

Message Received: Hearing God's Call

# ACTIVE RESPONSE GUIDE



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# INTRODUCTION

## God has a message for you! Can you hear it?

Samuel heard it during the middle of the night. Mary heard it through an angel. The disciples were hard at work when they heard it. They all heard God's special message just for them! *Message Received: Hearing God's Call* lets children know that God continues to call all kinds of people—including them! People are called to love God and follow Jesus every day. Those who hear God's message and respond are forever changed.

Several games and activity ideas are offered for each session, but you are not expected to do all of them. Focus on the activities most appropriate for your groups. The ideas are intended to be user-friendly for age 6 through grade 5, but can be adapted for other ages. Some of the activities require a large space, so think about outdoor places that can be used such as a lawn, parking lot, or nearby park. Some of the activities require more adult supervision than others, depending on the age group involved. Regardless of which activities are chosen, the *Message Received* theme will be extended in fun and creative ways.

You are privileged to work with the children. Affirm their gifts of creativity. Encourage them to develop healthy relationships with each other. Pray that each child will learn and grow through having fun in these sessions.

## SESSION OUTLINE

Each session includes the Bible background, faith focus, and memory verse of the day. Read them to understand how the Active Response ideas connect with the theme, and to guide you as you interact with the children. The variety of games and activities allows you to be flexible and consider the needs and abilities of your groups when planning each session.

- **About the session:** gives an overview of your time with the children
- **Session materials:** lists supplies for the session
- **Advance preparation:** notes what needs to be done ahead of time
- **Active Response session plan:** offers game and activity options and directions

# THE PRIMARY CHILD

Primary children (those in early elementary school) are both endearing and challenging, and often open and affectionate. They may enjoy doing things on their own one minute but want the leader's attention and guidance the next. Projects completed independently, though imperfect, are more satisfying than those completed by the leader.

Primary children think mainly about themselves and need encouragement to consider others and their needs. Sharing is hard for them, but repeated intervention is effective. Always acknowledge the children's feelings, even while correcting inappropriate actions. If you treat children with respect you will have encouraged positive behavior because primary children look up to their leaders and try to emulate them.

Primary children have lots of ideas and want to share them. They need space to express themselves and feel they are contributing to the group.

# THE MIDDLE CHILD

At this age (late elementary/middle school), children are becoming less self-centered and are able to understand another's point of view. They are big on fairness and rules, and will quickly tell you when something is unfair. Communicate clearly your expectations about group behavior. Follow through on your expectations. When working on a new skill or project, middler children show amazing focus and determination. They take criticism seriously, so try to frame comments in a positive way. Middlers tend to have best friends and can exclude others. Peers are important to them. While some still want to please their leaders, others are beginning to challenge authority. Model respect in your words and actions.

Children at this age show great developmental differences (physical, intellectual, psychological, social, and spiritual). Be aware of these differences and provide opportunities for everyone to contribute as they are comfortable. For example, reading abilities can vary greatly. Be sensitive to any child's reluctance to read aloud. Many children are eager to read and comfortable doing it, while others find it difficult or embarrassing.

Middler children are full of energy and enthusiasm. Their bodies are growing and need physical activity. Whenever possible, provide opportunities to move around.

# DAILY SCHEDULE

Schedule is for a 2-hour-and-15-minute Bible school session. For other session times, see below.

<p><b>Gather (10 minutes)</b> Small groups meet to begin the session.</p>	<p><b>Worship (25 minutes)</b> Small groups converge for worship. A drama presents the Bible story.</p>	<p><b>Bible/Creative/ Active Response (30 minutes each)</b> Small groups rotate to participate in three stations each day. Activities focus on Bible story themes. Creative Response time includes a snack.</p>	<p><b>Send (10 minutes)</b> Blessing and dismissal in small groups or in total group assembly.</p>
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## Modified schedule

**If you have 2 hours:**

**Gather**—5 or 10 minutes

**Worship**—20 minutes

**Respond**—75 minutes

**Active**—25 minutes

**Bible**—25 minutes

**Creative**—25 minutes

**Send**—5 or 10 minutes

**If you have 90 minutes:**

**Gather**—5 minutes

**Worship**—20 minutes

**Respond**—60 minutes

**Active**—20 minutes

**Bible**—20 minutes

**Creative**—20 minutes

**Send**—5 minutes

**If you have 1 hour:**

**Worship**—15 minutes

**Respond**—45 minutes

**Active**—15 minutes

**Bible**—15 minutes

**Creative**—15 minutes

## Day 1

# SAMUEL

### Biblical background

Samuel is a familiar and popular figure in the Old Testament. As a child, he serves God in the temple with his mentor, Eli, the priest. As an adult, he serves as a prophet of God to the people of Israel.

Samuel begins his ministry at a young age after experiencing something highly unusual—he actually hears God’s voice calling him. Not surprisingly, Samuel thinks it is Eli who is calling, and goes to see what he wants. Eli, however, realizes that it is God who is calling Samuel’s name.

According to 1 Samuel 3:1, the beginning of this story, “the word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” Yet God calls and Samuel responds, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” He is willing to take on whatever God has for him, even though it means that he has to tell Eli some difficult news.

God has warned Samuel about the coming downfall of the house of Eli. Samuel is afraid to share the message, but Eli invites him to do so anyway. Eli hears the news with resignation, saying that the Lord should “do what seems good to him.”

