

SURPRISE!

STORIES OF
DISCOVERING JESUS

BIBLE RESPONSE GUIDE

**Surprise! Stories of Discovering Jesus
Bible Response Guide**

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Writer: Ilene Bergen, Project Director: Mary Ann Weber, Designer: Reuben Graham

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**Growing Up
Catholic**
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INTRODUCTION

Jesus surprised the people he met! People in the temple were amazed by the conversations and questions they had with a boy named Jesus. Hungry people in a crowd had more than enough food to eat when Jesus provided plenty of food. Two travelers were sad that Jesus died, but then they were surprised when Jesus started walking alongside them! With each surprise, people discovered more about Jesus.

Are you ready to be surprised by Jesus? Are you ready to ask questions and discover more about him? Then come along on the journey, open your eyes, and see what you will find!

You are privileged to work with children as they discover surprising stories about Jesus! Pray that each child will learn and grow while having fun during the Bible Response time.

OUTLINE

The daily plan includes the Bible background, faith focus, and Bible memory verses. 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 day.

Activities are geared for various age groups, and you will want to consider the age and abilities of the children as you decide which activities to do. Additional activity options are suggested at the end of the daily plan if you want to extend it. Some activities require more adult supervision than others, particularly with younger age groups, so invite adults and youth to help you.

BIBLE STORY

The Bible Response time helps children reflect on the Bible story and what it means for their lives. The Bible story is read or retold during this time, even though the children have seen it dramatized during the Worship session. If you find this repetitive, ask the children to tell you the story or move on to other activities.

Create a space where children can gather to hear the Bible story. Make a story circle with tape on the floor. Or, use an area rug or a blanket, and add pillows and cushions. It may be helpful to mark where children sit with small markers such as pieces of cardboard or boxboard with children's names on them.

Make a curiosity box by wrapping a box with colorful paper and cutting a hole in the top. Prepare small pieces of paper on which children can write questions. Encourage children to write their questions about God, Jesus, and faith on slips of paper and put them into the box. Each day, draw some questions from the box and respond to them. Remember that as a leader, you do not need to have all of the answers. You may invite children to do research and see if they can find answers, and you can acknowledge that some things we will never completely understand.

A prayer symbol will be used during prayer times and is something that will help the children recognize that it is time to talk with God. You will hold the prayer symbol in your hands as you pray, or children will also take turns holding it as you pray or say blessings for them. The symbol can be a pair of carved hands in a prayer pose, or any small item that can be easily passed around.

STUDENT BOOK

Tales of Discovery, the student book, features a variety of activities that connect to the day's theme. Each child will need a book. Plan to have a few extras on hand in case you have visitors.

BIBLE MEMORY

One Bible memory passage is featured throughout the week:

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

(Bible memory continues on the following page.)

Motions for key words will be introduced during the Bible memory time as a way to help children learn the words. Practice the motions and become familiar with them so that you can teach them to the children.

- **Come**—wave your hands towards yourself
- **Stop**—extend your arm with the palm held away from yourself
- **Kingdom of God** (first mention)—children form a circle and join hands
- **Does not**—shake head
- **God**—point up
- **Little child**—hold hand palm down as if patting the head of a smaller child
- **Took them up**—put arms in front as if hugging someone
- **Laid his hands on them**—put both hands in front as if placing them on someone's shoulders
- **And blessed them**—raise one hand high as if blessing someone

If you choose not to do the motions, there are other fun ways to memorize Scripture. You may use your own ideas, or choose from the list below to make Bible memory fun and easy.

1. **Word Scramble:** Create cards with the words of the passage, one word per card. Hand out the cards in no particular order, and then invite children to stand in line with the passage unscrambled. If there are enough children, divide into teams, with each team having a set of words. Which team can unscramble first?
2. **Missing Words:** Create cards with the words of the passage, one word per card. Attach them to the wall or a poster board in their correct order. Invite children, one at a time, to remove a word. After a word is removed, repeat the entire passage until all of the cards are gone. Or, write the passage on a whiteboard and invite children to erase one word at a time.
3. **Action Words:** Invite children to suggest actions for key words. Say the passage together using the actions. This can be done in one large group, or in smaller groups with adults helping.
4. **March in Place:** Say the passage while marching in place, one word per step. This gets tricky when words have more than one syllable! Try doing different actions, such as hopping on one foot, raising arms into the air, or tapping knees.
5. **Balloon Toss:** Blow up a balloon and knot it, and then have children stand in a circle. Invite children to tap the balloon, with everyone saying a word of the passage each time the balloon is tapped. Keep it in the air. If the balloon falls to the floor, begin the passage again until the whole thing is said without the balloon falling.
6. **Ball Toss:** Have children stand in a circle and give one of them a ball. Before gently throwing the ball to another child, the one holding the ball needs to say the next word of the passage. Invite other children to help if a child is unable to recall a word.
7. **Musical Verse:** Hand out rhythm instruments and invite children to create sounds as they chant the verses together.
8. **What Is It?** Divide into small groups and give one piece of paper and several crayons to each group. Invite them to illustrate key words of the passage. Display the illustrations around the room.

