

Message Received: Hearing God's Call

BIBLE 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.

The Bible Response session helps children process the Bible story. The main session plan is written to connect with various age groups. Additional activity options are suggested if you wish to extend a lesson depending on allotted time. Consider the age and abilities of your group as you choose appropriate activities. Some activities require more adult supervision than others, particularly with younger age groups. All will extend the *Message Received* themes in unique and thoughtful ways.

You are privileged to work with the children as you help them hear God's message. 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 Bible Response ideas connect with the theme. Allow them to guide you as you 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
- **Bible Response session plan:** offers activities that go along with the Bible story

BIBLE STORY

Create a space in which children can gather to hear the Bible story. There are display items noted with each session that go along with the story.

- **Day 1**—blanket or mat, pillow
- **Day 2**—chair to represent a throne, crown or tiara
- **Day 3**—angel wings or halo, baby items
- **Day 4**—fishing nets and poles, oars
- **Day 5**—purple cloth, place setting

STUDENT BOOKLET

Message Decoder, the student booklet, features a variety of activities that connect to the day's theme. Each child will need a booklet. Plan to have a few extra booklets on hand in case you have visitors.

BIBLE MEMORY

Each session features a Bible memory verse that fits the Bible story and faith focus of the day. Use the Bible memory poster and Bible memory DVD to help children learn the verses.

The verses are as follows:

- **Day 1**—Luke 11:28b
- **Day 2**—1 Thessalonians 5:11
- **Day 3**—Romans 8:28
- **Day 4**—Mark 1:17b
- **Day 5**—2 Corinthians 5:17a

There are many fun ways to memorize Scripture. Each session includes hand motions to the memory verse for that session. Use these suggestions, your own ideas, or suggestions from the list below to make Bible memory fun and easy.

1. **Play a game using flash cards.** Use one card for each word. Distribute the cards to the children. Have them line up with their cards in the right order.
2. **Place the flash cards on a wall.** Children will remove one word at a time and repeat the entire verse until all the cards are gone.
3. **Create hand motions** to key words.
4. **Say the verse while doing different actions** (running in place, hopping on one foot, stride jumping, marching).
5. **Stand or sit in a circle**, and assign phrases or words for each child or small group to repeat. Continue until everyone knows the verse.
6. **Have children tap a balloon in the air** each time they say a word in the verse.
7. **Invite children to throw a ball to each other** as they say the next word in the verse.
8. **Use rhythm instruments** and chant the text.
9. **Use pictures** to illustrate key words.

The texts in the materials are from the New Revised Standard Version. You may use a preferred translation.

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. Make everyone feel welcomed at VBS!

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, middle 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.

Middle children are full of energy and enthusiasm. Their bodies are growing and need physical activity. Whenever possible, provide opportunities to move around. Make everyone feel welcomed at VBS!

DAILY SCHEDULE

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

<p>Gather (10 minutes) Small groups meet to begin the session.</p>	<p>Worship (25 minutes) Small groups converge for worship. A drama presents the Bible story.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Send (10 minutes) 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

SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

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 discover that God speaks to people of all ages, even young people! They can learn to hear God’s voice, too.

Session materials

- Bibles
- Bible memory poster or DVD
- *Message Received* CD
- *Message Decoder* student book for each child
- Radio
- Large sheet of paper or white board, and marker
- Display: blanket or mat, pillow

Advance preparation

- Review activities and become familiar with the session plan.
- Decide on any additional activities and gather supplies as needed.
- Display the Bible memory poster or show the video.
- Arrange the mat and pillow in the story area to represent Samuel’s bed.
- Hang white board or paper close to the story area.
- Set up the radio slightly tuned to a music station.

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.

Bible Response session plan

Introduction

1. **Greet the children.** Introduce yourself and ask the children their names. 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. **Invite children to gather** in the story area and explain that you will listen to music. Turn on a radio, slightly out of tune. Notice children's expressions and listen to their responses. After about a minute, tune the radio clearly.
Discuss the difference in listening when the radio is out of tune and when it is tuned clearly. Which is easier to hear? Ask the children if they tune in, or pay attention, when someone speaks to them. What difference does it make if they pay attention or not? Is it hard to hear when not tuned in properly?
3. **Share that today's story is about a young boy named Samuel.** We do not know how old Samuel is in the story, but he could be the age of some of the children at Bible school. In today's story, Samuel learns to tune into to God's voice. He learns that he needs to pay attention when God calls.

Children may be curious what it sounds like when God calls us. Share that God may speak to people through an audible voice, such as with Samuel, but that is rare. However, God also speaks to us through the Bible, through words of other people, by giving a sense of peace, by prompting our hearts, through prayer, and in other ways. You may want to share a personal example of how God has spoken to you.

