

THE GREAT
Jungle
JOURNEY
AnswersVBS

HELPER
HANDBOOK

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It's a Jungle Out There!

Listen! Can you hear a howler monkey screeching and insects buzzing? *Look!* Do you see a sloth hanging from a tree and a jaguar crouching, ready to pounce? *Smell!* Is that the aroma of tropical flowers wafting through the air? *Touch!* Do you feel soft grass under your feet and gentle rain on your skin? *Taste!* Is that delicious milk from a coconut and exotic spices from the rainforest?

Join us in a world of wonder that will delight our senses while captivating our hearts and minds at *The Great Jungle Journey: An Epic Cruise from Genesis to Revelation*. We will cruise through jungle rivers, making stops at seven ports of call along the way—each starting with a C. These represent seven key biblical events—the 7 C's of History.

Day 1: Creation—Our first C takes us back to the beginning of time and the creation of the universe when it was all good. Did the universe start with a big bang, or did God create it?

Day 2: Corruption and Catastrophe—Next, Adam sinned, which affected his descendants, who were so wicked that God sent a global flood as judgment for their sin.

Day 3: Confusion—The fourth C checks out the events that began at the tower of Babel. Can this be where all the people groups originated from?

Day 4: Christ and the Cross—At these stops, we realize once again that man is sinful and needs a Savior. Hallelujah, God provides one in his Son!

Day 5: Consummation—The last C shows the thrilling conclusion to history when all goes back to very good

again, and—best news ever—God wins against sin and Satan.

Excitement and adventure await from the first minute of each day when kids meet in travel groups. The groups gather at the **Jungle Jam Assembly**, a high-energy beginning that includes wacky intros, lively songs, a Mission Moment, and prayer.

Then they're off to rotate through five fun sites:

Rain or Shine Bible Time, where God's Word is taught in creative, hands-on ways.

Tree-mendous Science and Crafts, where kids make jazzy jungle crafts and explore God's amazing world with science experiments.

Canopy Café Snacks, where travelers go bananas, munching on tropical treats and eats.

Rainforest Recreation, where kids rumble in the jungle with some wet and wild games.

Travelers' Missions, Music, and Memory Verses, where kids sing songs, learn their memory verses with fun games, or go in-depth with the Mission Moment featuring Children's Hunger Fund.

Finally, everyone heads back to the **Jungle Jam Assembly** for the closing, where there's more singing, contest results, and the highly anticipated daily drama. This follows a jungle river cruise that plans to make stops at different ports of call but faces a catastrophe that affects the plan, resulting in lots of unexpected rainforest adventures.

Prepare to swing into the fun as we head out on our jungle river cruise. See you in the rainforest!

Our Goal

We are so thankful for how God has chosen to use the Answers VBS programs over the past years! But why did we decide to embark on such an undertaking in the first place, and why are we still at it by God's grace?

Our primary goal has always been to bring God glory by boldly and unashamedly proclaiming him to a strategic group—young people! From both a biblical and statistical point of view, young people are a big deal. They're not only awesome—we love 'em!—but they're also dearly cherished by our Lord and tend to be softhearted toward spiritual things. Researchers generally agree most people become Christians when they're children, so it's apparent this age group is a huge mission field!

Children are loved by their Creator, and Jesus said to let them come to him (Luke 18:16). We want children to come

to Christ and not be hindered in any way from doing so. To that end, we combine a biblically rich VBS with off-the-chart, irresistible fun. In a day and age when content sometimes suffers, we don't want to sacrifice rich teaching. But it's also crucial that the most exciting book in the world not come across as boring or irrelevant. We want to reflect our creative, inspiring, joy-giving God who made laughter and fun.

So why do we do it? We want kids around the world to hear about and personally meet our awesome God and understand how they can receive eternal life through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. We believe VBS is a great way to introduce them to God, as it is one of the biggest outreaches of the year for most churches.

We pray you will find that every prayer prayed, every minute invested, every dollar spent, and every word spoken will bring God glory as you reach kids for Christ. Just remember—VBS is worth it. May God richly bless your VBS. We're praying for you!

Frequently Asked Questions

The content of *The Great Jungle Journey* may be new to you. For a list of helpful articles on the topics covered in this VBS program, please visit AnswersVBS.com/junglefaq.

Terms to Know

Throughout the VBS curriculum, various terms will be used. Here is a list of some of the most common terms you should know.

Travel Groups/Travelers: Groups of children (individual classes) named after jungle animals, such as Bengal Tigers, Butterflies, Toucans, or Howler Monkeys.

Group Guides: Group leaders who lead the travelers from place to place during VBS. No teaching is required of this position.

Rain or Shine Bible Time: Bible and apologetics lesson time in the jungle.

River Guides: Teachers of the Rain or Shine Bible Time.

Tree-mendous Science and Crafts: Rotation site where crafts are made and science experiments are explored.

Canopy Café Snacks: Indoor or outdoor location where snacks are served.

Rainforest Recreation: Indoor or outdoor site (outdoor is preferred) for recreation time.

