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Welcome to VBS!

We are pleased you’ve chosen Digging for Treasure as your vacation Bible school curriculum! Everyone who participates will discover treasures in Jesus’ parables and learn how the parables apply to our own lives even today.

This year’s theme is about parables. Though they first appear to say one thing, the stories actually have a much deeper meaning. Time and again they reveal things about the kingdom of heaven, about God, and about how much God loves us. The parables are stories to treasure. Our hope and prayer is that you find the parables to be a source of treasure as well.

A big thank you goes to writers Amy Nissley Stauffer (Early Childhood), Clayton Gladish (Bible Response), Becky King (Creative Response and Active Response), and Alicia Roth (Worship and Drama).

Thank you for choosing Digging for Treasure! May your vacation Bible school be a time of discovering treasure!
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!

_Digging for Treasure_ is a Bible-and activity-based learning experience. There are several parts to the curriculum.

- Early Childhood is designed for ages 4–5. The _Early Childhood Leader Guide_ includes everything needed to lead this VBS component. It includes crafts, games, snack ideas, and other activities that will help the young children learn about Jesus’ parables. In addition, the younger children may participate with the older children during the Worship time, or have their own worship experience in their VBS space.

- The _Director Guide, Worship and Drama Guide, Active Response Guide, Bible Response Guide_, and _Creative Response Guide_ are materials for grades K–5. The children will meet as one group for the Worship time, where they will see the Bible stories come to life during the dramas. The children will be divided into smaller groups to rotate to the three Response times, allowing children to dig deeper as they uncover the treasures in the parables.

- Additional ideas are included for children in grades 6–8. The Worship time and the Active and Creative Response segments are appropriate for this age group. The Bible Response segment offers various additional activities for each day, and some are appropriate for junior youth. The _Adaptations for Grades 6-8 Guide_ offers additional ideas to supplement the Bible Response segment for this age group.

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.

_Digging for Treasure_ is written as a five-day vacation Bible school program, usually completed over the course of one week. See page 7 for the daily session schedule chart that will help you plan. The suggested time frames can be modified depending on the time available for your Bible school.

If a five-day vacation Bible school does not suit your needs, there are other ways to use _Digging for Treasure_. There are schedules on pages 26–27 for the following:

- Midweek club or program over 10 weeks
- Weekend retreat
## VBS overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Bible text and story summary</th>
<th>Purpose statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It’s a Secret</td>
<td>Matthew 13:10-11a, 16 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.</td>
<td>God will help us understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Listen Up</td>
<td>Mark 4:2-9, 13-20 Jesus tells the story of the farmer who sowed seeds on different types of soil. Some of the seeds were unable to be fruitful, while others flourished. Jesus explains that the seeds are the Word, and the soil is how people hear and experience the Word.</td>
<td>God’s Word can grow in us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It’s Growing</td>
<td>Matthew 13:31-33 Mustard seeds and yeast are very small, but they produce big things. Jesus explains that they are like the kingdom of heaven.</td>
<td>Small things can become great with God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Found It</td>
<td>Luke 15:1-10 A shepherd looks everywhere for a lost sheep, and a woman searches diligently for a lost coin. They celebrate when they find what had been lost. Jesus explains that there is much rejoicing when a sinner repents.</td>
<td>God loves us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Just Ask</td>
<td>Luke 11:5-13 Those who ask will receive, thanks to their persistence. Jesus explains that the Holy Spirit is given to those who ask.</td>
<td>When we seek and ask, God is with us.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Bible memory

### Grades K–5: 6–8

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

### Early Childhood

Let us love one another, because love is from God. —1 John 4:7a
Format

The grade K–5 component of Digging for Treasure is designed for children to have both large-group and small-group experiences.* Children may be grouped according to age, or be in multiage groups, in their small groups.

Each day include several meeting times: Gather, Worship, Respond, and Send. See page 7 for daily schedule options.

Gather
Children gather in small groups with their Group leader to begin the day. The Group leader will take attendance, answer questions, and make sure everyone is ready for VBS. The Group leader will accompany the children to the various VBS segments.

Worship
All the groups will gather in one area for Worship time. The large-group experience includes a call to worship, music, offering, and a drama to present the day’s parable.

Respond
The small groups will rotate among three Response segments:
- Active Response (games and activities)
- Bible Response (Bible story discussion, student book activities)
- Creative Response (crafts and snack)

Send
Children will meet in their small groups to talk about the day and then be dismissed.

