



## BIBLE RESPONSE GUIDE

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# Introduction

Listen up! Dig deep! Jesus had a lot to say. And those who listened discovered a treasure in his words.

At first, Jesus' parables seem simple. Of course we know that the type of soil in which seeds are sown is important for plants to grow, but what does that have to do with us? And if someone asked us for food, we wouldn't be rude and give a stone instead! Or, what if we lost something important to us? Of course we would look high and low and celebrate when it was found.

It turns out, however, that the parables have a greater meaning beyond what we first see. So come along, listen, and dig deeper for the treasures of the kingdom of heaven!

Each Bible Response time includes:

- **Introduction**—Children are welcomed to the Bible Response time and are shown puzzle pieces that will help them better understand the day's parable. More puzzle pieces will be found throughout the Bible Response time so that a complete picture is made at the end.
- **Bible story**—The Bible story will be reviewed. You may read it from the Bible (as happened during the drama) or read a retelling of the parable in *Treasure Map*. A *Treasure Map* activity is part of this time.
- **Bible memory**—The Bible memory passage for VBS is long, so it is divided into sections. At the end of VBS, the entire passage will be said. See pages 3 and 4 for memorization ideas.
- **Closing**—Complete the puzzle picture and end with singing and a closing prayer.

Each day includes an Additional activities section. The activities may be used if there is more time in a session after the daily plan is completed. Consider the age and abilities of the children so that you can choose activities appropriate for the groups.

A book list is offered each day if you would like to read to the children. The suggestions follow the day's theme and help make the ideas come alive.

Each session plan includes the day's Scripture, Bible background, purpose statement, and Bible memory passage. Read over these sections so that you are familiar with the focus of the day. All VBS leader guides include this information so that the activities and discussions will reflect the day's themes.

## Puzzles

A puzzle needs to be created for each day of VBS; find an artist or someone who is not helping with VBS to create the puzzles. See picture templates on pages 26–30. Copy the templates onto stiff paper or purchase blank puzzle sheets at a hobby store. Create puzzle pieces and then cut or pull them apart. You will need some for the Introduction time, and hide others in places where they will be found throughout the Bible Response time. Places to hide the puzzle pieces are offered in the Advance preparation section each day. However, you may also think of additional places to put pieces.

At the end of the Bible Response time, the puzzle will be completed and the picture will become relevant to the parable.

## Music

Music suggestions are found in the *Digging for Treasure* music collection. Songs are suggested for singing before the closing prayer as a way for children to recognize a transition between their activities and talking with God:

- Sing the prayer songs each day so that the children can learn and remember them.

## Treasure Map

*Treasure Map* is the student book that every child will need. It includes retellings of the parables and a variety of activities that connect with the Bible stories and the daily themes. It is used during the Bible story section of the daily plan, as well as with the Additional activities items. Children will take the books home at the end of VBS as one way to remember what they learned.

Plan to have a few extra copies on hand in case you have visitors.

## Bible memory

One Bible memory passage is featured throughout the week, with a focus on a section of the passage each day until the end of VBS, when the entire passage is said together.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. —1 John 4:7-9

► **Show the Bible memory poster or the Bible memory slide show presentation on the download page or Resource CD. Invite children to read the passage with you.**

► **The Bible memory passage is from the *New Revised Standard Version*. You may use a preferred translation.**

Motions provide a fun and easy way for children to learn the Bible memory passage. The following are suggestions:

Beloved, let us love (*make a heart with hands*)  
one another, (*open arms wide*)  
because love is from God; (*point up with both hands*)

everyone who loves (*make a heart with hands*)  
is born of God (*point up with both hands*)  
and knows (*point to head*)  
God. (*point up*)  
Whoever does not love (*form an X with forearms*)  
does not know God, (*form an X with forearms, shake head*)  
for God is love. (*make a heart with hands*)  
God's love (*point up with both hands*)  
was revealed (*cover eyes and then uncover them, like peekaboo*)

among us (*stretch out left arm*)  
in this way: (*stretch out right arm*)  
God (*point up with both hands*)  
sent his only Son (*cradle arms as if holding a baby*)  
into the world so that we (*open arms wide*)  
might live (*crouch down, then jump up*)  
through him. (*point up*)

In addition to motions, there are other fun ways to memorize Bible passages. Use these suggestions or your own ideas to make Bible memory fun and easy.