PRIMARY CHILDREN

Primary children 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!

MIDDLER CHILDREN

At this age, 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. 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> |
|---|---|--|--|

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 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

DISCOVERING JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Biblical background

The Bible shares just this one story about Jesus' boyhood. It is an important one for children, helping them to understand that Jesus was young once, too.

At age 12, Jesus travels with his parents to Jerusalem to observe the Passover festival. We know from Mary and Joseph's presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple that they observed traditional religious events and rituals. It is no surprise that they make the journey to Jerusalem for Passover. Their faith is a natural part of their life and part of their identity.

Most of the story takes place after the event, as the family travels home. After a full day of walking, Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus is not with them. They are traveling with a group—a community of family and friends—and assumed Jesus was walking with others.

When they realize Jesus is missing, they return to Jerusalem and search for three days until they find him in the temple. Jesus is with the teachers, talking, listening, and asking questions. The teachers are surprised and amazed at his understanding!

When Mary tells Jesus how worried they were, he responds, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (v. 49). Neither Mary nor Joseph fully understands, but Mary treasures the experience.

This story reminds us to take children and their faith experiences seriously, as the teachers did with the young Jesus. Young children are capable of reflecting about God, so embrace their enthusiasm and allow their faith to grow.

Hearing a story about Jesus as a boy allows children to see him as someone who understands them. When Jesus was in the temple, he asked questions as many children do. As a result, he grew in wisdom. Children will learn that they can ask questions, too, and learn and grow in their faith.

Today's Bible experience

Luke 2:41-52

Summary

Jesus' parents travel home to Nazareth after observing Passover in Jerusalem, and discover that 12-year-old Jesus is not with them. They return to Jerusalem and find Jesus in the temple, asking questions and talking with the teachers.

Bible memory

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

Faith focus

We can ask questions and grow in wisdom.

Session materials

- Bibles
- Bible memory poster
- *Surprise!* CD
- *Tales of Discovery* student book for each child
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils
- Prayer symbol
- Curiosity box

Advance preparation

- Review activities and become familiar with the daily plan.
- Decide on any additional activities and gather supplies needed.
- Display the Bible memory poster.
- Choose a prayer symbol to use in your prayer times, such as carved hands in prayer, or any small item that can easily be passed around.
- Prepare a story circle where children will hear the story each day.

Create a space in which children can gather to hear the Bible story. Make a story circle with tape on the floor. Or, use an area rug or a blanket, and add pillows and cushions. It may be helpful to mark where children sit with small markers such as pieces of cardboard or boxboard with children's names on them.

- Make a curiosity box. Wrap a box in colorful paper and cut a hole in the top. Prepare small pieces of paper on which children can write their questions about God, Jesus, and faith. Encourage children to write their questions or things they are curious about, and put them in the box. Beginning on Day 2, questions will be chosen from the box. Remember that some questions are difficult to answer and it is okay to not know all the answers. Some things we will never completely understand.

DAILY PLAN

Introduction

1. **Welcome the children** to this first day of vacation Bible school. Ask them to share their names and something about the world around them that they are curious about. Begin by introducing yourself and adding something such as *I wonder why the sky is blue* or *I wonder why frogs sing at night*. (As leader, you do not need to have the answers; encourage the children not to give answers at this point. Instead, simply wonder about things you are curious about.)
2. **Pray with the children.** Hold the prayer symbol as you pray: *Great God, you have created such a wonderful world and we have so many questions. Help us to be curious about you. Fill our minds and hearts with a love for learning more and growing in wisdom and faith. Amen.*

The prayer symbol is held by the one leading the prayer. When children are prayed for individually, or if they pray, they may hold the prayer symbol.

3. **Ask the children if they know that Jesus was curious about the world around him and about God.** He had questions. Jesus went to the very best teachers about God; he went to the rabbis (teachers) at the temple.