*The number of small groups depends on the number of children who attend VBS. Most VBS programs will want to have three small groups so that children can rotate easily among the three Response segments. However, if your Bible school has more than 50 children, you may want to divide into more than three groups. Instead of one Active, one Bible, and one Creative Response segment, you may want to have two of each running simultaneously so that all the groups can rotate through the three segments.
Daily schedule

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gather</th>
<th>Worship</th>
<th>Bible/Creative/Active Response</th>
<th>Send</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10 minutes)</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
<td>(30 minutes each)</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small groups meet to begin the session.</td>
<td>Small groups gather for worship. The parables are presented through a drama.</td>
<td>Small groups rotate to participate in three stations each day. Activities focus on Bible story themes. Creative Response time includes a snack.</td>
<td>Small groups gather for a sending blessing and dismissal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
Materials for a successful VBS

The Digging for Treasure boxed kit includes guides and resources you will need to plan and run a successful VBS program. You will need to order more copies of some of the resources, and an order form is included in the VBS box kit. You may also order online at https://pastoral.center

- **Electronic files:** A number of downloadable files (also on the VBS Resource CD) may be copied for use with your VBS program. In addition to the various leader guides, the files include:
  - Promotional materials: Print invitation postcards and posters; use the blurbs as announcements in bulletins and electronic media
  - Logo: Use for announcements, or print a large banner to place outside your church to advertise to the community
  - Letters to families
  - Name tags
  - Leader certificate of appreciation
  - VBS overview
  - Bible memory passage slide show: Use during the Worship and Bible Response times; pause the slides as needed so that children can read and memorize the words

- **Treasure Map** is an activity book that will be used each day during the Bible Response time. It is very helpful for each child and Bible Response leader to have one. Have extra copies available for other leaders and visiting children.

- **My Book of Stories** is for children ages 4–5. It includes illustrated Bible stories and activities. It is very helpful for each child and Early Childhood leader to have one. Have extra copies on hand for other leaders and visiting children.

- **Active Response, Bible Response, and Creative Response Guides** direct the respective leaders in discussions and activities during these times. If you have more than one of each Response time, be sure to order extra guides.

- **Digging for Treasure music collection** adds songs to the VBS. It will be used during the Worship and Bible Response times, as well as with the Early Childhood group. Be sure to have a music player on hand for each of these groups. In addition, some VBS programs order a CD for each child to take home as a reminder of VBS.

- **Digging for Treasure songbook** includes songs from the music collection.

- **The Bible memory poster** is used during the Worship and Bible Response times. Be sure to have enough on hand for these groups.

- **The invitation posters and postcards** are used to spread the word about VBS. You may order more, or print them yourself.

- **Student participation certificates** are given to each child on the last day of VBS.

- **Additional resources** focused on the parables are available for purchase. The following can be found at http://pastoral.center/parables.
  - *The Kids’ Travel Guide to the Parables* offers many additional lessons if you would like to significantly extend the time of your VBS.
  - *Pondering the Parables* offers deeper insights for catechist leaders.
  - *Parables on the Run* provides additional handouts for coaching parents to teach their children about the parables at home.
Staff needs

Program Coordinating Team
This team is familiar with the entire curriculum and organizational structure. They are responsible for making decisions about leaders, content, facilities, publicity, promotion, leadership training, registration, and supplies.

Leaders
Gather: Group leaders are needed for each of the small groups. They will greet children as they arrive and travel with their small groups to the Worship time and three Response segments.

Worship
The following leaders are needed for the Worship time:
- **Worship leader**—to welcome children to the Worship time and facilitate worship
- **Music leader**—to choose songs and lead singing
- **Drama leader**—to cast actors and coordinate the drama, including props
- **Bible memory leader**—to guide children in learning the Bible memory passage

Respond
The following leaders are needed for the three Response segments:
- **Active Response leader**—to choose and lead games and other activities
- **Bible Response leader**—to lead discussion of the Bible story and Treasure Map activities
- **Creative Response leader**—to choose and lead crafts and snack

Send
Group leaders will dismiss the children at the end of the day.

- Copy and fill in the leader assignment sheets (pp. 14–15) and hand them out to appropriate leaders and volunteers.

Early Childhood leaders
The Early Childhood portion of vacation Bible school is designed to meet the needs and developmental abilities of young children ages 4–5. The *Early Childhood Leader Guide* contains all the information needed to lead this portion of VBS.