(more Bible memory ideas continued on the next page)

- March or clap on each syllable.
- Use rhythm instruments to create a chant.
- Toss a balloon and have children, one at a time, tap it as each word is said. Or give children their own balloons to keep in the air, tapping it as each word is said.
- Make a word scramble. Write one word per card. Hand out the cards in no particular order, and invite children to unscramble the words and stand in line with the passage in order.
- Toss a ball or beanbag; as a child catches it, he or she must say the next word in the passage.
- Invite children to illustrate key words or phrases.
- Write one word per card and place the passage on the wall. Say the passage several times, each time removing one or more words.
- Divide into groups and have them alternate saying words or phrases of the passage.

## Daily schedule

Schedule is for a 2-hour-and-15-minute Bible school session as follows:

### Gather

(10 minutes)

Small groups meet to begin the session.

### Worship

(25 minutes)

Small groups gather for worship. The parables are presented through a drama.

### Bible/Creative/ Active Response

(30 minutes each)

Small groups rotate to participate in three stations each day. Activities focus on Bible story themes. Creative Response time includes a snack.

### Send

(10 minutes)

Small groups gather for a sending blessing and dismissal.

## Modified schedule

### If you have 2 hours:

Gather—5 to 10 minutes

Worship—25 minutes

Respond—75 minutes

Active—25 minutes

Bible—25 minutes

Creative—25 minutes

Send—5 to 10 minutes

### If you have 1½ hours:

Gather—5 minutes

Worship—20 minutes

Respond—60 minutes

Active—20 minutes

Bible—20 minutes

Creative—20 minutes

Send—5 minutes

### If you have 1 hour:

Worship—15 minutes

Respond—45 minutes

Active—15 minutes

Bible—15 minutes

Creative—15 minutes

## Day 1

# It's a Secret

## Bible background

Jesus sometimes told stories in the form of parables. Parables use common objects and concepts to point toward a deeper meaning. Today's text is a brief introduction as to why Jesus spoke this way. And just as the parables themselves need to be unpacked to become clear, so too today's texts need to be unpacked.

The parables seem a bit mysterious. The reason Jesus gives for speaking in parables seems equally mysterious: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven."

The verses between today's texts follow this comment by noting that some people see and hear, but they don't understand. However, at the end of today's text, Jesus adds, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."

What does all this mean? What do eyes and ears and the kingdom of heaven have to do with stories about everyday items?

Just as the everyday items are with us, so the kingdom of heaven is here among us. Though at first it might not have been apparent to those around Jesus, if they watched and listened, they would have seen that the kingdom of heaven was not only present, but also growing. Just as the parables are not understood at the first hearing, so the kingdom of heaven is not always understood or visible to those who may be searching for it.

The kingdom of heaven did not arrive with all the pomp and circumstance that the people of Jesus' day expected. Instead, it arrived in a humble way. Though it began small, it would become so large that it would offer salvation and eternal life to those who believed. All people needed to do to notice was to open their eyes and their ears. The secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given. God will help people understand.

Today's texts will encourage children to notice what is around them so that they can better understand what Jesus said. They too can unlock the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven if they notice the way people around them follow Jesus. Do they hear kind words spoken? Do they see caring gestures from one person to another?

As a leader, you have the honor of helping children see and hear the kingdom of heaven around them. Take a moment to ask for God's help as you lead vacation Bible school.



## Today's Bible experience

Matthew 13:10-11a, 16

## Purpose statement

God will help us understand.