Bible story

1. **Move to the story circle.** Review the Bible story drama. Who was the story about? What happened? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Find Luke 2:41-52 in your Bibles. Depending on the age of the children read the story together from the Bible, or retell the story from page 4 of *Tales of Discovery*.
2. **Connect with the story** by talking about some or all of these questions. Invite children to share their own questions or comments. As they wonder about the stories and ask questions, they too will grow in faith.
 - In the story Mary and Joseph searched for Jesus. But because Jesus was asking questions, we know that he was searching for something, too. What do you think he was looking for?
 - What kind of questions do you think Jesus asked the teachers in the temple?
 - What questions would you like to ask about God?
3. **Introduce the curiosity box.** Explain that every day during VBS, children can write questions they have about God on slips of paper. Say: *Write things about God that you are curious about. Put them in this box and each day we'll pick some of the questions and think about them.*

Tell the children you won't necessarily have the answers, because some questions about God we'll never have the words to explain. But, like Jesus and the teachers in the temple, you'll have conversations and will think together about where you might find answers. Provide a computer or tablet for older children to search the Internet to find more information about the questions.
4. **Explain that as a boy, Jesus grew in several ways.** Invite children to listen closely to see if they can hear how Jesus grew. Read Luke 2:52: *And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*
 - Have the children crouch as low as they can go, and share that Jesus grew in wisdom. Say: *He got wiser. As you get older you know more and more things. So did Jesus. But "wiser" also means wondering about things. Being curious and asking questions and learning more about who you are and who God is. That's what Jesus was doing in the temple.*
 - Have the children stand, but lean over, and share that Jesus increased in years, or got older. Say: *He got older and bigger just like you do. Every year you celebrate another birthday and you are taller than the year before. Jesus was like that too.*
 - Have the children stand up straight and share that Jesus increased in divine favor. Say: *Jesus understood more and more how much God loves him and what that means for how he lived and how he treated others. Jesus loved God.*
 - Have the children stretch as tall as they can with their hands in the air, and share that Jesus increased in human favor, or that people thought highly of him. Say: *Jesus' family and neighbors and friends liked him more ever year. Jesus liked to make friends.*
5. **Go through the movements again,** this time having the children repeat after you the phrases about Jesus growing. Repeat movements and phrases, doing them faster each time.
 - Crouch low and say: *being wiser*
 - Stand, leaning over and say: *growing older*

When Pope Francis spoke about this passage, he emphasized how beautiful it was how the whole Holy Family went on this pilgrimage together. They had a single goal to focus on God. And the pilgrimage didn't end until they returned home to their daily lives and reflected on what they learned from the experience. Our families help us grow in wisdom! (12/27/15)

- Stand straight and say: *loving God*
 - Stand tall with hands in the air and say: *making friends*
6. **Just as Jesus learned about God**, we can learn about God, too! Turn to page 5 of *Tales of Discovery* and talk about ways we learn. Invite children to write or draw additional ways they learn about God.

Bible memory

1. **Introduce the memory verses.** Read Mark 10:14b-16 from the Bible or the Bible memory poster. Explain that each day the children will learn part of it so that it can be recited together on Day 5.

This Bible story helps children discover Jesus welcoming the children to share, ask questions, and be blessed by God. Children are very important to God!

Let the little children come to me, do not stop them. —Mark 10:14b

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. —Mark 10:14b-16

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

2. **To say today's portion of the verses**, invite children to stand in a line facing you. Say the verse. When the children hear “come” they will walk toward you. When the children hear “stop” they will stop. Do this several times, inviting different children to stand in front of the others and say the verse, while the other children *come* and *stop*.

Teach children the following motions and allow time for them to walk around the room practicing them.

- **Come**—wave your hands towards yourself
- **Stop**—extend your arm with the palm held away from yourself

Or, use one of the memorization ideas from page 4 to learn this part of the passage.

Closing

1. **Say a closing blessing and prayer.** Hold the prayer symbol and ask children to quiet their hearts and minds and souls. Say: *We'll end this session in prayer and I'll pray for each one of you.*

Give the symbol to the first child and say: *(Name), may you grow in wisdom and be blessed by God.*

Have the child pass the symbol to the next child and continue around the circle. If children would like to join you in blessing each other, encourage them to prayerfully say the blessing with you for each child.

2. **Sing or listen to songs** from the *Surprise!* CD. Here are suggestions:

- “The Temple”
- “Bless the Lord”
- “Just Like You”

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. **Make a footprint path.** This is an ongoing activity for all of the Bible Response times during VBS. The stories are not only about the surprises in discovering Jesus—they also include travel. Create a footprint path that goes around the space, out into the hallway, and through other rooms, and see how long it becomes! Each day will have a different focus for the footprints.