Travelers' Missions, Music, and Memory Verses: Rotation sites where kids can spend additional time learning songs, memory verses, and missions.

Memory Verse: Daily Bible verse to learn.

Animal Pals: Our friendly animal mascots that remind us of the main themes of each day.

Toddlers: 2-4-year-olds.

Pre-Primaries: 4-6-year-olds or children ages 4 through those who have completed kindergarten.

Primaries: 6-9-year-olds or children who have completed grades 1-3.

Juniors: 9-12-year-olds or children who have completed grades 4-6.

For multi-age K-6 travel groups, we recommend using the material for the Primaries.

Staff Devotions

Devotion 1: God Is the Good Creator

The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. Psalm 145:9

For a few moments, imagine yourself strolling through a section of the garden of Eden. This beautiful abundance of flora and fauna was just declared by the Creator to be “very good.” The creation was a manifestation of the goodness of the Creator. In your mind’s eye, how does this original paradise reflect the goodness of God?

Do the flowers fill the air with glorious fragrances? Do the serpents hanging from the trees fill you with delight at their bright colors and silky smooth skin? Do you gently stroke the thick fur of the large bear to your right? Do you gasp in awe at the towering sauropod as he lumbers past?

Contrast this with the view that Carl Sagan held about God and his creation:

“If God is omnipotent and omniscient, why didn’t he start the universe out in the first place so it would come out the way he wants? Why is he constantly repairing and complaining? No, there’s one thing the Bible makes clear: The biblical God is a sloppy manufacturer. He’s not good at design, he’s not good at execution. He’d be out of business if there was any competition” (Carl Sagan, *Contact* [New York: Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster, 1985]).

In Sagan’s Eden, the flowers God created prick you with thorns when you bend over to inhale their fragrance. The serpent slithering past your feet inspires a fearful shriek. The lion creeping up behind the lamb suddenly

takes a bite out of it. And the dinosaurs are nowhere to be seen because they died out millions of years ago.

What important factor did Carl Sagan fail to take into account? *He believed that the world we live in today is the world God originally created. He didn’t understand that we now live in a fallen world—a world that has been corrupted with sin. His view has been colored by the belief that the world is millions of years old and that the fossil record—filled with evidence of death, disease, suffering, and thorns—is a record of the way things have been for the past several million years.*

Carl Sagan isn’t alone in viewing the Creator this way. Media mogul Ted Turner and even Charles Darwin himself are just a few of the many who can’t comprehend the goodness of God because of what they see today.

Although all of creation shouts, “There is a God!” (Romans 1:20), it has been marred with our sin.

Read Psalm 33:5. In what ways do you see the love of God still reflected in his creation?

In what ways do you see the effects of our sin?

Think about how you represent the all-good Creator to those in your care. For example, are the “design features” you share with your children reflective of a good God or a fallen creation?

As you present today’s C, do so in a way that emphasizes the goodness of

God. His original creation was complete and “very good.” It was full of life, peace, and joy. He provided light for us to see by (day 1), air for us to breathe (day 2), vegetation for us to eat (day 3), majestic arrays of stars to study before bed (day 4), abundant fauna for us to enjoy (days 5–6), and a creation for us to care for. He created for his glory.

Read Psalm 107:1, 15, and 119:68, as well as this Puritan prayer about the infinite goodness of the Creator.

King of glory, divine majesty,
Every perfection adorns thy nature
and sustains thy throne;
The heavens and earth are thine,
The world is thine and its fullness.

Thy power created the universe
from nothing;

Thy wisdom has managed all its
multiple concerns,
Presiding over nations, families,
individuals.

Thy goodness is boundless;
All creatures wait on thee;
Are supplied by thee;
Are satisfied in thee.

How precious are the thoughts of thy
mercy and grace!
How excellent thy lovingkindness that
draws men to thee!

—Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
Trust, 2005), 216.

Devotion 2: God Is Our Righteous Judge

The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. Deuteronomy 32:4

After every tragedy, the media abounds with reports of people asking, “If there is a good and loving God, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world?” Have you ever asked this question or heard this question asked?

As the infinitely good God, the Creator fashioned a world that manifested his goodness according to his pleasure and for his glory. He established rules for his creation to follow. The standard to which he held his creation is himself: absolute goodness. With one bite of fruit, Adam fell short of that standard. With every act of disobedience, we too fall short of his standard.

Because God is absolutely pure and holy, untouched by sin, he cannot partake in sin nor approve of it in others.

He established a penalty for falling short of his standard: death. The goodness and holiness of God demands that he judge sin. As the righteous judge, he had no choice but to carry out the punishment that he had set for breaking his rules.

He imposed a sentence from which we have no means of escaping on our own. We can’t get away from our punishment for sin—death, eternal separation from our Creator.

When a murderer is given a sentence for his crime, do we blame the judge who sentenced him? The answer to the age-old question, “Why?” lies not at the feet of the Creator but in the bite of a fruit by man.