Youth helpers
Youth can be an important part of the VBS experience. Invite youth to:
- accompany VBS leaders and the children as they go from one Response time to another
- prepare and help with games and crafts
- create, serve, and clean up snacks
- set up electronic equipment needed for the music, dramas, and Bible memory slide show

How can people volunteer?
Invite adults and youth to help with a wide variety of needs:
- serve as VBS staff: Program Coordinating Team member; Group leader, Worship leader; Active, Creative, or Bible Response time leader; or Early Childhood leader or helper
- serve as prayer partners for the program
- help with registration on the first day of VBS
- serve as assistants to session leaders
- help with snack preparations and cleanup
Staff orientation

Meet with staff, leaders, and volunteers for an orientation before VBS to be sure that everyone understands their role and receives the supplies they need. The following should be covered:

- **Introduce staff** and clarify roles.
- **Review** overall schedule.
- **Give an overview** of *Digging for Treasure* stories (p. 5).
- **Make room assignments** for each of the segments: Gather, Worship, Respond (Active, Bible, and Creative Response); and Send.
- **Make room assignments** for the Early Childhood component.
- **Distribute and explain** the schedule, a map locating all areas and activities, group lists, and record-keeping supplies.
- **Give an Early Childhood Leader Guide** to each leader and helper for children ages 4–5.
- **Give copies of Treasure Map**, one per child, to the Bible Response leader.
- **Give copies of My Book of Stories**, one per child, to the Early Childhood leader.
- **Share a first aid policy** that tells leaders what to do with both minor cuts and greater emergencies.
- **Explain VBS procedures** and list times you will be available for questions.
- **Give additional supplies** to Group leaders.
- **Outline plans** for the VBS dedication in the parish, if one is planned.
- **Describe closing celebration** plans (p. 13), if one is planned.

VBS dedication

Plan a blessing to commission adult and youth leaders and volunteers, as well as children, as they participate in the upcoming vacation Bible school.

Use downloadable files (also on the VBS Resource CD) to introduce *Digging for Treasure* to the parish. Print the logo and announcements in the church bulletin alongside a list of leaders and volunteers. Use the VBS overview to show the parables that will be covered, and the Bible memory slide show to introduce the memory passage.

Pray that VBS leaders and children will grow in their faith during this time. Invite parishioners to pray for VBS on the days when it is in session.
Offering project

Digging for Treasure includes an offering project suggestion to Heifer International, an organization which works with communities to end world hunger and poverty and care for the earth. Children will be excited that as they are learning parables involving farmers, bread bakers, seeds, and sheep, they can help small-scale farmers in developing countries to feed their families by becoming more self-sufficient. Like the shepherd who found his sheep and the woman who found her lost coin, the children can celebrate their gift of generosity which will help other families to help themselves.

Of course, feel free to choose another recipient for donated funds, perhaps Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities, or a ministry your parish is already connected to and supports.

Heifer International

Dan West was a Christian farmer from the Midwest who went to the front lines of the Spanish Civil War as an aid worker. His mission was to provide relief, but he soon discovered the meager single cup of milk rationed to the weary refugees once a day was not enough. And then he had a thought: What if they had not a cup, but a cow? That “teach a man to fish” philosophy is what drove West to found Heifer International.

Now, nearly 70 years later, that philosophy still inspires Heifer’s work to end world hunger and poverty. Giving an animal is like giving someone a small business, providing wool, milk, eggs and more. Animal donations can provide families a hand up, increasing access to medicine, school, food and a sustainable livelihood. As little as $20 will provide a flock of baby chicks to one family. More than that can buy goats, sheep, honeybees, ducks, rabbits, cows and more. Your VBS can choose how many and which animals to gift based on the week’s donation.

The core of Heifer’s model is “Passing on the Gift.” This means families share the training they receive, and pass on the first female offspring of their livestock to another family. This extends the impact of the original gift, allowing a once impoverished family to become donors and full participants in improving their communities.

Go to http://www.heifer.org/gift-catalog to see all the possible options for your donation.

You may want to show the children the two minute video clip on Heifer’s website to help them understand how gifting animals to families in need helps them.

To make your donation, go to Heifer.org and click on “Donate.”

Offering visuals

Plan a visual way to recognize the amount of money contributed during VBS. Be sure to update the visual each day and point out to the children the progress that is made. Be sure to thank children for their generosity!

Here are some ideas for an offering visual:

- **Create a treasure chest that reveals the amount of money contributed.** Take a box and paint it to look like a chest. Add a large paper coin or small “jeweled” stone to the chest to represent a certain amount of money. Or use a transparent container for the coins or stones.

- **Draw and cut out paper animals representing the animals you can gift** with the particular amount of money donated. Attach the animals to the wall to show how much money has been contributed.

- **Another way to represent something small getting larger is to cut strips of paper and make a chain.** Each link will represent a set amount of money.
Planning chart

5 months

- Become familiar with *Digging for Treasure* curriculum. Look over all the materials.
- Select date and time for VBS.

