



## ACTIVE RESPONSE GUIDE

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# Introduction

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

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

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

Each 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.

## Games and activities

Games and activities are offered each day. They go along with the Bible stories in some way so that children can better remember the parables and themes of the day.

Read over the options and choose the ones that will work best for your groups, considering the children's ages and abilities. If materials are needed to play the games or do the activities, they are listed with each option and are easy-to-find items.

Take time to go over some of the "Think about it" questions and comments noted at the end of each game and activity. They help make connections between the parables and their themes, and are a good way to deepen the meaning of the activities.

## Optional ideas for treasure hunts

As children learn to dig for treasure as they explore Jesus' parables, they may also want to go treasure hunting in other ways. Here are some options to consider.

- **Geocaching**—If you know people who have a GPS and go geocaching, consider asking them to set up one or two caches on the VBS grounds for groups of children to search for. Search online to learn more about geocaching.
- **Orienteering**—If you know people who have knowledge and tools for orienteering, consider asking them to do a lesson and some orienteering activities with the children. Search online to learn more about orienteering.

# Daily schedule

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

## Gather

(10 minutes)

Small groups meet to begin the session.

## Worship

(25 minutes)

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

## Bible/Creative/ Active Response

(30 minutes each)

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

## Send

(10 minutes)

Small groups gather for a sending blessing and dismissal.

## Modified schedule

### If you have 2 hours:

Gather—5 to 10 minutes

Worship—25 minutes

Respond—75 minutes

Active—25 minutes

Bible—25 minutes

Creative—25 minutes

Send—5 to 10 minutes

### If you have 1½ hours:

Gather—5 minutes

Worship—20 minutes

Respond—60 minutes

Active—20 minutes

Bible—20 minutes

Creative—20 minutes

Send—5 minutes

### If you have 1 hour:

Worship—15 minutes

Respond—45 minutes

Active—15 minutes

Bible—15 minutes

Creative—15 minutes

# Day 1

# It's a Secret

## Bible background

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Today's Bible experience

Matthew 13:10-11a, 16

## Purpose statement

God will help us understand.

## Summary

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

## Bible memory

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

## Session materials

- Choose areas with enough space for the selected activities
- Activity supplies (see list with each activity)

## Advance preparation

- Pray for everyone involved in Bible school—adults as they prepare and lead, and children as they learn.
- Read Matthew 13:10-11a, 16. Read over the Active Response daily plan and choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups. Prepare materials.

# Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Welcome them to the first day of vacation Bible school! Explain that during this time they will do activities and play games that relate to the Bible story.

Ask children about their previous VBS session: What did they do? What was their favorite part? What did they learn?

2. **Introduce the activity time.** Explain the directions for the selected activities. Afterward, take time to discuss the “Think about it” questions listed after each activity, making connections between the activity and the Bible story.

3. **Close in prayer:**

*Dear Jesus, please open our eyes and ears so we can learn about you. We want to understand the parables you told so that we know more about God’s kingdom. Amen.*

## Active options

### Hidden Secrets

#### Materials

- Brown bags
- One object to place inside each paper bag

In preparation, place an object in each bag and then fold the top of the bag and staple it so that children cannot see inside. Make one bag for every two children. You may want to keep a list of the objects placed in the bags.

1. Have children sit or stand in a circle. Pass the bags around so that each child can feel, shake, smell, or otherwise try to identify what is inside the bag.
2. After all the bags are passed, invite children to talk with each other about what they think might be in each bag. Why did they make that guess?
3. Pass the bags around again as you discuss the “Think about it” questions.
4. To close the activity, have children help you open the bags.

**Think about it:** Are there any bags that you are sure you know what is inside? Are there any bags that you have no idea what is inside? Jesus helps us unlock the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus helps us understand things about God.

### Find the Secrets (Hide-and-Seek)

#### Materials

- Space in which children can move and hide

1. Choose one child to be the Seeker. All other children are the Secrets.
2. The Secrets will find a place to hide while the Seeker counts to 20 out loud.
3. The Seeker searches for all the Secrets. The last Secret to be found is the new Seeker.

**Think about it:** How did you use your eyes to see in this game? Did you use your ears too? How do we use our eyes and our ears to uncover the treasures Jesus wants to teach us?

## Unlock the Secret Relay

### Materials

- Space in which children can run
- Padlocks with two keys that will open each lock (one per team)
- Containers that can be locked with the padlocks (one per team)
- Basket or other container for the keys
- Bible memory passage (1 John 4:7-9), divided into words or phrases, written on slips of paper, and locked into the containers (one verse per container)

In preparation, place the containers with the memory passage inside, locked with the padlocks, at one end of the playing area. Place a basket with the keys in the middle of the playing area.

1. Divide children into teams and have them line up at the end of the playing area opposite the locked containers. Assign one container to each team.
2. One person from each team will go to the basket and get a key, then run to their container and use the key to try to open it. If the container does not open, the player will return the key to the basket, return to their team, and the next player will go.
3. If the container opens, the player will take it to their team. As soon as the team receives their container, they will open it and take out the slips of paper.
4. The first team to correctly unscramble their papers wins.

**Think about it:** Read the memory passage together. What special treasure does it tell us about?

## Finding the Treasure

### Materials

- Large room or flat outdoor space
- Tape, paint, or chalk to create two 4 x 4 grids (or two sheets with 4 x 4 grids drawn on them)
- Space divider (dark sheet or blanket to create a barrier)
- Items to mark spaces, such as sticky notes or pens (five items per team)

In preparation, use tape, paint, or chalk to mark each row with the numbers 1–4, and each column with the letters A–D. The first square of each grid, for example, will be 1A.

1. Divide the group into two teams. Situate the teams on either side of the divider near their respective grids. (Two people may need to take turns holding up the divider.)
2. Each team will place three players (“treasures”) on their grid. One player will stand in a single box, the second player will sit with legs extended across two boxes, and the third player will lay across three boxes.
3. Teams will guess where the other team’s treasures are by calling out grid boxes one at a time. If a team calls out a grid location where part or all of a treasure is, mark that box and give the team another turn. If they miss a treasure, the other team makes a guess.
4. The game ends when one team has located all the boxes where the other team’s treasures are.
5. Play again, using different children as the treasures.

**Think about it:** How does it feel to figure out a code or a secret so that you can find a treasure? How did you use your eyes and your ears to find treasures in this game? How do you do this in other places?