As kids enter the room, suggest that kids pretend you're in a movie theater. Welcome kids to the theater and guide them to sit quickly because the movie is about to begin.
2. Once everyone is seated, welcome them back to Illumination Station. Talk about how great it is to go to the movies, about how exciting it is when the lights go down and that bright beam of light shines on the screen.
3. Say: "All movies have a beginning, a middle, and an end, right? What signals to us that the end of the movie is here?" (*The credits start rolling.*)
4. Say: "But sometimes, if you stay in the theater through all the credits, you get a surprise: there's a post-credits scene! Today's story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. But that end may not be where you think it is!"
5. Explain that a lot of people believed that Jesus' story was over when He died on a cross, but it wasn't! There was a post-credits scene!
6. Say: "Today's spotlight question is: Was Jesus just someone who lived a long time ago? The answer is: Jesus lived, died, and rose again to be our Savior, now and forever."

LOW
PREP**Learn It** (11 minutes)

1.  Dim the lights (or keep them dimmed from Start It). If you have a room with no windows, bring in some Christmas lights so it won't be completely dark. Hold a flashlight.
2. Say: "Let's pretend we're in a movie theater—only this story is about real people who really lived on the earth. When we learn about Jesus' life, we're learning a history of things that really happened. Everyone got your popcorn?"
3. Ask the kids to show you their popcorn eating-style when they go to the movies.
4. Open your Bible and tell the story in your own words. Use the text below as a guide. Option: Stop at Jesus' burial and use the text after the story to debrief up until that point before continuing.

Jesus Died and Rose to Life

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.**

START IT PREP

- No supplies needed

 **LEADER NOTE**

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

LEARN IT PREP

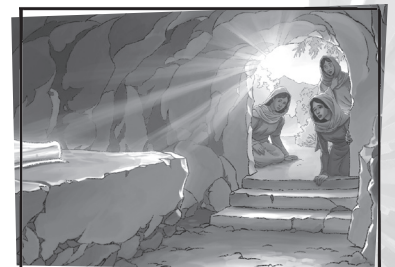
- Leader pack
 - Item 4: "Day 4 Bible Story Picture"
 - Item 6: "Illumination Station Banner"
 - Item 7: "Illumination Station Banner Add-ons"
- Bible

HELPFUL INFO

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.

Why are some parts bold? These stories have been designed to help you be flexible! For younger kids or a limited amount of time, tell only the part in bold. If you have older kids and plenty of time, tell the entire story.



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.

Mark 14:43–16:7

OPTION


At Jesus' burial, stop telling the story.

Say: "What if the story ended right here? Things are really dark and sad. Jesus' friends and family and even His enemies thought this was the end. But the best thing that's ever happened was about to happen! The Light of the world was coming back! Let's hear the rest of the story!"

Finish the story.

5. Return lights to normal. Say: "How about that post-credits scene? Jesus was alive, and He's alive now, ruling on His throne in heaven."
6. Attach the Day 4 "Illumination Station Banner Add-on" (item 7).
7. Say: "Jesus wasn't just a man who lived a long time ago! He is the proven Son of God because He lived, died, and rose to life again!"

Know It (8 minutes)

1. Display the theme verse and read it together.
2. Shroud the poster in darkness (cover it with black paper) and challenge the kids to say it from memory.
3. Talk about how much easier it is to say the verse in the light, just like life is easier when we know Jesus the Light. Say: "On Day 1 we heard about a time when Jesus asked who the disciples thought Jesus was. Peter said, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' In today's story, the centurion also understood who Jesus is."
4. Ask: "Who do you think Jesus is?"
5.  Explain that when you begin to understand who He is and why He came, it's like you were walking in the dark and then suddenly someone turned on the light. When you really see who Jesus is and choose to follow Him, it changes the way you live in this world. Say: "Following Jesus means believing He is God's Son, receiving His gift of salvation from sin, and making Him the Lord (the leader) of your life."
6. Let the kids line up and try to step over and crawl through the laser maze. Their goal is to make it through without breaking any streamers. If a kid breaks a streamer, you may ask him to start over, or you may suggest he freeze in place until the next kid comes through and tags him to unfreeze him.
7. Each time someone makes it through the maze, lead the group in saying the verse from memory.