As you share with the children today about the second and third C's in our journey through time—the corruption that entered the universe after Adam sinned and the catastrophe that resulted from God's judgment on sin—be careful to emphasize that the mess we find ourselves in is not the fault of our good and loving Creator. This helps children answer the “why” question when they encounter a tragedy. In general, this is the result of living in a cursed world, which is the deserved punishment for sin. We need to also continually point them toward the great gift that the Creator has for us (salvation through Jesus Christ), which we'll talk more about later.

Read Psalm 89:14 and think about the words of this Puritan prayer.

Thou Maker and Sustainer of
all things,
Day and night are thine,
heaven and earth declare thy glory;
But I, a creature of thy power and
bounty, have sinned against thee
by resisting the dictates of
conscience,
the demands of thy law,
the calls of thy gospel;
yet I live under the dispensation of a
given hope.
Deliver me from worldly dispositions,
for I am born from above and bound
for glory.
May I view and long after holiness
as the beauty and dignity of
the soul.

—Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
Trust, 2005), 139.

Devotion 3: God Is the Infinite Sustainer

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. Acts 17:26–27

Imagine if our entire world spoke the same language. Even with our English-speaking world of over 300 million people, what have we accomplished?

It's easy to pat ourselves on our backs about how much we have done. This attitude is perhaps best demonstrated at NASA. A tour of the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, USA, provides a glimpse at the massive machines and impressive technology NASA scientists have produced. During one segment of the tour, a narrator intones that with man “nothing is impossible.” Another

narrator, an astronaut, affirms this attitude, “Whatever we can conceive, we can achieve.”

Do such arrogant statements shock you?

If you're familiar with today's lesson, they shouldn't. Read Genesis 11:4–6.

At the time of the tower of Babel, people arrogantly thought they could achieve whatever they wanted. However, God judged their rebellion by bringing a multiplicity of languages, causing them to scatter over the earth.

Why does mankind today have this same philosophy: "And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (Genesis 11:6)?

Ever since the temptation in the garden of Eden, when Satan said Eve would be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5), mankind has been in rebellion against God, trying to be god. The first judgment was the entrance of death into the world. Later, God judged mankind's rebellion with a watery catastrophe. And in today's lesson, we find a judgment that included a confusion of mankind's one common language into many languages.

So, what should our attitude be? Read Acts 17:24-31. These verses show that God is the Infinite Sustainer of all things—apart from him, we can do nothing. He gives us life, breath, and everything else. In him, we live and move and have our being.

Today, let's look for opportunities to show the children the importance of walking humbly before the Infinite Sustainer, recognizing our continual need for him. We need to carefully reflect any glory that might come our way to God, and teach our children to do the same.

Read Colossians 1:15-17 and think about this Puritan prayer.

O God All-Sufficient,
Thou hast made and upholdest all
things by the word of thy power;
darkness is thy pavilion,
thou walkest on the wings of the wind;
all nations are nothing before thee;
one generation succeeds another,
and we hasten back to the dust;
the heavens we behold will
vanish away
like the clouds that cover them,

the earth we tread on will dissolve as
a morning dream;

But thou, unchangeable and
incorruptible,
art for ever and ever,

God over all, blessed eternally.
Infinitely great and glorious art thou.
We are thy offspring and thy care.
Thy hands have made and
fashioned us.

Thou hast watched over us with more
than parental love,
more than maternal tenderness.
Thou hast holden our soul in life,
and not suffered our feet to
be moved.

Thy divine power has given us
all things
necessary for life and godliness.

Let us bless thee at all times and
forget not how thou hast
forgiven our iniquities,
healed our diseases,
redeemed our lives from
destruction,
crowned us with
lovingkindness and
tender mercies,
satisfied our mouths with
good things,
renewed our youth like the eagle's.

May thy Holy Scriptures
govern every part of our lives,
and regulate the discharge of all
our duties,
so that we may adorn thy doctrine in
all things.

—Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
Trust, 2005), 211.

Devotion 4: God Is the Sovereign Savior

The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. Psalm 24:1

Fill in the following blanks.

1. ____ told Noah how to build the ark.
2. God provided all that ____ needed, including great wisdom.
3. God brought all the ____ to the ark at just the right time.
4. God provided a seaworthy, safe way for man and animals to ____.
5. God shut the ____ after Noah, his family, and the animals entered the ark.
6. God caused the ____ to cover the entire earth.
7. God directed Noah when to leave the ____.
8. God provided the ____ as a sign that he would never send another global flood.

Based on these statements, what attribute of God do you think we are focusing on today? *He is the sovereign Savior of the world.*

Although each of the questions in the quiz highlights God's sovereign salvation as seen in the account of the Genesis flood, let's focus specifically on number five.

In his instructions for building the ark, God told Noah to put a door in the side of the ark (Genesis 6:16). The ark had only one door to pass through to escape God's terrible judgment. By faith, Noah and his family entered the ark. Once they were all inside, the Lord shut them in (Genesis 7:16).