Pope Francis called Samuel's simple words in this bible passage ("Speak Lord, I am listening") as a beautiful way to pray. He said they are especially good words to use when we have doubts, are confused, or have some resistance to the Holy Spirit. He said we shouldn't be afraid when the Holy Spirit surprises us or changes our plans: joy is part of the package! (4/14/2016)

The Bible text

1. **Find 1 Samuel 3 in the Bible.** Explain that today's story is found in the book of Samuel in the Old Testament of the Bible. Not only is the story found in the book of Samuel, but the story is about Samuel when he was a boy. Read the story from 1 Samuel 3:1-21.
2. **Connect to the story** by discussing some of the following questions. Invite children to share their own questions or comments.
 - How did God call Samuel?
 - How did Samuel tune in to God's voice?
 - How do you think Samuel felt when he realized God was calling him?
 - How can we tune in to God's voice?
3. **Invite children to spend some time with their eyes closed**, listening carefully. This can be done indoors, but if you have time you may want to go outside. After a minute or two, have them call out the sounds they heard. Write these down on a white board or large sheet of paper. Listen again. What other sounds can be added to the list?
 - Samuel heard God calling, but did not recognize God's voice. Add that sometimes it can be hard to hear and recognize God calling us, too. The noise of our televisions, video games, music, sports, family, friends, and so on can drown out the call. We need to take time to listen carefully to hear God.
4. **Turn to page 4 in *Message Decoder*.** (Answer: Samuel listened to God's message.)

Bible memory

1. **Open the Bible to Luke 11.** Point out that the story of Samuel is found in the Old Testament, but that Luke is in the New Testament. Luke includes stories about Jesus and things Jesus said. One thing Jesus said is the day's memory verse.
2. **Refer to the Bible memory poster or the video.** Read Luke 11:28b together with older children, or read it to younger children and ask them to repeat it.

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

Review the verse several times and use motions if you wish.

Blessed rather (*cross arms over chest*)
are those (*hold palms out toward others*)
who hear (*cup hand behind ear*)
the word of God (*cup hands in front of body, as if an open book*)
and obey it (*nod*)!

3. **Show the memory verse in Message Decoder page 15.** At the end of Bible school, children will take their books home to help them remember the verses. Challenge children to learn today's verse until they can say it by memory.

Closing

1. **Pray:** *Dear God, we love you and want to hear your voice. Give us the courage to say, "Speak, for your servant is listening," like Samuel did. Amen.*
2. **Lead a closing reading.** Point to ears, hearts, hands as you read. Read it several times and have children join in the motions, and words if they are able to do so.

May you have listening ears to hear God's call (*point to ears*),
courageous hearts to answer, "Here I am!" (*point to heart*),
and willing hands to go and serve (*hold out hands*).

3. **Play and sing a song from the Message Received CD.** "We Are Children of God," "Open My Eyes," and "Send Me" are good ones for this session.

Encourage children to bring their Bibles to Bible school. Help them to find the memory verse.

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.

Additional activities

- 1. Show artwork by various artists depicting Samuel's call** (check with your library or the Internet to find sources). Talk about how each artist pictured the scene. What are the expressions on the people's faces? What do you think they are thinking? Some art examples are *Samuel Reading to Eli the Judgments of God upon Eli's House*, by John Singleton Copley, 1780; *The Infant Samuel*, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1776; *Samuel and Eli*, by Harold Copping, 1912.
- 2. Play the telephone game.** Ask children to form a line or circle. Whisper a phrase or sentence into the first child's ear. This child will whisper it to the next child, and on down the line. How does the message change by the time it reaches the last person? Ask children what it was like to listen carefully. Note: You may need to instruct children on an appropriate whisper volume—not too loud, but not too soft, either.
- 3. Just as God and Samuel had a conversation,** God wants to talk with us as well! Though we may not be able to audibly hear the voice of God, we know that God is with us. Ask the children: What would you like to say to God? What would you like to ask God about?
Children do not need to respond out loud. However, allow time for them to silently talk with God.
- 4. God spoke to Samuel and gave him a message.** God spoke to other people, too. Invite children to read the following stories and learn more:
 - Exodus 3:1-6 (Moses and the burning bush)
 - Numbers 22:22-35 (Balaam and the donkey)
 - Ezekiel 37:1-10 (Ezekiel and the dry bones)
 - Luke 2:8-14 (shepherds and angels)
 - Mark 1:9-11 (Jesus' baptism)
- 5. Retell Samuel's story. Turn to page 5 in *Message Decoder*.** Read the story together and do the motions.

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 session's themes, or feature characters who have acted upon ideas or a call. You are welcome to find other applicable books as well.

Book list

- Blackaby, Tom, and Rick Osborne. *Sammy Experiences God*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013.
- Fryar, Jane L. *The Lord Calls Samuel*. Arch Books. St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1995.
- Kidd, Ronald. *Raising the Roof*. Americus, GA: Habitat for Humanity International, 2005.
- Lester, Helen. *Listen, Buddy: A Story about Learning to Listen*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.
- Winter, Jeanette. *Biblioburro: A True Story from Colombia*. New York: Beach Lane Books, 2010.
- Zolotow, Charlotte. *If You Listen*. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2002.