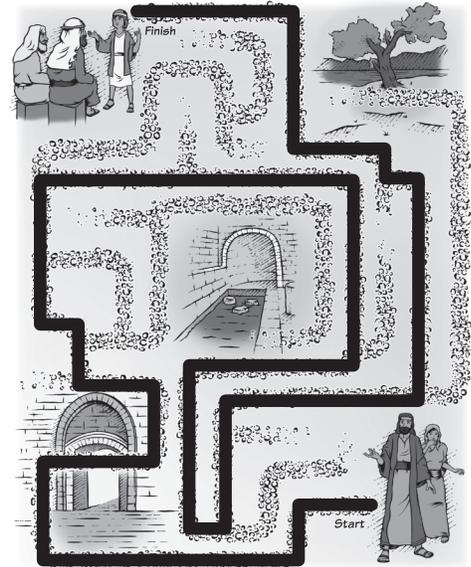
Give children pieces of construction paper and have them trace their feet and cut out their footprints. On the Day 1 footprints, invite children to illustrate the story by drawing Jesus in the temple. Or, some children may prefer writing about the story instead. Attach the footprints heel to toe to the floor and walls, and see how long the path is after Day 1.

2. **Help Jesus' parents find him!** Go to page 6 in *Tales of Discovery* and do the maze.

3. **Learn about Passover.** Jesus and his family went to the Passover in Jerusalem every year. They celebrated the way God had blessed their ancestors with freedom when they were slaves in Egypt. Jewish families still celebrate Passover and they have a special meal called a seder (*say-der*). At this meal children ask the questions. One of the questions they ask is, “Why do we eat these special foods?”

Bring some of these foods and explain their significance:

- **Parsley and a bowl of salt water.** The parsley is dipped in the salt water as a reminder of the tears of God's people when they were slaves in Egypt.
- **Horseradish** is a bitter herb and a reminder of the hard life of the slaves.
- **Lamb bone** is a reminder of how the Israelites put blood on their doors just before they left Egypt.
- **Unleavened bread or matzo** is a reminder of the time when the Israelites fled during the middle of the night and had no time for their bread to rise. Children today search for some hidden matzo bread during the seder.



4. **Take a walk.** In preparation, let adults know that you will visit them to ask what questions they have about God. Walk with the children from one location to

another within the church building. Talk to the adults in the church office, those in the kitchen, and in other areas. Remind children that adults have questions, too!

5. **Read the storybook *The Night the Stars Flew*** by Jo Ellen Bogart (book list). This is a story about curiosity about creation, and how adults sometimes don't get it!
6. (*An option for older children.*) **Jesus spent time in the temple** when he was an adult, too! Find these Bible stories and discover some things that happened when Jesus was in the temple
 - **Matthew 21:12**—What was one of the most famous things Jesus did at the temple? (*He drove out everyone who was selling and buying, he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the dove sellers.*)
 - **Matthew 21:13**—What did he teach about the temple? (*My house [the temple] is a place of prayer.*)
 - **Matthew 21:14**—Who came to Jesus at the temple and what did he do for them? (*The blind and the lame came to Jesus at the temple and he healed them.*)
 - **Matthew 22:36-37**—What was the lawyer curious about? What did he ask Jesus? What was Jesus' answer? (*“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*)
 - **Luke 20:25**—Some spies were sent to trick Jesus. They asked him, “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” What was Jesus' answer? (*“Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.”*)
 - **Mark 12:41-43**—Jesus often surprises us. Who did Jesus say gave the most money to the temple: rich people who gave lots or the poor widow who dropped in two small copper coins worth a penny? (*The poor widow gave the most.*)

BOOK LIST

- Bogart, Jo Ellen. *The Night the Stars Flew*. Markham, ON: North Winds Press, 2001. For children who are curious and wonder and keep looking.
- *Curious Creatures: 4 Books in 1*. Part of the Made by God series. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2014. For children curious about God's great creation.
- Gaudrat, Marie-Agnes. *What Is God Like?* Collegeville, MN: The Lutterworth Press, 1998.
- Murray, Julie. *Passover*. Edina, MN: ABDO Publishing Group, 2011. This book explains Passover to children.
- Muth, Jon J. *The Three Questions*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2002. Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy. Nicolai has three very important questions to ask.
- Tutu, Archbishop Desmond, and Douglas Carlton Abrams. *God's Dream*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2008. Do you ever wonder what God dreams for us? This book lovingly gives some answers.
- Weiss, David R. *When God Was a Little Girl*. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications, 2014. In this book a father does his best to answer his curious daughter's unusual request: “Tell me a story, Daddy... about when God was a little girl.”*

* Available for purchase from PastoralCenter.com.