What is significant about God shutting the door of the ark? After God shut the door, the time of judgment was at hand. Only those who had gone through the doorway would be saved. No one else could enter. Noah and his family had to obey God's command to build and then enter the ark for salvation—but God commanded the construction of the ark as the means of saving Noah's family in this time of judgment.

The ark is a picture of salvation in Jesus Christ, our "ark" of salvation. Jesus said that he is the door of salvation (John 10:9).

The Bible makes it clear that we are dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). Nothing we can do can save us from our sin and its consequence of eternal separation from God. But the Bible also tells us that if we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead, we will be saved (Romans 10:9). We are saved by grace through faith as a result of God's gift to us (Ephesians 2:8). Salvation is all due to God. Our responsibility is to go through the doorway (Jesus), and God will save us.

The next judgment will be by fire (2 Peter 3:5–12). God has provided salvation through the ark—his Son, Jesus Christ. Many are hearing the warning of the coming judgment, but who will enter through the God-given means of salvation—the death and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf? A time is

coming when God will close this door.
Are we ready?

Let's close this time by reading Acts 4:10–12 and thinking about this Puritan prayer.

Sovereign Lord,
Thy will is supreme in heaven
and earth,
and all beings are creatures of
thy power.
Thou art the Father of our spirits;
thy inspiration gives us
understanding,
thy providence governs our lives.
But, O God, we are sinners in
thy sight;

thou hast judged us so,
and if we deny it we make
thee a liar.

Yet in Christ thou art reconciled to thy
rebellious subjects;
Give us the ear of faith to hear him,
the eye of faith to see him,
the hand of faith to receive him,
the appetite of faith to feed
upon him;
that we might find in him light,
riches, honour, eternal life.

—Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
Trust, 2005), 222.

Devotion 5: God Is the Loving Redeemer

Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47

As we wrap up our journey from Genesis to Revelation, let's take a look at the connection between the seven C's.

God is the Good Creator: The one who created a "very good" world is the one who will restore his creation to its original glory.

The one who created the first man is the one who came to be the second man—the last Adam.

The one who breathed into Adam the breath of life is the one who gives eternal life to his children.

God is the Righteous Judge: The one who sentenced the first man to death for his rebellion is the one who came and suffered the sentence of death on behalf of mankind.

God is the Infinite Sustainer: The one who created time is the one who stepped into time so that he could live as a human.

The one who confused the languages at Babel is the one before whom people from every tribe, nation, and tongue will bow and worship.

The one who scattered the people around the world is the one who commands us to go into all the world and preach the gospel, making disciples of all nations.

God is the Sovereign Savior: The one who provided an ark for Noah and his family is the one who provided the Savior of the world.

The one who judged the world with water is the one who will judge the world with fire.

The one in whom all things hold together is the one who became part of his creation, born as a baby.

Today, let's take a look at another attribute of God seen in the last C.

God is the Loving Redeemer: The one who killed animals to cover the sin of Adam and Eve is the one who came to bleed on the cross for sinners.

The one who placed a curse on the creation is the one who came to redeem his creation from the curse.

The one who promised to send someone to crush the head of the serpent is the one who fulfilled the promise by rising from the dead, conquering the "last enemy."

The one who created the heavens and earth is the one who will create a new heavens and earth wherein righteousness and his children will dwell.

Why has God done all this? "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16).

As you talk with the children today, look for opportunities to share the love of the Creator and Redeemer with them, pointing them toward the one who has done so much for us.

Let's close by reading 1 Corinthians 15:21 and thinking about this Puritan prayer.

O Thou Most High,
 Creator of the ends of the earth,
 Governor of the universe,
 Judge of all men,

Head of the church,
 Savior of sinners;
 thy greatness is unsearchable,
 thy goodness infinite,
 thy compassions unfailing,
 thy providence boundless,
 thy mercies ever new.

We bless thee for the words of salvation.

How important, suitable, encouraging are the doctrines, promises, and invitations

of the gospel of peace!

We are lost: but in it thou hast presented to

us a full, free and eternal salvation;
 weak: but here we learn that help is found

in one that is mighty;
 poor: but in him we discover unsearchable

riches,
 blind: but we find he has treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

We thank thee for thy unspeakable gift.

Thy Son is our only refuge, foundation, hope, confidence;

We depend upon his death,
 rest in his righteousness,
 desire to bear his image;

May his glory fill our minds,
 his love reign in our affections,
 his cross inflame us with ardour.

—Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 219.