Listening and responding to God’s call transforms Samuel’s life. He grows from a young boy who does not fully know God, to a man who becomes known as a trustworthy prophet of the Lord at Shiloh.

Children will be fascinated that someone their own age was given such an important task from God. This can encourage them to think about God’s call in their own lives and to listen for the voice of God as they make decisions.

### About the session

Children will participate in games and activities to heighten their listening skills. The games will help children remember how important it is to listen to God and to others, just like Samuel did.

### Advance preparation

- Choose games appropriate for your VBS group.
- Find appropriate places to play the games. Consider space and the amount of children in the group.
- Prepare supplies needed for each activity (pp. 6–7).

### Active Response session plan

1. **Greet the children.** Find out which session the children have just experienced and ask about it: What activities did you do? What did you learn? What did you like best?
2. **Activity time.** Explain to the children that they will have opportunities to practice their listening skills. Invite them to think about how Samuel practiced his listening skills in today’s Bible story.  
Introduce the games and allow time to play them.
3. **Closing prayer:** *Dear God, help us to find quiet time to listen to you. Help us do what you ask us to do. Amen.*

MESSAGE  
RECEIVED

HEARING GOD'S CALL

### Today’s Bible experience

1 Samuel 3:1-21

### Summary

Samuel, a young person, is called by God and gives a message to Eli. Samuel listens to God and Eli accepts the message.

### Bible memory

Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!  
—Luke 11:28b

### Faith focus

God calls us to listen and respond.

## Sequence Echoes

### Materials

- Chairs, one per child
1. Invite children to have a seat on chairs that are arranged in a circle. An adult leader needs to be part of the circle.
  2. The leader will demonstrate a sequence of two to four actions that make noise (clap, stomp, snap, click tongue, hit legs, etc.). The children will echo the leader.
  3. For the second round, have children turn their chairs so that they are seated facing away from the circle. The leader will give another sequence of two to four actions and children will echo it. This time, children who are not able to repeat the sequence will turn their chairs to the inside to listen to the next sequence. They may continue to participate.
  4. Repeat other sequences, making each longer. Continue until all are turned in to the circle again.

### Debrief

Samuel had to listen carefully to hear God's message. We also need to listen carefully to God, our teachers, our parents, and others to hear important messages.

## Samuel Says (Simon Says)

1. Invite children to stand in a circle, or randomly throughout the room.
2. As leader, tell the children to do different motions or activities, beginning the command with "Samuel says . . ." Or, simply tell the children a motion without preceding it with "Samuel says . . ." Alternate the two commands so that children have to listen carefully. The actions can be things such as: put your hand on your head, stand on one foot, take five baby steps, sit on your hands, etc.
3. Tell the children to follow the movement when they hear "Samuel says . . ." at the beginning, but not to follow when "Samuel says . . ." is not said.
4. If children do the command when Samuel does not say it, they sit down and watch the others. Keep the game moving at a good pace to hold the children's attention.

### Debrief

Sometimes it's hard to pay attention because there are a lot of things going on. But we need to find a way to listen so that we can do what God tells us to do, just like Samuel did.

## What's Your Name?

### Materials

- Chairs, one per child
1. Invite children to have a seat on chairs that are arranged in a circle. Explain that the leader will call out names or characteristics of the children. If children hear their name, or a characteristic of themselves, they are to stand up and switch seats with others who were also called. Make sure that every child has a chair so that no one is left standing after switching seats.
  2. Play a few rounds with an adult as the leader; then allow a child to be the leader. Ideas include calling out several names at a time, those who are wearing red, those who like pizza, those with curly hair, those who have a dog, etc. Be sure that every child is able to switch seats several times.

### Debrief

God knew Samuel's name. And God knows our names, too! Samuel had to listen carefully, and we need to listen carefully, too. Ask: How did it feel to anticipate that you would be called at some point? How did it feel when your name was not called? How difficult was it to find a seat? How important was listening during this activity?

## 3-D Art

### Materials

- Bag of items, one per child; all bags include identical items

### Advance preparation

- Place the same items in each bag. Items could include: different color blocks, tissue boxes, paper towel rolls, cans, or other items that can be used to build.
1. Invite children to sit in a circle with an adult leader. Because of the definitive directions, it is best to have an adult leader, not a child.
  2. The leader will give directions about what to do with the items in the bags. The children will need to follow the directions through listening only, and not look at what others are doing. Demonstrate what some of the directions might be by building something small. Example: Put your tissue box on the floor. Now put two cans on the tissue box beside each other. Put two red blocks on top of one of the cans.
  3. Give each child a bag of items and ask them to turn so that they are facing out and away from everyone. Remind them not to look at their neighbor's building.
  4. Call out directions, choosing any sequence or item. Only give each direction one time. Children will build their structures as they understand the leader's directions.
  5. After the directions end, have children carefully stand and sit on the other side of their 3-D art. Do their pieces look like the leader's piece?
  6. Try the activity again, with the leader giving a different sequence of items to build a new structure. Did the children listen more carefully the second time?

### Variation

This idea can be adapted to make people sculptures. Divide children into groups of three to five. Give directions for them to arrange themselves, instead of using materials.

### Debrief

Children needed to listen closely and follow directions. Samuel needed to listen closely to God's message. How can we listen closely to God?