KNOW IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 8: "Theme Verse Poster"
- Red crepe paper streamers
- Black craft paper
- Tape
 - Before the session, set up two parallel rows of chairs with their backs facing each other. Leave several feet between the two rows. Stretch red paper streamers across the space between the two rows and tape the ends, making a pretend laser maze. You'll want your streamers to be in a zig zag pattern, from top to bottom, across the space between the chairs. Option: If you have a hallway close by that is only used by your group, you could create your maze there. For examples of how to set up your maze, search "crepe paper hallway laser maze" on the internet.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Leave spaces where a wheelchair can navigate the maze.

**Live It** (6 minutes)

1. Give the kids their activity books, highlighters, and Bibles.
2. Ask the kids to open their books to pages 10 and 11. Briefly review today's Bible story
3. Let the kids work together in groups of two or three, using their highlighters to draw lines from one event to the next in the order that they happened.
4. Go over the events in order as a group, encouraging the kids to retrace their lines as you go.
5. Lead them to do the "Brighter Idea" activity. Help them find the verses in the book of Mark and decide on some events that aren't included in the puzzle.
6.  Ask: "Could Jesus have saved Himself and not died on the cross? (yes) Why didn't He?" Help kids understand that on the cross, Jesus took the punishment from God that people deserve because of their sins. Say: "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.)


**End It** (2 minutes)

1. Use the banner flashlight to show the cross and tomb icon. Ask kids to explain what the icon has to do with today's story.
2. Give each of the kids a Day 4 tag for her Memory Maker bag.
3. Ask the Spotlight Question: "Was Jesus just someone who lived a long time ago?"
4. Draw attention to the Day 4 "Illumination Station Banner Add-on" and guide kids to answer: "Jesus is the proven Son of God!"
5. Pray for the kids and ask God to help them clearly see who He is. Ask Him to help them know when it is time to respond to the good news of what Jesus came to do for us.

LIVE IT PREP

- VBS 2026 Kids Activity Books
- Highlighters
- Bibles

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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


END IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 6: "Illumination Station Banner"
 - Item 7: "Illumination Station Banner Add-ons"
- VBS 2026 Memory Makers
- Banner flashlight from Day 1 (item 7)


Shine a Light on the Gospel

(Application Activity #1—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 14: “Gospel Presentation Poster”
 - Optional: “Spotlight’s on You!” response cards (available as a free download on lifeway.com/vbs > Resources > Helps)
- Scissors
- Vellum or parchment paper
- Tape
- Flashlight
 - Before the session, cut out the “light” portion of each light bulb and use tape to attach vellum to the back side of the bulbs on the top half of the page. Cut out the marked and discard. Fold the piece in half along the dotted line and secure with tape. As you use the piece to present the gospel, shine a flashlight behind the light bulbs to highlight each of the gospel points. If you’re short on time, simply fold the piece along the center line and use it as a double-sided presentation tool.

1.  Hold the “Gospel Presentation Poster” (item 14) in one hand and a flashlight in the other.
2. Say: “We’re going to shine a light on the gospel. The word *gospel* means “good news.” Even though it’s a sad thing that happened when Jesus died on the cross, it’s the best news that He came to the earth, lived the perfect life that we weren’t able to live ourselves, took the punishment we deserved when He died on the cross, and then rose again, proving that He really is God’s Son.”
3. Lead the kids through the icons, verses, and phrases on the gospel poster, holding the flashlight behind the poster to light up each light bulb as you move through the presentation.
4. Optional: To allow for follow-up, “Spotlight’s on You!” (see above) can be used to gauge kids’ readiness to talk about salvation. Assure kids you will keep their responses confidential.
5. Allow kids to ask questions, and encourage them to speak to you or another adult if they want to know more about becoming a Christian.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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

LEADER TIP

Talking about salvation with a child can be a private conversation, but do not be alone with a child. Always have another adult within eyesight. When possible, involve a child’s parents or guardians in this important conversation!

Jesus Is Alive Suncatchers

(Application Activity #2—10 minutes)

- Waxed paper
- Old bright colored crayons
- Iron (leader use only)
- Small handheld pencil sharpeners
- Cookie cutters (such as moons, stars, suns, light bulbs, and other light sources if possible)
- Kid-safe scissors
- Pens
- Hole punches
- String or twine
- Craft knife (leader use only, optional)
 - Before the session, remove the wrappers from the old crayons.
 - Heat the iron to low heat. Set out of reach of kids or supervise very carefully to make sure no one touches it accidentally.