Top 20 Tips When Working with Children

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 19:13-14

1. **Show love.** All children, regardless of age or appearance, need to be loved. Greet them warmly each day and always be ready with smiles, giggles, encouraging words, and appropriate hugs. (Be aware of your church's appropriate touching policies.)
2. **Learn names.** It makes children feel important and loved to be called by their names. Make sure a visible name tag is always on each child.
3. **Keep it moving.** Children have short attention spans.
4. **Use active learning.** The more children can be actively involved in the learning process, the more they will retain.
5. **Be all there!** During VBS, determine to leave behind whatever is currently going on in your life and focus your attention on the children under your care. Listen to them and care for them.
6. **Eliminate downtime.** Find activities to do when you have a few free minutes so all time is being used in a fun and productive way. Practice memory verses, share Terrific Trivia Tidbits and jokes (Feroiously Fun Jokes) from this book, play impromptu review games, or ask fun conversation starters. Check the Two-Minute Tips page at the back of this guide for specific ideas.
7. **Think safety.** Read the Child Safety Precautions page. Ensure there are always at least two unrelated adults with the children at all times.
8. **Be thematic.** Children love costumes, fun cheers, songs, and anything that goes with the theme. Participate in the daily contests. Get the children enthused and excited about participating in the other aspects of the daily contests as well.
9. **Walk worthy.** Be an example in both word and deed. Children need to see authentic Christianity, so make sure you are walking the walk and not just talking the talk.
10. **Notice the good.** Children want attention and will sometimes act up in an effort to receive attention, even if it is negative attention. Be proactive by noticing and praising the things they do right. Be an encourager.
11. **Be aware of age-level characteristics.** With younger children, activities need to be hands-on, concrete, short, and simple. Older children love to talk and are processing and questioning information. Be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you.

12. **Challenge them.** Children generally rise to the level expected of them, so challenge them to learn their memory verses and song lyrics. At the same time, encourage in them a true love for the Lord and his Word.
13. **Pray.** Before, during, and after VBS, be a faithful prayer warrior for the children in your care.
14. **Be organized.** Read through all training information, ask questions, and faithfully prepare any materials for which you are responsible.
15. **Be a team player.** Children do not need to hear negative words from their leaders. If you are frustrated or upset, take it to the Lord, but do not complain or get angry in front of the children.
16. **Remember to take bathroom breaks.** The younger the children, the more important this is!
17. **Maintain order.** Children like order! Think through potential trouble spots in your day and decide on a firm, loving discipline strategy. Ask for help from experienced individuals.
18. **Build team spirit.** Work as a team rather than allowing cliques to develop. Everyone should be an important member of the team.
19. **Use guided conversation.** Be alert and ready to turn conversations to spiritual matters. Build upon what the children are learning throughout the VBS day.
20. **Be prepared to lead a child to Christ.** Attend the Gospel Workshop to be equipped should God give you the awesome opportunity to talk with a child about Christ.

Age-Level Characteristics

Kids are awesome! Each one is unique and is a special creation from the hand of our amazing Creator. With all their uniqueness, however, they also share some common characteristics. That doesn't mean every child always exhibits the following characteristics at the corresponding age, but these guidelines can be a benchmark to use when looking at characteristics of children as a

whole. It can be helpful to see how God has wired children as they develop, enabling us to be more effective in teaching and interacting with them.

First, you'll see characteristics of children in general and then characteristics broken down by the four age groups we use with Answers VBS.

Common Characteristics

- Children are born sinners.
- God has given each a conscience, and they (generally) want good to win over evil.
- God has shown himself to all children through his creation, making it obvious to all that there is a Creator.
- Children enjoy active learning—moving around, seeing things, touching things, smelling and hearing things, and being involved.
- Children need to be loved, encouraged, and praised.
- Children are rapidly growing and changing.
- Children trust the adults who are responsible for them.
- Children can get discouraged by criticism and failure.
- Children are eager to learn and are curious about the world and about God.

Toddlers (2–4 years old)

Physical Characteristics

Toddlers are active! They're on the move, running, climbing, and exploring. Some are beginning to perform simple tasks like using scissors. They can easily get hurt as they are rapidly developing physical skills but don't have wisdom to know when to stop running, climbing, etc.

Takeaways for Us

- Keep toddlers moving. Engage them actively as much as possible. Have them do motions to songs and actions to Bible accounts.

- Supervise them carefully.
- Provide chunky, nontoxic supplies.
- Intersperse periods of sitting with something active.

Emotional/Social Characteristics

Toddlers want to do things by themselves, such as picking out their clothes and dressing themselves. They like imaginative, dramatic play. They're testing their powers and saying "no" a lot. They often want to please adults and try to mimic their behaviors. They're affectionate toward others.

Toddlers are fearful of things that are loud and out of the ordinary.

Takeaways for Us

- Let toddlers be helpers. Give them simple one-step jobs to do and have them help pick up things and straighten the room at the end of the lesson. Let them know they've done a good job.
- Be consistently present all week; establish routines and stick with them.
- Be consistent in discipline. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no."
- Give them opportunities to dress up and play imaginatively.
- Don't dress in elaborate costumes that may seem unfamiliar and scary.
- Be careful to walk worthy—act and speak in godly ways. Little eyes are watching and will want to imitate you!

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

Toddlers are curious and want to touch, smell, feel, see, and experience their world. They have short attention spans and learn and communicate in short sentences. They understand short and simple directions. They believe what you say. Their attitude toward God and others is in the process of being formed during these years.