4 months

- Estimate the number of leaders needed for your Bible school (p. 9).
- Choose an offering project (p. 11).

3 months

- Choose Group leaders and contact leaders and volunteers (pp. 9 and 14).
- Post VBS dates in local newspaper and/or online.
- Announce VBS dates, times, and themes in church bulletin.
- Plan meeting spaces and map locations.
- Look at the electronic files and visit https://pastoral.center/parables for additional resources.
- Read through leader guides.
- Order extra *Digging for Treasure* CDs for leaders (including Early Childhood) and children.

2 months

- Finalize appointments to all VBS responsibilities. Set date and time for staff orientation.
- Place invitation posters in public places.
- Give copies of the *Worship and Drama Guide* and *Digging for Treasure* CD and songbook to Worship and drama leaders.
- Photocopy registration form (p. 16) and letter to families (p. 18).
- Distribute leader guides to staff.

1 month

- Plan VBS blessing with pastor or liturgy committee (p. 10).
- Plan closing celebration (p. 13).
- Hold preregistration.
- Send out letters to families (p. 18).
- Divide students into groups based on registration.
- Make student lists.
- Hold staff orientation (p. 10).
- Schedule custodian or helpers to move furniture before and after VBS.
- Share attendance expectations with Creative Response leader so snacks can be planned.
- Locate a few extra Bibles for each age group.

During VBS

- Count donation money.
- Record attendance.
- Meet briefly with staff after Day 1.
- Post daily announcements in a prominent place.
- Prepare for staff recognition.
- Prepare student participation certificates.
- Prepare for closing event.
Record keeping

Copy an attendance record for each group (p. 17). During Bible school, record daily attendance, average attendance, daily donations, and total donations. Prepare student participation certificates and have them available for Group leaders to sign on Day 4.

Tips for the first day

- Post group lists for children at the entrance to the church. Print the lists with large letters to be easily read by young children. Provide names of the Group leaders and the locations.
- Prepare for late registrants. Have a table where several helpers are available to place children in groups. Write the child’s name and name of the Group leader on a sticky note, which the children can use to find their group and leader. The leader will add the names to the attendance record. Give new class lists to Group leaders later in the session.
- Have parents or guardians of late registrants complete the registration form. If the children arrive without an adult, be sure to send the registration form home to be completed and returned the next day.
- Ask Early Childhood leaders to meet their children at the church entrance. They should gather the entire group before going to the meeting space.

Closing celebration

- Plan a closing program for family and friends. Use songs from the *Digging for Treasure* music collection and songbook, and other favorites. Introduce the drama space and characters. Acknowledge the work of leaders, volunteers, planners, and helpers. Distribute student participation certificates.
- Invite family and friends to visit the Response spaces.
- Invite family and friends to contribute to the offering project.
- Use the following Sunday morning to bring VBS to the entire parish. Use songs and worship materials from the *Worship and Drama Guide* and *Digging for Treasure* music collection. Offer a snack to celebrate Bible school, perhaps one used during a Creative Response time.

Leader recognition and appreciation

Thank leaders and volunteers by providing a meal within a week after VBS has ended. Use the time to talk about Bible school experiences and complete evaluations forms copied from page 28. Present certificates of appreciation.
Leader assignment sheets

Group leader

Responsibilities

• Function as a guide and spiritual mentor for a group of children.
• Be aware of individual needs of group members as well as group dynamics.
• Greet children as they arrive at Bible school; take attendance.
• Accompany your group to Worship and the Active, Bible, and Creative Response times.
• Dismiss children at the end of the Bible school session.
• Attend staff orientation on __________ (day) at __________ (time).

Gather

• Welcome each child to Bible school and to your group. Learn each other’s names.
• Take attendance.
• Briefly explain the daily schedule.

Worship and Respond

• Accompany your group to each of the activities.
• Assist leaders as needed.

Send

• Remind children of the offering project and distribute any Bible school information that needs to go home. Encourage them to invite their friends and neighbors to Bible school.
• Offer a sending verse. You may use words from the Bible memory passage, or choose your own: “Let us love one another, because love is from God.” —1 John 4:7

Worship leader

Responsibilities

• Lead five Worship times and coordinate others involved in worship. Use plans provided in the Worship and Drama Guide and songs from the Digging for Treasure music collection and songbook.
• Read the dramas in the Worship and Drama Guide to see how they coordinate with worship plans.
• Work with the Drama leader and musicians to plan worship.
• Work with the Bible memory leader to lead children in learning the Bible memory passage.
• Attend staff orientation on __________ (day) at __________ (time).
Drama leader

Responsibilities

- Coordinate rehearsals and direct the five dramas.
- Read the Worship and Drama Guide to see how the dramas fit into the worship service.
- Work closely with the Worship leader to plan the worship time.
- Find drama participants; copy and distribute scripts from the Worship and Drama Guide.
- Locate costumes and props for the dramas.
- Attend staff orientation on __________ (day) at __________ (time).