1. Give each of the kids a pencil sharpener and a sheet of waxed paper. Set crayons within reach.
2. Guide kids to create crayon shavings using their pencil sharpeners, then empty the shavings onto their sheet of wax paper. Instruct kids to cover no more than half of the paper.
3. Suggest kids create a multicolor effect with their shavings or alternate two or three preferred colors in a design.
4. Guide kids to fold their piece of wax paper in half so that the crayon shavings are covered on both sides, like a sandwich.
5. Carefully iron each sandwich on low heat (leaders only).
6. Allow shavings to cool for a few minutes, then instruct kids to peel back one side of the wax paper and enjoy the colors. Distribute cookie cutters for kids to trace shapes on the remaining wax paper side with a pen.
7. Provide scissors and allow kids to cut out the shapes. Guide them to punch a hole in the top of each shape and then thread a string hanger through the hole.
8. Say: “Look at how beautiful your suncatchers turned out! You can use tape or a hook to hang these in your window at home, and every time you see the light coming through your suncatcher, I hope you’ll remember that Jesus is the Light of the world, and He is alive!”

LEADER TIP


If shavings get caught in your pencil sharpeners, use the craft knife to dislodge them. You may wish to break crayons in half partway through the activity so kids can have another blunt end to sharpen.



Neon Gospel Hop

(Bible Skills Activity—10 minutes)

- Neon paper
- Marker (optional: if you are using black lights, use orange, yellow, or green highlighters on regular paper)
- Tape
- Black lights (optional)
 - Before the session, write *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* on pieces of neon paper, one name per piece of paper, and tape them to the floor. Make several sets and lay the pages out randomly in the room.

1. Explain that there are four separate accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in the Bible.
2. Say: "These four different books are called the Gospels because they tell the good news about Jesus. They are the first four books in the New Testament. Their order is Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."
3. Ask the kids to repeat the books in order.
4. Challenge kids to start at any point in the room and leap between the four Gospels in order as many times as they can, reciting the books aloud as they jump.
5.  For a black light option, turn on black lights around the room and dim the overhead lights so that the pages and/or words glow. Return lights to normal when the activity is done.

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Assign a Gospel to each corner of the playing area with paper signs. Place children in different corners. Allow one child to call out "Gospel Hop" and let all kids move in order to the next Gospel from the one they are standing near.



LEADER NOTE

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




(Glow) Stick with Jesus


(Bonus Verse Activity—10 minutes)

PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 12: "Day 4 Bonus Verse Poster"
- Bible
- Glow stick bracelets (1 per kid)
- Half-circle of floral foam
- Marker
 - Before the session, activate the glow sticks. Mark the ends 5–6 of the glow sticks with black marker and stick all of the glow sticks into a half-circle of foam, making sure any marked ends are hidden.
 - Display the "Day 4 Bonus Verse Poster"(item 23).

1. Ask the kids to remember who the Roman army officer was.
2. Remind kids that on the day Jesus died, a Roman army officer (called a centurion) seemed to know that Jesus's death was different from anything he had ever seen. Read Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:33-34 to kids. Point out that the sky went dark in the middle of the day and Jesus asked God the Father to forgive the people who were killing Him. Mention that it may have been things like this that showed the soldier Jesus was not like other people. This soldier believed that Jesus is the Son of God.
3. Let the kids take turns pulling a glow stick out of the foam.
4. If it's marked, ask the child to lead everyone in some sort of action while saying the verse together. (Examples: marching, high-fiving, hopping up and down, waving arms over heads, or jumping jacks)
5.  Let the kids wear the glow sticks as bracelets to remind them that Jesus is the Light of the world and that when He died and rose to life again, He proved that He is the Son of God who came to be our Savior.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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

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 Verse

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)*

Today's Point

Jesus is God's plan for forgiveness.

Bible Story

Peter Preached About Jesus (Acts 2)



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. 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.

Notes

BONUS VERSE

Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2:38 (KJV)

LEADER PACK ITEMS USED TODAY:


5–8, 13–14, 25–28



START IT PREP

- No supplies needed

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Use a feelings chart to talk to kids about the feelings involved in doing something wrong and receiving forgiveness.

