



Creative 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 Creative Response time

A variety of craft options are offered each day and are designed to help children think about being a good neighbor. Read the options carefully and choose the ones that will work best for your groups and the children's ages and abilities. Each of the options uses easy-to-find materials; you may want to have an adult or youth who is not otherwise involved in VBS to collect the materials you need. If there are several ideas 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 another day.

Make the crafts ahead of time to make sure you understand the directions. Show your craft to the children as a sample of what they will make. Do not expect children to make their crafts identical to yours; instead, allow children to use their creativity during this time. You may want to choose one craft for everyone to make, or you may want to set up craft stations around the room and allow children to choose what they would like to do. Some crafts require more adult supervision than others, particularly with younger groups, so invite adults and youth to help you.

Snack suggestions are offered each day to be served during the Creative Response time, and the snack ideas relate to the Bible stories in some way. Invite adults and youth who are not otherwise involved in VBS to prepare the snacks and clean up afterward. Have napkins or small plates on hand, as well as cups for juice or water. Make sure children wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before eating.

Offer a prayer of thanks as you begin snack time.

- Your church may have a favorite spoken or sung prayer that children can learn and repeat together.
- Invite children to lead out in prayer, saying prayers they have learned at home or making up their own prayers.
- Offer a simple prayer, such as: *Dear God, thank you for vacation Bible school, where we can learn about our neighbors. Thank you for this food. Amen.*

Be aware of children with gluten intolerance or nut or other allergies. Have alternative foods on hand if necessary.

Pay attention to how your meeting space is set up. It is ideal to have at least two areas or tables—one for snacks and another for crafts—if space is available.

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

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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

- Snack, water or juice
- Napkins, small plates, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Supplies (see list with each creative option)

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. 5) to become familiar with today's story. Read the Creative Response daily plan and choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups.
- Make craft samples ahead of time to be sure you understand the directions, and so that children can see what they will make.
- Prepare a snack. Be aware of children who may have food allergies or gluten intolerances. Have alternate foods on hand, if needed.

Daily plan

1. **Greet the children.** Welcome them to the first day of vacation Bible school! Explain that during this time they will enjoy a snack and make crafts that go along with the Bible story, and will discover what it means to be a neighbor.
2. **Share a snack.** Use the option listed, or use your own idea. Pass out plates, napkins, and cups of water or juice. Have the children wash their hands or use hand sanitizer or wet wipes before eating.
3. **Do a creative activity** that goes along with the story. Afterward, take time to discuss the "Think about it" questions listed after each activity, making connections between the activity and the Bible story.
4. **Allow time for cleanup.** Explain expectations for cleaning the areas and putting projects away. Decide whether the projects will be kept at Bible school, taken home, or distributed in another way. Make sure all projects have names written on them.
5. **Close in prayer:**

Dear God, thank you so much for Jesus and the wise words he spoke. Help us to do our best to love God and love our neighbors. Amen.

Be aware of anyone with food allergies or gluten intolerance. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.

Snack

Cinnamon Toast Hearts

- Bread
- Heart-shaped cookie cutters
- Butter
- Cinnamon-sugar mixture in a shaker
- Knife
- Toaster oven or oven

Give each child a slice of bread and a cookie cutter. Demonstrate how to use a cookie cutter to make a heart of bread. Put the hearts in the toaster oven until toasted, then place them on napkins and return to the children. They will spread butter on their slices, then sprinkle them with the cinnamon-sugar mixture.

Left-over bread pieces can be made into bread crumbs, fed to animals, or composted.

Think about it: Today's story says that we are to love God with our whole hearts, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Enjoy this heart and its sweetness, as a reminder of what God wants us to do.

Creative Options

Let Your Love Shine! Candle Holders

Materials

- Small glass jars (one per child)
- Glue and water mixture
- Shallow pans
- Paintbrushes
- Colorful tissue paper
- Glitter
- Tea light candles
- Newspaper

In preparation, make a glue and water mixture of one part water and two parts glue. Cover the work tables with newspaper. Pour the mixture into shallow pans and set them around the work space.