Response leader (Active, Bible, Creative)

Responsibilities

- Prepare and supervise Response times. Use the plans found in the Active Response Guide, Bible Response Guide, or Creative Response Guide. Choose activities that work best for your groups.
- Coordinate adult and youth volunteer helpers to assist with the activities.
- Gather supplies needed for the activities.
- Save copies of receipts and give them to ______________ for reimbursement.
- Attend staff orientation on ___________ (day) at ____________ (time).

Early Childhood leader

Responsibilities

- Function as a guide and spiritual mentor for a group of children.
- Be aware of individual needs of group members as well as group dynamics.
- Greet children as they arrive at Bible school and take attendance.
- Lead the daily sessions as outlined in the Early Childhood Leader Guide.
- Coordinate adult and youth volunteer helpers to assist with the activities.
- Attend staff orientation on ____________ (day) at ____________ (time).
Registration form

Digging for Treasure Registration

Please complete this form and return it by ____________________________________________

Name of child _________________________________________________________________

Address _________________________________________________________________

Birthdate _____________________________ Last school grade completed __________________________

Medical concerns/allergies _________________________________________________________

Name of parent/primary caregiver ______________________________________________________

Primary phone _____________________________ Secondary phone _____________________________

  □ Home / □ Work / □ Cell  □ Home / □ Work / □ Cell

Emergency contact _____________________________ Emergency phone _____________________________

  □ Home / □ Work / □ Cell

Parish: (optional) _________________________________________________________________

Parent/guardian signature __________________________________ Date ____________________________
# Attendance record

## Digging for Treasure attendance record.

Group __________________________ Leader __________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Day: 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Digging for Treasure attendance record.

Group __________________________ Leader __________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Day: 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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**SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE**
Letter to families

It’s time for vacation Bible school!

Place:

Date:

Time:

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

*Digging for Treasure* is a fun-filled, Bible-based learning experience focused on uncovering the stories Jesus told, also known as *parables*. Children will sing songs, play games, make crafts, eat snacks, and do other activities, all designed to help children discover amazing treasures in the parables.

We welcome your children to vacation Bible school!

—The vacation Bible school staff
Bible backgrounds

Day 1: It’s a Secret

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.
Day 2: Listen Up

“Listen!” We want people to pay attention, to not miss what is being said. We want people not only to understand the information, but also to follow instructions.

The parable today begins with Jesus wanting others to hear what is being said. “Listen!” The story that follows seems straightforward, perhaps a bit obvious in the Palestinian agrarian community. After all, it’s true that some seeds grow, especially if they’re planted in good soil and receive the nutrients, light, and water they need. And it’s true that some seeds don’t grow; they may fall on stony soil or not have enough water to flourish.

Why does Jesus want people to listen to something that seems obvious? Much like the other parables, there is a deeper meaning than what at first seems obvious. While Jesus uses an example from agriculture that the people around him would have understood, Jesus has something more in mind. Yet, even as people listen, they do not necessarily grasp all that Jesus has to say. Like seeds, there is always room for growing. And the more one listens and mulls over the words of Jesus, the more one’s life grows and is changed.

In both the parable and the explanation that follows, there is more emphasis placed on sowing the seeds than on the harvest. The harvest is abundant—and perhaps, because Jesus is in control, that is to be expected. And so the immediate concern is of the seeds themselves. How will they take root? Will they be able to weather the storms and cares of the world in order to grow and be fruitful?

While the illustrations of this parable may have connected with the Palestinian culture of Jesus’ day, not everyone today is familiar with the planting and harvesting aspects of farming. The popularity of gardening in the past number of years, however, could be a starting point to help children connect with this parable. Or, at the very least, houseplants will have a role in helping children understand the things needed to have healthy, growing plants.

But there is something deeper here than the agricultural aspect of this parable, something that pertains to the kingdom of God. “Listen!” What is it that Jesus is really trying to say? What needs to be uncovered? Is this parable about us?

Think deeply about what Jesus says. Ask questions and ponder. You too will be changed as you grow and flourish.