LEARN IT PREP


- Leader pack
 - Item 5: “Day 5 Bible Story Picture”
 - Item 6: “Illumination Station Banner”
 - Item 7: “Illumination Station Banner Add-ons”
 - Item 14: “Gospel Presentation Poster”
 - Item 25: “Peter’s Sermon”
- Flashlight

LEADER TIP

If you think kids will find the acting exercise distracting, tell the story first and then allow a volunteer to deliver “Peter’s Sermon” as part of your review.



Start It (4 minutes)

1. Say: “Welcome to our final day at Illumination Station. Today we’re going to think about forgiveness. How do you feel when you’ve done something wrong and someone forgives you?” (*Answers will vary. It makes you feel relieved and cared for.*)
2.  Say: “It’s nice when people forgive us for doing something wrong, but we need God’s forgiveness. Only God’s forgiveness can make it as if we have never sinned. But first we have to admit that we’re sinners. We have to repent.”
3. Explain that repenting is changing directions, like doing a U-turn. It’s like walking one way and then suddenly turning around and going the opposite way. Ask for volunteers to demonstrate what it looks like to do a U-turn.
4. Lead everyone to stand up and start walking around the room. When you say “U-turn,” they should all turn around and head in the other direction. Repeat several times, increasing the frequency with which you say it (every 8 steps, then every 6, then every 4, and so forth) until kids are turning around comically fast. You may allow competitive kids to race this way as time and space allow. Guide kids to sit again.
5. Say: “Repenting means we were making choices that moved us far away from God, but then we turned around and went the opposite way. We moved toward Him instead.”
6. Talk about how this was the message that John the Baptist preached in the wilderness. He was telling the people that they were used to going their own way in sin, doing things they knew they shouldn’t, but John called them to turn around and follow Jesus instead.
7. Say: “Repenting doesn’t mean that we will be perfect now. It means that we are turning away from the things we know are wrong, running to Jesus, admitting that we have sinned and we need Him to help us live a different kind of life.”
8. Say: “Today’s spotlight question is: Why do I need to respond to Jesus? The answer is: Jesus is the only way to receive God’s forgiveness.”



Learn It (11 minutes)

1. Attach the Day 5 banner add-on (item 7) to the “Illumination Station Banner” (item 6). Read it together.
2. Say: “After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to hundreds of people and spent time with His disciples, teaching them. Then He went back to heaven, instructing His followers to tell everyone about Him. Not long after that, the Holy Spirit arrived! The Holy Spirit made it possible for Jesus’ followers to speak in languages that they had never learned so that they could tell people from all over the world who Jesus is.”
3. Explain that when this happened, it was so out of the ordinary that people were confused. Peter, one of Jesus’ closest friends, stood up to speak to the crowd.
4. Choose a volunteer to play the role of Peter and give him a copy of “Peter’s Sermon” (item 25). When the time comes for Peter to speak, ask Peter to stand and passionately deliver his sermon. Use a flashlight to put the spotlight on him.

Peter Preached about Jesus

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, *(cue your volunteer)* “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.” *(Guide your volunteer to pause.)*

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

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.” *(Continue telling the story.)* 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.




HELPFUL INFO


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.

Why are some parts bold? These stories have been designed to help you be flexible! For younger kids or a limited amount of time, tell only the part in bold. If you have older kids and plenty of time, tell the entire story.

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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

Acts 2

5. Say: “Our spotlight question is: ‘Why do I need to respond to Jesus?’ Why do you think those 3,000 people responded to Peter when they heard his sermon?” *(Peter taught them what all of these events that had happened meant: We are separated from God because of our sin. Jesus is the Messiah, and He came to take the punishment we deserve so that we won’t be separated from God anymore. The people needed to repent and believe to be saved. The people who repented knew they had sinned, believed what Peter said, and knew that Jesus is the only way to receive God’s forgiveness.)*
6.  Say: “The people believed Peter. They knew they needed Jesus. The question you need to ask yourself is whether you believe that Jesus is who He said He is. And do you believe that you need to receive forgiveness?”
7. Briefly review the points on the “Gospel Presentation Poster” (item 14.)
8. Encourage the kids to talk to an adult if they have questions about how to respond to Jesus.

KNOW IT PREP

- Leader pack
 - Item 8: “Theme Verse Poster”
- Paper
- Marker
- Plastic bowl
- Chairs (1 per kid)
 - Before the session, write questions related to light on slips of paper. Place the slips of paper in a bowl. Suggestions:
Who likes sunlight better than moonlight? Whose family puts up Christmas lights in November? Who has looked at the stars through a telescope? Who likes to be in the spotlight? Who forgets to turn off lights when they leave the room? Who likes sunny days better than rainy days?

