



Active Response Guide

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Neighbors are more than the people who live next door.

Neighbors are more than the people in our families or communities. Through five carefully chosen Bible stories, *Who Is My Neighbor?* VBS leads children on a journey to discover more about God's great love. From looking at how to be a neighbor to diving into what it means to live out our faith, this interactive VBS series will lead children deeply into Bible stories focused on God's care and compassion for neighbors close at hand and around the world. Join us as we discover neighbors near and far!

About Active Response time

A variety of games and activities are offered each day. They will help children think about who their neighbors are, and how to be a good neighbor, as they play. Be sure to use some of the “Think about it” questions and comments at the end of each game and activity because they will help to make connections between the stories and between the stories and the children’s lives. The questions are a good way to deepen the meaning of the activities.

Read over the game and activity options and choose the ones that will work best for your groups and the children’s ages and abilities. If materials are needed, they are listed with each option and are easy-to-find items. There may be several activities listed for a day that you would like to do but don’t have time for; keep them in mind and perhaps you will have time to do them another day.

Pay attention to your meeting space. Ideally, you will need a large space, either indoors or outdoors, in which the children can freely move during the activity time. Read the daily plans carefully so that you know the space that is needed for the activities, and plan accordingly.

Daily schedule

Several meeting times are included in each day: Gather, Worship, Respond, and Send. The schedule for a 2-hour-and-15-minute Bible school session is as follows:

1. Gather (10 minutes)

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.

2. Worship (25 minutes)

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

3. Respond (30 minutes each)

Small groups will rotate among three Response stations each day. Activities focus on the Bible story themes; the Creative Response time includes a snack.

- **Active Response** (games and activities)
- **Bible Response** (Bible story discussion, student book activities)
- **Creative Response** (crafts and snack)

4. Send (10 minutes)

Children will meet in their small groups for a sending blessing and to be dismissed.

Modified schedule

If your VBS program allows for less time, here are scheduling options:

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

Love God and Your Neighbor



Today's Bible experience

Mark 12:28-34

Jesus speaks of the importance of loving God and loving neighbors.

Purpose statement

To discover Jesus' instructions to love God and neighbor

Bible memory

"Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" —Mark 12:28b-29

Fratelli Tutti

#56-86

Bible background

Today's Scripture from Mark and its parallels in other Gospels raise questions that have dogged readers for 20 centuries: What does it look like to love God with every fiber of our being? Who is my neighbor? Who is it that we are to love and tend as faithfully as we feed and groom our own bodies? These are questions that every generation needs to revisit.

Mark's version of the dialogue about the greatest commandment moves slowly and has a contemplative feel to it. Earlier in chapter 12, hostility underlies the verbal sparring between Jesus and the religious authorities, but here, the questioner seems sincere. Perhaps he intends to make peace by focusing everyone's attention on what matters most. At any rate, a sense of awe descends as we tiptoe through this passage, wondering what it means to love God with all our strength, heart, and mind.

In some ways, Jesus' answer is conventional: even the smallest Jewish children would have known the command to love God with all your heart, and they would have seen it written on doorframes, as is described in Deuteronomy 6:4-8. However, the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 19:18). It comes from a rather obscure

passage about not taking revenge. Jesus binds love of God and love of neighbor together in a fresh way that reshapes our understanding of both kinds of love.

In Luke's version of this conversation, the emphasis shifts to loving our neighbors, and Jesus is pushed to define what he means by that. His out-of-the-box reply features a compassionate Samaritan acting as neighbor to the victim of a crime, which we will explore in Day 2 of VBS.

Learning to love God and others is a lifelong pursuit. Children can show their love for God through peaceful and loving relationships with others. They can show their love for others through simple actions that help make the world a good place for themselves and others to enjoy. Throwing away trash, watering a garden, and caring for pets are practical ways for children to nurture God's world and thereby show love for God and others. They can imagine that God longs for a life-giving, beautiful earth to be enjoyed by children for many years in the future.