Today’s Bible experience:
Mark 4:2-9, 13-20

Purpose statement:
God’s Word can grow in us.
Day 3: It’s Growing

It seems at odds with reality—that something small could grow so great, or that something hidden would be revealed as it grows. Yet that is what today’s parables seem to imply. People expect the kingdom of heaven to be grand and mighty, but it begins in a small, humble (lowly) way, almost hidden from sight. From these lowly beginnings, however, something is revealed that grows to greatness.

Even though we don’t always notice, God is indeed working among us. These parables are compelling when we realize that God uses small, inconspicuous things. Children will identify with the nature of this, knowing that they are small but have hopes and dreams of growing and doing something grand. Yet children can be affirmed in their lives now, knowing that even at their age they can do great things.

Small gestures and acts of kindness, done in the name of Christ, can have large, far-reaching effects. Ask children to think about small things they do that can mean something big. How does inviting someone to play at recess turn into something big? How can sharing a game or a toy have a lasting effect? What other ideas do children have of simple things they can do daily that will help to grow the kingdom of heaven? Remind children that small things add up to make something big.

Likewise, when we understand that the kingdom of heaven begins with small things that collectively become large, we know that we can have a place in this kingdom.

Jesus’ stories send a message to not dismiss small things. Don’t overlook how God can take the smallest objects or actions and use them to grow the kingdom.

Today’s Bible experience:
Matthew 13:31-33

Purpose statement:
Small things can become great with God.
Day 4: Found It

Jesus tells a story to teach a lesson to the Pharisees and scribes, who complained that he associated with sinners, and even ate with them. Though Jesus uses a sheep and a coin as the objects in the story, this is one of the parables that has direct implications for how we live our lives and interact with others.

Both the sheep and the coin are lost. After an extensive search, both are found. Both owners invite friends and neighbors to celebrate after finding that which was lost. “Rejoice with me!” they say. “I have found what I had lost.”

The sheep had value. In their agriculture-based community, those who heard Jesus’ story would have known that the sheep could be sold and the money used for household expenses. The lost coin, however, was worth less than the sheep—its worth was only about one day’s wages. Even so, finding the coin was as much of a celebration as finding the sheep.

The sheep and the coin are the objects Jesus uses to teach about his interactions with sinners. Even though they are lost, the sheep, the coin, and the sinners can be found. This is cause for great rejoicing! Yet these objects will not be found if no one looks for them.

This parable is an invitation to perhaps leave our comfort zones and interact with those on the fringes, as Jesus’ examples teach us: sinners, tax collectors, women of Samaria, and others whom culture deems unacceptable. For how can these lost people be found if we are not searching for them?

This parable also leads us to consider how much we are sought, and loved, by God. No matter what we have done, God is searching for us. How amazing it is that the angels in heaven rejoice over our being found!

Children know what it is to search for something precious to them. Everyone has lost something, even if only temporarily. And how happy everyone is when the items are found! How important the children will feel if they know God is searching for them. And when they are found, even the angels will rejoice! Everyone is valuable to God, and God loves everyone.
Day 5: Just Ask

This parable is a response to Jesus teaching his disciples to pray. The preceding verses include the Lord’s Prayer, and this story provides an example of how God responds to our requests and prayers.

Jesus uses the concept of hospitality to connect these ideas with the listeners. Hospitality was very important in Jesus’ day, with guests expecting to be taken care of and fed well. Anything less than that would shame the host. So what should a host do with a guest who arrives late at night? Even though there is no leftover bread from the day to share, there is still an obligation for the host to provide something to eat.

In the spirit of friendship, the host goes next door and asks for bread. Friendship is a theme throughout the story; the neighbors are friends, and the host and guest are friends. Because of these friendships, we can assume that everyone is looking out for the best interest of the others.

At first, the neighbor is reluctant to give bread to the host for fear that the commotion might wake up the children. However, the host is so persistent that the neighbor finally relents, gets out of bed, and gives the host some bread.

Jesus ties in this example of neighborliness with prayer. When we ask God for things, we can be sure that God will give us what we need. Even as we seek a neighbor’s help, we can even more seek God’s help.

Children frequently ask for things, so they will understand what it means to ask for bread (food) and receive it. They will also understand how ridiculous it is to suggest that if people ask for fish, they would receive a snake. Or if people ask for eggs, they would receive a scorpion. This is just not the way things are done.

Even so, we may ask God for things we need. This does not mean we have a blank check. Just as those who love us and take care of us give us what we need, but not always what we want, God will also give us what we need and what is best for us, but not always what we want.
Invite children to faith

_Digging for Treasure: Parables Revealed_ is an invitation for children to learn about Jesus and better understand what it means to follow him. As children hear the parables and uncover their meaning, they will learn how to develop a better relationship with God. There are ways for children to grow in their faith.