SPECIAL NEEDS ADAPTATION

Allow a child who has difficulty moving quickly to read the questions while others move.


LIVE IT PREP

- VBS 2026 Kids Activity Books
- Red cellophane
- Bibles

END IT PREP

- VBS 2026 Memory Makers
- Banner flashlight from Day 1

SHARING THE GOSPEL

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

LEADER TIP

Talking about salvation with a child can be a private conversation, but do not be alone with a child. Always have another adult within eyesight. Whenever possible, involve parents in these important conversations as well!



Know It (8 minutes)

1. Display the “VBS Theme Verse Poster” (item 8).
2. Ask the kids to sit in a circle with just enough chairs while you stand in the middle.
3. Explain that the person in the middle of the circle will ask a question. If the question describes anyone in the circle, he must get up and switch places with someone else who gets up. The catch is that the person in the middle will also be trying to get a seat.
4. Whoever doesn’t make it to a seat in time will choose the next slip of paper and read it aloud.
5. Each time kids switch seats, ask them all to stand and say the verse together.
6. Kick off the game by being the first one to ask a question.




Live It (5 minutes)

1. Give the kids their activity books and Bibles and ask them to open to page 12.
2. Choose a volunteer to quickly review today’s story.
3. Give each of the kids a piece of red cellophane to hold over page 13, revealing the hidden message.
4. Help the kids look up the verses in the “Brighter Idea” activity.
5. Ask them which verse doesn’t prove the hidden message. (*Acts 1:1*)



End It (2 minutes)

1. Use the banner flashlight to show the exclamation mark inside a speech bubble. Ask kids to explain what the icon has to do with today’s story. Remind them that Peter preached a very important message to the people.
2. Give each kid a Day 5 tag for his Memory Maker bag.
3. Ask the spotlight question: “Why do I need to respond to Jesus?”
4. Help the kids shout the answer: “Jesus is the only way to receive God’s forgiveness!”
5.  Explain to the kids that they can pray anywhere at any time. They can ask God to forgive them of their sins.
6. Pray and ask God to show the kids their need for forgiveness. Ask Him to show kids when they are ready to respond to Him.



A Light to the Nations

(Application Activity #1—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 26: “Languages Poster”
 - Item 27: “Jesus Bookmarks”
 - Bible
 - Pencils
 - Markers
 - Crayons
 - Kid-safe scissors
 - White cardstock
 - Before the session, print “Jesus Bookmarks” (item 27) on cardstock. Cut them apart so that the kids can do the detailed cutting.
1. Say: “It’s amazing to think about today’s story! So many people were walking around not knowing the truth about Jesus when suddenly they heard someone saying Jesus’ name in their own languages! Peter and the other followers of Jesus were preaching in languages they had never learned. It was a miracle!”
 2. Explain that because of a festival, people from lots of different places with different languages were in the city that day.
 3. Open your Bible to Isaiah 42:6. Explain that hundreds of years before Jesus came, a prophet named Isaiah told the people God’s words about the Messiah. He said that the Messiah would be a light to the nations. Jesus is the Light of the world!
 4. Display the “Languages Poster” (item 26).
 5. Say: “Here are some different ways to write and say *Jesus* in other languages.”
 6. Read through the list together using the pronunciations on the poster.
 7. Give the kids a “Jesus Bookmark” (item 27).
 8. Guide them to use a pencil to copy one of the forms of *Jesus* from the poster onto their bookmark. Then guide them to trace over it with a black marker. Guide them to write *Jesus* in English as well to show the translation.
 9. Let the kids color and cut out their bookmarks.

In the Light

(Application Activity #2—10 minutes)

- Battery-operated candles (2)
1. Say: “When Peter stood up to preach, he put out a call for action. He asked the people to respond to Jesus by repenting and believing that He is who He said He is. What did the people do?” (3,000 of them believed and got baptized.)
 2. Group the kids into two teams.
 3. Ask them to stand in single file lines, shoulder to shoulder.
 4. Give the player at the front of each line a battery-operated candle.
 5. Lead the teams to pass the candles all the way down the line and back, each child telling the next, “Repent and believe!”
 6. The first team to get its candle and message all the way down the line and back wins.
 7. On the next round, change the message to “Jesus is the Light!”
 8. Play additional rounds with the daily points from the various VBS days as time allows.
 - Day 1: Jesus is God’s promised Son.
 - Day 2: Jesus is God’s perfect Son
 - Day 3: Jesus is the powerful Son of God.
 - Day 4: Jesus is the proven Son of God.
 - Day 5: Jesus is God’s plan for forgiveness.