Use this session to help the children think about concrete ways to show love to others. Make sure that the children feel loved, too.

Session materials

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

Advance preparation

- Pray for the adults and children who will participate in VBS. May they be open to discovering who their neighbors are and how to be a good neighbor.
- Read Mark 12:28-34 and the Bible background (p. 4) to become familiar with today's story. Read the Active Response daily plan and choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups.
- Collect and prepare the materials needed for each activity.

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 and will discover what it means to be a neighbor.
2. **Introduce the activity time.** Explain the directions for the activities you've chosen to do. 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 God, thank you for everyone who is at vacation Bible school today. Be with us as we learn more about loving you and loving our neighbor, as Jesus taught us we are to do. Amen.

Active options

Love God, Love Your Neighbor

1. Have the children sit in a circle on the floor. Invite a child to be It.
2. It will walk behind the circle and gently tap each child on the head. With each tap, It will say, "Love God." However, when It changes to "Love your neighbor," the child who was tapped will stand up and chase It around the circle. It tries to run around the entire circle and sit in the spot where the other child had been. If It successfully reaches the spot the other child has vacated, the other child is the new It. However, if the child tags It, he or she remains It for another turn.

Think about it: Just as It spoke the same phrases over and over, we need to remind ourselves over and over that we are to love God and love our neighbors.

How Can We Love? Charades

Materials

- Charade strips (p. 19)

In preparation, copy and cut out the charade strips and place them in a bowl.

1. Remind children that we are to love the Lord with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We are also to love our neighbors. Invite each child, in turn, to draw a charade strip from the bowl and act it out.
2. Those who are watching the charade will call out "heart," "mind," "soul," or "strength" to say what part of ourselves is showing love. There is no right or wrong answer.

Think about it: We can do many things to show that we love the Lord and love our neighbor. The charades were just a few ideas. Can you think of more?

Every Step of the Way

Materials

- Masking tape or another marker

In preparation, find a large playing area and use the tape to make lines across the playing area. The first line should be the starting line. Subsequent lines should be approximately 6 ft / 2 m apart.

1. Have the children stand along the starting line. Tell them that they will go from one line to the next, and at each line, they will call out, "Love God! Love your neighbor!"
2. Have children begin at the same time at each line, and designate a different movement to go from one line to the next such as: walk backwards, hop, crab walk, crawl, jump, and other movements.
3. When children have completed all of the movements and arrive at the other side, they should choose their favorite movement and return to the starting line.

Think about it: Loving God and loving our neighbors is a lot to remember. But if we go step-by-step, it's easier to remind ourselves of these things.

Memory Verse Treasure Hunt

Materials

- Treasure hunt clues (see handout)
- Memory verse (one per child) (see handout)
- Bibles

In preparation, copy and cut apart the treasure hunt clues and hide them according to the directions below. Copy and cut apart one memory verse per child, and place them as the treasure that will be found at the offering plates (Clue 11).

If you have a large group you may want to divide children into smaller groups. Make sure that older children are with younger children, and that there are adults ready to help children find and read the Bible verses.

1. Give Clue 1 to the children to begin the treasure hunt. Make sure that children have Bibles so that they can look up clues.
2. When children find the Bible memory verse as the treasure, read it together and talk about what it means.

- Clue 1: give to the group to begin the treasure hunt
- Clue 2: hide at the main entrance (gates) of the building
- Clue 3: hide in the pastor's study or office
- Clue 4: hide at the church mailboxes (letters)
- Clue 5: hide at a drinking fountain
- Clue 6: hide in the sanctuary
- Clue 7: hide in the library
- Clue 8: hide in the kitchen
- Clue 9: hide in the nursery
- Clue 10: hide at the pulpit
- Clue 11: hide near the offering plates/baskets

Think about it: What are some ways we can show that we love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength? How can we show that we love our neighbors as ourselves?