Use vacation Bible school as an opportunity to learn to know better the families in your parish and community. If the children are part of your parish, talk with the families about the experiences the children had during VBS. If the children are not part of your parish, or not even Catholic, this is a good time to invite their families to make your church their faith home.

As you prepare for VBS, read the Bible stories and pray for the children who will attend. Think about ways to talk about faith and a life of following Jesus.

**Day 1**

Today’s story is an introduction to parables. When Jesus’ disciples asked why he talked using parables, he responded that it’s so they can “know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.” But before we can understand the parables or the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, we need to open our eyes and our ears so that we can see and hear them! Children want to know about the world around them, and they know that there are five senses to help them learn. We can grow in our faith in Jesus in many ways—we simply need to be open and ready to follow him. Use this day to prepare children to be open to the things that Jesus wants to teach them.

**Day 2**

Jesus told a parable about a farmer sowing seeds in the field. Some seeds grew because they fell on good soil; other seeds could not grow because they did not fall in good areas. The story contains an important message that builds on the Day 1 story—we need to be open and ready to follow Jesus. But first, we need to listen! We need to put our senses and our hearts to work to learn about the things around us, asking questions to understand what Jesus wants us to know. Spend time talking with the children about ways they can listen to Jesus. Together, say a prayer of thanks for the things that Jesus teaches us.

**Day 3**

How amazing is it that God uses small things to grow big things? A tiny mustard seed grows into a plant so big that birds build their homes in it. A small amount of yeast will grow so large that it can make the bread we enjoy eating. Yes, even these small things have value. Even these small things can become great. While a mustard seed and yeast are the objects in this story, remind children that their actions, no matter how small, can also become great. Talk together about how Jesus can take kind words and helpful actions and grow them into amazing things. Let children know that when we follow the ways of Jesus, we will want to do kind, helpful things, no matter how small.

**Day 4**

A common children’s game is hide-and-seek; the one who is It searches until the other children are found. In some ways today’s story is like hide-and-seek—the sheep and the coin are so important that they are searched for until they are found. And when found, their owners gather friends and family together to rejoice. The lost has been found! Jesus told this story as a response to leaders who complained that he was spending too much time with sinners. The parable is often interpreted to mean that Jesus will search for sinners until they are found. And when they are found, the angels in heaven will rejoice. Children will be glad to know that Jesus is searching for them too! They simply need to be open to receiving Jesus. Remind children that Jesus loves them very much. Invite children to follow Jesus, the One who searches tirelessly for them.

**Day 5**

God wants what is best for us. Jesus used a story about hospitality to teach us about praying and how God responds to our prayers. If we ask for an egg, will we get a scorpion? No! When we ask God for things, God responds by giving us what is best for us. Sometimes it means that we don’t get what we want. Sometimes it appears that God doesn’t respond. Yet we can seek God and ask for God’s help, and God is with us. Name times that you have been aware of God’s presence. Remind the children that God is with us because God loves us.
Create a safe learning environment

General discipline tips
Dealing with unwanted behavior can be discouraging, especially for volunteer teachers. Determine a plan of action before you begin.

• Pray for yourself, that you will be able to show unconditional love to each child.
• Pray that everyone will experience God’s love and protective care in your classroom.
• Be prepared. Have supplies on hand; know the step-by-step plan.
• Be consistent yet firm with expectations and guidelines during VBS.
• Be prepared to stop the session and correct unwanted behavior at the beginning, so the children know you are serious about your role as leader.
• Observe the children’s learning preferences and accommodate them as often as possible. When children can succeed at learning in their best ways, disruptions are reduced.
• Expect children to be responsible for their actions.
• Practice forgiveness.
• Be ready to apologize when you do or say something inappropriate.
• Communicate effectively. Before giving instructions, wait until everyone is quiet and attentive. Speak clearly and slowly, making sure everyone understands.
• Celebrate with the children and enjoy learning with them. Let them know you are happy being with them.
• Seek help for children with special needs. Ask a youth or adult to give extra loving care to children.
• Seek counsel from other leaders and parents if you do not know how to handle a discipline problem.

Active children
• Give clear instructions and make sure the child is listening to you.
• Look directly at the child.
• Establish a consistent routine.
• Explain what is happening: “When we finish story time, we will go to ___.”
• Give advance warning when a preferred activity is coming to an end.
• Offer short and simple activities.