Takeaways for Us

- Involve toddlers' senses in learning! The more they can touch, smell, see, taste, and feel, the better!
- Give clear, simple directions.
- Keep activities and lessons short. Toddlers' attention spans are only a few minutes long before they need to switch to something new, so keep it moving!
- Be careful to speak accurately and truthfully.
- Show care and respect for your Bible and help them see your love for it and for the Lord.

Pre-Primaries (4–6 years old)

Physical Characteristics

Pre-Primaries are active and more confident in physical activities like jumping, hopping on one foot, and walking backward. They love to be moving. They're improving in hand-eye coordination.

Takeaways for Us

- Pre-Primaries like to play hard, so keep them moving with short, simple games and activities. They may need to sit and rest for a brief time after active play.

Emotional/Social Characteristics

Pre-Primaries are less fearful than toddlers but may still be afraid of common things like dogs or the dark. They can have emotional extremes and are testing others to see who can be controlled. They want to please adults and want praise. They will often mimic adults' behaviors. They like imaginative play. Pre-Primaries can handle small tasks and levels of responsibility.

Takeaways for Us

- Let them be helpers. Give them simple jobs to do, and have them

help pick up things and straighten the room at the end of the lesson. Let them know they've done a good job.

- Give them opportunities to dress up and play imaginatively.
- Be consistent in discipline. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no."
- Be careful to walk worthy—act and speak in godly ways. Little eyes are watching and will want to imitate you!

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

Pre-Primaries talk a lot and ask a lot of questions, including questions about God. They understand that sin is disobeying God. They need a lot of guidance in tasks but can also follow a simple series of directions. They have an attention span of approximately five minutes. They enjoy doing new things and hearing stories and songs. They're not always able to tell the difference between reality and fantasy. They're developing attitudes toward right and wrong and can do basic memory work.

Takeaways for Us

- In downtime, give them time to ask questions and be ready to patiently

answer! During teaching time, however, be careful you don't get so wrapped up in letting them talk that the lesson doesn't happen!

- Vary activities often—every 5–10 minutes.
- When engaged in pretend activities, name them as such (e.g., "Let's pretend to be explorers!"). At the same time, point out often that God's Word is not pretend but true!
- Repetition in songs and stories works great and is enjoyed by Pre-Primaries.
- Sing the memory verse songs with them. They will be able to learn at least parts of the verses by the end of the week.
- Use visuals.
- Teach them about sin and asking God for forgiveness.
- Show interest in each child, helping them sense your care and interest in them.
- Be careful to speak accurately and truthfully.
- Show care and respect for your Bible and help them see your love for it and for the Lord.

Primaries (6–9 years old)

Physical Characteristics

Primaries love games and competitions, but it can be hard for them to lose. They are continuing to grow and improve in hand-eye coordination and fine and gross motor skills. They need to have opportunities for movement.

Takeaways for Us

- Use games to teach! Primaries love any kind of games, whether active or learning-type games.
- Help them learn to take turns and to be good winners and good losers! Both winning and losing well are important in God's sight.
- Use boy versus girl competitions to get them revved up! As long as you

keep it light and fun, they will enjoy these times.

Emotional/Social Characteristics

Primaries are becoming more independent and confident in their ability to do things. Girls play most often with girls and boys with boys, but there is some mixing of girl and boy friends. They like to have a best friend and enjoy pretend play. Primaries enjoy jokes and are gaining a sense of humor. They care about being accepted by the team and want adult and teacher approval.

Takeaways for Us

- Give Primaries plenty of opportunities to work in teams or with partners.
- Use humor with Primaries. The sillier, the better!
- Be careful to walk worthy—act and speak in godly ways.

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

Primaries like to talk and ask questions. They understand simple concepts and sentences and are concrete rather than abstract or symbolic thinkers. They're learning to read. They need active learning. Their attention span is growing. They understand the consequences of their actions. They can tell the difference between reality and fantasy. They often have a strict sense of right and wrong.

Takeaways for Us

- Be concrete in what you say. Don't use abstract or symbolic language. For example, regarding salvation, don't ask if they have Jesus in their hearts. They will take that literally. Becoming a child of God, or being in God's family, is a more concrete way to express the same concept, as they will understand what it means to be in a family.
- Although their attention spans are growing, it's still good to vary activities and involve Primaries with movement as much as possible.
- Some children read better than others. Be careful about asking children to read out loud. Try asking for volunteers.
- Small print can be a challenge, so use larger print when possible.
- Encourage memorization.
- Use visuals.
- Show interest in each child, helping them sense your care and interest in them.
- Be careful to speak accurately and truthfully. Explain Bible words and concepts even if you think they are widely understood.
- Remember that you are a role model.
- Show care and respect for your Bible and help them see your love for it and for the Lord.

Juniors (9–12 years old)

Physical Characteristics

Juniors can vary widely as they grow, with some having a growth spurt that launches them into puberty. (This can make them get tired easily.) Height, weight, and physical maturity can be

all across the board. Their stamina, strength, and coordination are improving, and some are becoming known for their athletic abilities. Juniors enjoy going places and doing interesting things.