## Summary

The disciples ask Jesus why he speaks in parables, and Jesus explains that it is so they can know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

## Bible memory

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. —1 John 4:7-9

## Session materials

- Bible
- Bible memory poster or slide show presentation, and projector
- *Digging for Treasure* music, songbook, and music player
- *Treasure Map*, one per child
- Puzzle of the day (p. 9)
- Mirror
- Three common items, such as a pen, book, lightbulb, phone, cup
- Four cloths—three to cover the common items, plus one more

(continued next page)

## Advance preparation

- Pray for everyone involved in Bible school—adults as they prepare and lead, and children as they learn.
- Read Matthew 13:10-11a, 16. Read over the Bible Response daily plan and additional activities and choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups. Prepare materials.
- Use the magnifying glass template on page 9 to create a puzzle. (See page 2 for more information.) Hide some of the puzzle pieces so that they will be found during the session; suggestions are given throughout the daily plan. (See Bible story #2 and #3 and Bible memory.) Some unhidden puzzle pieces are needed at the beginning of the session.
- Place the three common items underneath three of the cloths on a table next to the story area. Place a puzzle piece underneath the fourth cloth.

► **Remind the children that Jesus told lots of stories. They are called parables. Parables are special stories that teach us things.**

# Daily plan

## Introduction

1. **Welcome the children to the first day of vacation Bible school!** Say:

*Welcome to the Bible investigation station! This is where we find treasure as we explore Jesus' parables. This is where we discover the secrets of the kingdom of heaven as the parables are revealed to us. So open your eyes and your ears to see what we can uncover.*

2. **Show the unhidden puzzle pieces.** Explain that every day during your time together, you will find missing puzzle pieces while you do different activities. The children may want to guess what the completed puzzle will be, but let them know that some investigation will have to happen to find out for sure what it is.

► **Ask the children if they have ever put a puzzle together. If not, you may want to have a simple completed puzzle on hand so that they can see how pieces fit together.**

## Bible story

► **Encourage children to bring their Bibles to Bible school. Some children may not own one so have extras on hand for them to borrow. Help them find the stories and memory passage.**

1. **Review the Bible story drama presented during Worship time.** What happened? Were there any clues about the treasures that will be discovered this week? Were there any clues about the parables that will be told? Find Matthew 13:10-11a, 16 in your Bible and read it. Depending on the age of the children, read the story together from the Bible, or retell the story from page 4 of *Treasure Map*.

It may be helpful to explain that the disciples followed Jesus. They were like students, and Jesus, who was the Son of God, was their teacher. The more the disciples learned from Jesus, the more they wanted to follow him. This is just what Jesus was hoping they would do! Jesus wanted to teach them more about the kingdom of heaven. We can be Jesus' special students, too.

2. **Explain what a parable is**—children may not have been familiar with this word before today. Hold up a mirror so that the children's faces are reflected. Ask:

*Who do you see when you look in the mirror?*

*Is it really you, or is it just a reflection of you?*

*Can you see yourself when you don't have a mirror?*

Tell the children that this is how parables work. They help us to see things we can't normally see. As with a mirror, we don't see the real thing, we see a reflection. Parables are stories, and if we look closely enough, we can see things reflected in them that we can't normally see.

Turn the mirror around so that children can see a puzzle piece taped to it. Set both items aside.

3. **Reveal the hidden items.** Explain that sometimes parables are tricky to understand, and we have to investigate what they might be hiding. Sometimes we have to uncover them to find out their meaning.

Invite children to guess what might be under the cloths. As the items are uncovered, observe that this is like uncovering a parable to see what is revealed under the surface.

Under the final cloth is a puzzle piece. Set it aside.

4. **Children can retell the story** and reveal a treasure in a message by doing the word search on page 5 of *Treasure Map*.

## Bible memory

Introduce the Bible memory passage. Open the Bible to 1 John 4:7-9 and explain that Jesus wants us to be his special students because God loves us. This is not a mystery to be solved; we know it is true that God loves us because God said so!