1. Allow each child to choose a small glass jar, and instruct them to paint a layer of glue and water onto it.
2. Demonstrate how to carefully tear the tissue paper into assorted shapes and sizes, and then press the pieces onto the painted jar. The tissue paper may overlap with other pieces of tissue paper.
3. Have the children brush more of the glue and water mixture onto their jar, making sure the surface is smooth.
4. After children are finished with their jars, they may sprinkle glitter onto the glue.
5. When the jars are dried they may put a tea light inside, and when it is lit it will shine through the paper.

Think about it: The lights will shine in these candle holders. That's a lot like love—we want it to shine from us, too. And we can do that through kind, caring actions which show that we love God and we love our neighbors.

Neighbor Bracelets

Materials

- Plastic lacing (two per child)
- Colorful beads (ten per child)

In preparation, cut the lacing to fit children's wrists.

1. Give each child two lacings, and allow the children to choose ten beads. Help the children to tie knots about 4 in / 10 cm from one end of the lacing.
2. Have the children string five beads onto each lacing, then knot the opposite ends to secure the beads.
3. Children may help each other tie one bracelet on their arms for them to keep. Tell the children that they are to give the second bracelet to someone who is a good neighbor to them, someone who is not at VBS.

Think about it: We can show people we are caring neighbors by doing kind, helpful things. The bracelets are one way to show that we care.

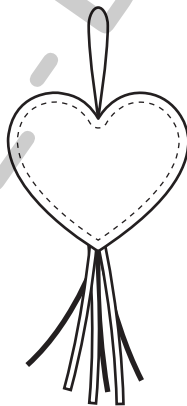
Heart Mobile

Materials

- Heart templates (see handout)
- Cardstock
- Felt squares or other heavy fabric (two per child)
- Yarn
- Craft glue
- Glitter, sequins, other decorations
- Cotton batting or stuffing, or cotton balls
- Ribbon
- Fabric scissors
- Sewing needles
- Fine-tip markers

In preparation, cut one heart template out of cardstock for each child.

1. Have children use their heart templates to trace the hearts onto felt, then cut them out. Each child will need two hearts. You may need to have extra adults and youth on hand to help the younger children trace and cut their hearts.
2. Demonstrate how to place the hearts together and carefully stitch around the edges. Leave one space at the bottom of the heart open for the cotton stuffing. (Instead of sewing, you could use craft glue.)
3. Demonstrate how to insert a small amount of cotton batting into the heart, then finish stitching.
4. Children may use craft glue to decorate their hearts with glitter, sequins, or other decorative items.
5. Older children, and adults or youth helping younger children, will use a needle and yarn to make a loop of about 8–12 in / 20–30 cm in length at the top of the heart, so that it can be hung.
6. Children may want to glue ribbon onto the bottom of the heart.



Think about it: Today's story is about loving God and loving our neighbors. Hang this heart where you can see it every day as a reminder of Jesus' words.

Love Prints

Materials

- Styrofoam (one square per child)
- Popsicle or craft sticks
- Tempera paint
- Paintbrushes
- Small dishes
- Construction paper
- Markers
- Painting smocks
- Newspaper

In preparation, cut Styrofoam into paper-sized pieces, one for each child. Cover the work table with newspaper, and pour paints into small dishes and set them around the table.

1. Give each child a piece of Styrofoam and a painting smock. Have them use the markers to write LOVE backwards onto the Styrofoam. They might want to write their names backwards on the Styrofoam as well.
2. Have the children use the popsicle or craft sticks to press into the letters to make an imprint.
3. The children will paint over the entire piece of Styrofoam and may use more than one color if they wish.
4. Demonstrate how to carefully place a piece of construction paper onto the Styrofoam, and pat the paper so that the paint gets on it.
5. Demonstrate how to carefully pull the paper away from the Styrofoam. The print will be revealed!

Think about it: Today's story is about loving God and loving our neighbors. This print will remind us of that, every time we look at it.