Takeaways for Us

- Don't comment on physical appearance, such as how tall someone is. Juniors can feel sensitive and awkward about their bodies.
- Make sure to help each child realize how special and uniquely created by God he or she is. Some have giftings and talents physically, some musically, some academically, etc. They need to be assured that they are God's masterpiece, created exactly as they are for a special purpose.
- Some love being active, and some don't, but it's good to keep them involved and moving.

Emotional/Social Characteristics

Juniors can't wait to grow up. They look up to teenagers and young adults. They like challenges and may develop interests and hobbies, although they're self-conscious about their abilities and failures. They're becoming more independent and can handle responsibilities. They enjoy close friendships and small group discussion with peers. They're greatly influenced by their friends and want to be accepted. They look to friends for information and advice on issues. They like humor and jokes and most understand sarcasm. As they head into puberty, they may experience mood swings.

Takeaways for Us

- Make sure the teens and young adults in their VBS world are good role models.
- Don't tear down Juniors or resort to sarcasm. Be an encourager, listen well, and be patient with them.
- Incorporate discussion into the lesson and do things that allow teams or

pairings that don't rely solely on the children choosing partners. This helps avoid children repeatedly getting chosen last by peers.

- Be careful to walk worthy—act and speak in godly ways.

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

Juniors are beginning to think abstractly and are asking many questions for which they're looking for good answers. They have a much longer attention span than younger children. Their reading and memorization skills are improving. They're developing their views on current issues and often want to associate themselves with their parents' belief system. They spot inconsistencies in what people do versus what they say. Juniors enjoy serving and caring for others.

Takeaways for Us

- Ask thought-provoking spiritual questions. They are thinking and like to talk. Be there for them as a safe person to bounce thoughts and ideas off of.
- Listen well and pray with them.
- Some children read better than others. Be careful about asking children to read out loud unless they volunteer or you know they can read well.
- Allow them to act out lessons. Most Juniors enjoy this active involvement.
- Give them opportunities to be involved in missions or service projects.
- Challenge them to ask God to help them grow in their love for him and his Word. Help them set up Bible-reading plans and encourage them to memorize passages of Scripture.

- Make sure to walk the walk and not just talk the talk. They can spot inconsistencies, so it's important to walk worthy.
- Show interest in each child, helping them sense your care and interest in them.
- Be careful to speak accurately and truthfully.
- Show care and respect for your Bible and help them see your love for it and for the Lord.

Tips for Managing a Group of Kids

Kids are fun, and kids have energy! Whether you are a group guide, a classroom teacher, or an assistant, be prepared to confidently lead them using some strategies that follow.

Attention Getters

Call and Response—The teacher teaches the kids that when she says something, they reply back with something else. Practice the following ideas so they know your expectations for responding to them.

- » **Teacher:** Chimpanzees!
Kids: Everybody freeze!
- » **Teacher:** 1, 2, 3, 4
Kids: Elephants, tigers, monkeys galore!
- » **Teacher:** Pitter-patter, pitter-patter
Kids: Raindrop, raindrop
- » **Teacher:** Crisscross (they cross their legs)
Kids: Watch for crocs!
- » **Teacher:** Rain
Kids: Forest
Teacher: Rain
Kids: Forest
Teacher: Shh!

Rainstorm—Make the sound of a rainstorm that starts softly with a light rain and gets louder. Start by having everyone rub their hands together, then snap their fingers to get a little louder, then clap their hands (not in rhythmic clapping), then slap their hands on their legs, then stomp their feet. Go in reverse to get back to a light rain.

Countdown—Hold up five fingers and start to count down from five to one. By the count of one, they need to be completely quiet.

Rhythm Claps—The teacher claps a little rhythm and the kids try to clap the exact rhythm back. Vary the clapping patterns.

Soft Talk—Start talking about something important very softly, or in a whisper. Kids will often get quiet to hear what you are saying. Or share a command in a soft voice, such as, “Anyone who hears me, clap once.” Continue to share other commands.

Flash the Lights—This is a good signal to listen up.

Lining Up and Walking Through the Building

If You—Say different categories for lining up in fun ways, such as the following:

- » “If you are wearing red, line up. Now, if you’re wearing blue, line up.”
- » “If your birthday is during the summer, line up. Now, if your birthday is during the school year, line up.”
- » “If you have a dog, line up. Now, if you have a cat, line up. Now, if you have no pets, line up.”
- » “If your first name starts with A–L, line up. Now, if your first name starts with M–Z, line up.”
- » “If you are quiet, line up.”

Let’s Be—When you are leaving a room, encourage good behavior in the hallway by making a game out of it. This works well with younger kids.

- » “Let’s be mice and walk as quietly as we can.”
- » “Let’s be robots. No talking—just stiff movements.”