Invite children to read it with you from their Bibles, the Bible memory poster, or the Bible memory slide show. Repeat today's words, using motions or memorization ideas on pages 3 and 4.

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

Explain that the Bible memory passage tells the story of God's love for us. It is because of God's love that we have Jesus' stories and can learn about the treasures of the kingdom of God.

Find a puzzle piece in your Bible after saying the verse. Set it aside.

► **Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. —1 John 4:7-9**

## Closing

1. **Complete the puzzle to reveal a magnifying glass.** Share that detectives sometimes use magnifying glasses to see things that are hard to see. That's what parables do. Jesus tells us stories to help us learn things that we could not know all on our own.

Look at the magnifying glass on page 6 of *Treasure Map*. Have children write a word or draw a picture in the middle of the magnifying glass that will help them remember today's story. They may decorate and color the page.

2. **Sing together a song for this session** from the *Digging for Treasure* music collection.
3. **Closing prayer.**

Pray:

*Dear God, we want to follow you. Help us to be good students of the best teacher of all time—Jesus. We love you, Jesus! Amen.*

# Additional activities

► **Additional activities may be used to extend a session, depending on the amount of time available. Consider the age and abilities of your VBS children so that you choose appropriate activities.**

1. **Go on a scavenger hunt.** Hide objects around the room and have children work in pairs, with each pair finding one object. Be sure to hide more objects than there are pairs. After all pairs have found one object, walk around and work together to find things that are still hidden. Sometimes we need help from others—or we need to help others—in order to find hidden things.
2. **Play a guessing game.** Choose an object in the room and give a clue about it. Say: *I see something that is . . . (blue, furry, hot, and so on).* Allow children a total of five guesses to guess what was chosen. The child who guesses correctly chooses the next object. After a few rounds, talk about how important it is to pay attention to what is going on. Add that in the next few days at vacation Bible school there will be many stories. We want to pay attention to the details because they might be clues for understanding the parables and the kingdom of heaven.
3. **Whisper a secret.** The parables reveal secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Divide children into groups of five or six and have them stand in a line. Whisper the same secret into the ear of the first child in each line, and then have that child whisper the secret into the next child's ear, and so on, until all children have heard the secret. Has the secret changed? Remained the same? Here are options to whisper: *God will help us understand the parables; God loves us very much; The parables give us many treasures; Let us love one another because love is from God.*

Before beginning the activity, review how to tell a whisper. A whisper is not said loudly so that others can hear, but it is also not said too quietly so that it can't be heard.

4. **Unwrap a treasure.** In preparation, write today's portion of the memory passage (1 John 4:7) on a card and place it inside a box. Wrap the box with multiple layers of paper—wrapping paper, newsprint, newspaper, or other paper—at least one layer per child. Have children sit in a circle and pass the box to one another. Play the *Digging for Treasure* music collection as the box is passed, and pause the music at an unexpected time. The child who is holding the box unwraps one layer of paper. Play continues until the treasure inside the box is revealed. Say 1 John 4:7 together.

Try to watch and make sure that each child gets at least one turn to unwrap a layer of paper.

# Book list

► **You may want to read to children or have them look at books, depending on how much time is available. This list offers suggestions that fit the day's themes. You are welcome to find other books as well.**

- Buckley, Ray. *God's Love Is Like*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Butterworth, Nick, and Mick Inkpen. *Favorite Parables from the Bible: Stories Jesus Told*. Grand Rapids: Zonderkidz, 2012.
- Higgs, Liz Curtis. *The Pumpkin Patch Parable*. Nashville: Tommy Nelson, 1995.
- Hoffman, Mary. *Parables: Stories Jesus Told*. New York: Phyllis Fogelman Books, 2000.
- Lindvall, Ella K. *The Tell-Me Stories, Volume 1: Parables Jesus Told*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2000.

# Day 1 reproducible