• Be positive and affirming.
• Involve movement as much as you can.
• Assign tasks such as handing out and collecting supplies.
• Arrange the classroom so the child is not sitting by windows or hallways.
• Seat child away from heaters, fans, or air conditioner vents so that the noise is not a distraction.
• Reward even the smallest success with a wink, smile, or pat on the arm.
• Do not use putdowns or reprimands.
• If the child uses medication, do not refer to it.

Make church a safe place
God calls us to create communities of faith where children, youth, and adults can be nurtured in their faith without any stumbling blocks. In order to provide safe sanctuaries, we must be aware of the risks in our world and put in place abuse prevention policies and procedures that help us manage the risks as we minister to children.

Here are some of the issues to discuss with the leaders:
• Procedures for picking up and dropping off children.
• Have two adults present in every classroom and ministry setting.
• Ensure all classroom doors have windows, or leave doors partially open.
• Procedures for taking a young child to the bathroom.
• Education of safe touch and personal boundaries.
• CPR and first aid procedures, and have well-equipped first aid supplies.
• Keep children safe while playing inside or outside your church.
• Background checks of all volunteers and church staff.
• Train all leaders and volunteers on these issues, including those who are under age 18.
• Procedures for reporting child abuse.

Additional resources
• Your diocesan website
Midweek program plan

You can use *Digging for Treasure* for a 10-week program. Here’s a sample plan to help you get started. Sessions are based on 1 hour.

**Day 1: It’s a Secret**

**Session 1**
- Gather (10 minutes)
- Worship and drama from Day 1 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (20 minutes)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides) (20 minutes)
- Send (10 minutes)

**Session 2**
- Gather (5 minutes)
- Sing worship songs (music collection/songbook) and practice Bible memory passage (10 minutes)
- Groups do two remaining Response segments (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

**Day 2: Listen Up**

**Session 3**
- Gather
- Worship and drama from Day 2 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides)
- Send

**Session 4**
- Gather
- Sing worship songs (music collection and songbook) and practice Bible memory passage
- Groups do two remaining Response segments
- Send

**Day 3: It’s Growing**

**Session 5**
- Gather
- Worship and drama from Day 3 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides)
- Send

**Session 6**
- Gather
- Sing worship songs (music collection and songbook) and practice Bible memory passage
- Groups do two remaining Response segments
- Send

**Day 4: Found It**

**Session 7**
- Gather
- Worship and drama from Day 4 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides)
- Send

**Session 8**
- Gather
- Sing worship songs (music collection and songbook) and practice Bible memory passage
- Groups do remaining Response segments
- Send

**Day 5: Just Ask**

**Session 9**
- Gather
- Worship and drama from Day 5 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides)
- Send

**Session 10**
- Gather
- Sing worship songs (music collection and songbook) and practice Bible memory passage
- Groups do remaining Response segments
- Send
Weekend retreat plan

You can use Digging for Treasure during a weekend retreat as children’s programming, or as intergenerational activities if used during a church retreat weekend. Sessions are based on 90 minutes.

Friday evening—Day 1: It’s a Secret
- Gather; Worship and drama (see Worship and Drama Guide) (25 minutes total)
- Respond activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides) (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

Saturday morning—Day 2: Listen Up
- Gather; Worship and drama (see Worship and Drama Guide)
- Respond activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides)
- Send

Saturday afternoon—Day 3: It’s Growing
- Gather; Worship and drama (see Worship and Drama Guide)
- Respond activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides)
- Send

Sunday morning—Day 4: Found It
- Gather; Worship and drama (see Worship and Drama Guide)
- Response activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides)
- Send

Sunday afternoon—Day 5: Just Ask
- Gather; Worship and drama (see Worship and Drama Guide)
- Response activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides)
- Send
Evaluation form

Tell us what you think

We encourage you to submit your opinions online at GrowingUpCatholicVBS.com/evaluation, or send this completed form to VBS Evaluation, The Pastoral Center, 1212 Versailles Ave., Alameda, CA 94501.

Your information:
Parish _____________________________________________________________________________
Your name (optional) ______________________________________________________________________________
Email _____________________________________________________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________________________________________________
City __________________________________ Province/State __________________ Code __________________

Please checkmark your role in the program:
☐ Director/Coordinator   ☐ Worship Leader   ☐ Music Leader
☐ Drama Leader/Participant ☐ Active Response Leader ☐ Bible Response Leader
☐ Creative Response Leader ☐ Early Childhood Leader ☐ Other (specify) ____________

I have these comments about the resources in this curriculum (worship guide, leader guides, student books, posters, music, etc.):
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________

I have these comments about how the program worked for us (time factor, session flow, etc.):
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________

Additional comments:
_________________________________________________________________________________________
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