Bible Blazes

(Bible Skills Activity—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 26: “Languages Poster”
 - Item 28: “Bible Blazes”
 - Bibles
 - Tape
 - Display the “Languages Poster” (item 26).
 - Before the session, cut apart the “Bible Blazes” pictures (item 28).
1. Give the kids Bibles.
 2. Say: “In today’s story, the Holy Spirit arrived and made it possible for Peter and others to speak in languages they had never learned. The Bible says that when this happened, flames appeared over their heads. That may seem strange, but God’s presence appeared as fire at other times, too. Let’s look at a few of them!”
 3. Guide the kids to find Exodus 3:2 and let a volunteer read it aloud.
 4. Explain that this was when God called Moses to go to Egypt and help His people.
 5. Show the kids the picture and let one of them tape it to the wall somewhere around the “Languages Poster” (item 26).
 6. Help the kids find Exodus 13:21 and Exodus 19:18, showing them the pictures and explaining the circumstances. *(God led the people through the wilderness in a pillar of fire. When Moses went on the mountain to talk to God, the people could see smoke at the top—God’s presence.)*
 7. Let kids tape the pictures to the wall with the first one.
 8. Finally, help kids find Acts 2:3-4 and show them the picture.
 9. Hang the final picture with the others and say: “It’s amazing that Jesus said He’s the Light of the world, and that because of the Bible we can see that God sometimes showed the people He was near through fire!”



Who’s in the Spotlight

(Bonus Verse Activity—10 minutes)

- Leader pack
 - Item 13: “Day 5 Bonus Verse Poster”
 - Flashlight
1. Display the “Day 5 Bonus Verse Poster” (item 13) and read it together.
 2. Talk about how baptism is a way to show the world that you have received God’s gift of salvation and are following Jesus. Being baptized shines a spotlight on Him!
 3. Review the Day 2 Bible story when John the Baptist baptized Jesus. Talk about how in today’s story Peter told the people that they should be baptized after they repented and turned to Jesus.
 4. Say: “If you haven’t been baptized yet and want to know more about it, let one of your leaders or another adult know!”
 5. Ask the kids to stand in a line facing you. Make sure they can see the Day 5 verse.
 6. Explain that the kids will say the verse together, but each of them will say just one word at a time.
 7. Say: “If I shine the spotlight on you, you’ll say the next word in the verse.”
 8. Randomly choose kids to say each word, going faster and faster as they become more familiar with it.

ILLUMINATION STATION JOHN 8:12

EQUIP YOUR VBS LEADERS WITH THESE TEACHING RESOURCES!



VBS 2026 GRADES 1-2 BIBLE STUDY LEADER PACK

Order one for each class. Includes one *Music for Kids* CD.
005853472 • ISBN 9798384537373 • \$29.75

VBS 2026 GRADES 3-4 BIBLE STUDY LEADER PACK

Order one for each class. Includes one *Music for Kids* CD.
005853473 • ISBN 9798384537380 • \$29.75

VBS 2026 VBX PRETEEN BIBLE STUDY LEADER PACK

Order one for each class. Includes one *Music for Kids* CD.
005853475 • ISBN 9798384537403 • \$29.75

VBS 2026 KIDS ACTIVITY BOOK

Order one for each child.
005853151 • ISBN 9798384535041 • \$3.60

VBS 2026 VBX PRETEEN ACTIVITY BOOK

Order one for each preteen.
005853150 • ISBN 9798384535034 • \$3.60

VBS 2026 MEMORY MAKER

005853571 • ISBN 9798384538141 • \$8.99
(5 sets)



ORDER YOUR KIDS RESOURCES
TODAY AT Lifeway.com!

Prices and availability subject to change.

Lifeway VBS

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

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! Illumination Station VBS will shine a light on the truth of who Jesus really is. 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.

Lifeway® VBS

lifeway.com/vbs