Proactive Tips

Be Prepared—One of the best ways to ward off discipline problems is to be prepared. If you have things well-organized and have thought through your day so there isn’t downtime, it really helps. Keep things moving! This takes more time on your part but is very worth it.

Active Participation—Keeping kids actively engaged in the lesson is perhaps the best thing you can do to keep the class from getting rowdy. The lessons are written to be creative, fun, and full of active participation. Play the games, act out the Bible accounts, and do the other ideas listed. Occupy kids’ minds and attention with good stuff!

Helpers—Involve the kids. Let them be helpers. Some kids just want to feel wanted, so giving them a responsibility is a way to show you trust them. Try putting them in charge of a simple task like filling out the attendance roster as kids come in to VBS, collecting name tags, carrying crafts, helping others learn memory verses, passing out papers, or holding a poster for the teacher. Sometimes a simple task can keep them busy and make them feel important!

Pray—Some kids may never have had anyone pray for them. Pray not only about behavior situations but also about their eternal souls.

Notice the Good—Sometimes a poor behavior is an attention-seeking device, so be proactive and give

attention to that child so she doesn’t feel the need to act out negatively. Negative behaviors can be a cry for love and attention.

Use Humor—Kids of all ages love to laugh! Have fun together. If you see a situation is getting tense or a child is getting upset for some reason, try thinking of a way to lighten the mood with humor.

Distraction—When young kids are dropped off or start to cry, distracting them is a good technique to try. Ask them to tell you about something on their clothes (“Oh, what’s that on your T-shirt?”), get them talking about some of their favorites, or show them an intriguing toy or puppet.

Keep Them Busy—If there is any downtime, fill it with something productive! This could occur while waiting for the next rotation or the assembly to begin, if craft time ends a few minutes early, etc. Use the time to practice team cheers, ask questions, or go over memory verses in fun ways (make up motions, make them into a rap, etc.). You may also want to play a quick game, like one of the following.

- » **Stone Face**—Have a competition to see which child can hold a frown for the longest without cracking a smile.
- » **I Spy**—Look for jungle things to spy out.
- » **Simon Says**—Simon can say Bible-themed things, like read your Bible (hands in front of you making a book), pray (praying hands), tell others (cup hands around mouth), go to church (make a church with a steeple out of your interlocked hands), etc.

- » **Quiet Mouse**—Have a competition to see who is the quietest in line.
- » **Follow the Leader**—Play the normal version or a jungle river cruise version. A jungle version uses rainforest animals and activities, like the following:

Fly like a scarlet macaw (bird).
 Crouch like a jaguar.
 Crawl like a Goliath birdeater spider.
 Swim like a piranha fish.
 Run like a basilisk lizard (running upright).
 Slither like an anaconda, the world's largest snake.
 Flutter like a blue morpho butterfly.
 Jump like a red-eyed tree frog.
 Trek through the jungle in your Wellington boots.
 Kayak on the Amazon River.
 Climb a tree to see a sloth.

Calming Rowdiness

Don't Yell—Kids may respond at first if someone yells, but they eventually dismiss it. Try some of these other ideas instead.

Separate Kids—Separate kids who misbehave around each other, but also encourage problem-solving when possible. "What are some things we could do to help you and ___ get along?"

Give Choices—Avoid power struggles by giving choices. If a child is resistant to doing something you've asked of her, try your command another way. "You can either sit with the rest of the group and listen to the teacher or sit with ___ (leader's name) at the back of the room."

Praise in Public, Correct in Private—If someone does need correction, be careful not to embarrass him in front of his peers. If you need to talk to a child about a misbehavior, pull him aside at a time when the rest of the group is distracted. Kids will be less defensive if they don't feel they have to "save face" in front of their peers, and if they feel you really care and aren't just coming down on them.

Know Church Policies—Know your church's policy for severe behavior issues. Do you take the child to your VBS director? Do you alert the child's parents? Do you involve other staff members? Be prepared.

Child Safety Precautions

Keeping children safe during VBS is an important responsibility of all VBS workers that requires both prayerful and practical steps. Begin with prayer, praying before and during VBS for God's protection over each child, worker, and visitor. Also, pray for everything to run smoothly with the facility itself. Prayer is a critically important step in your safety plan and should not be taken for granted! Then plan and execute practical steps, such as the following:

- Thoroughly check all areas for cleanliness and safety each day before VBS begins. Remove hazardous or toxic items, cover outlets, put away heavy or dangerous objects, tape down cords, and make sure everything is in good working order. Check both inside and outside the facility.
- Make sure all workers have had background checks.
- Children should be signed in and out of VBS by their caregivers, following your church's check-in/checkout procedures. Release the children only to authorized individuals.
- Always have at least two unrelated adults (eighteen and above) with children, including trips to the bathroom. Children must be well supervised at all times and never be left alone with just one adult or teen.
- Always pair responsible teens with adults.
- Count children every time you move to a different station.
- Enlist qualified members of the church with medical experience to be at the facility during VBS hours. Outline a procedure to quickly find and alert them of any situation needing attention. Make sure an accident report is filled out after any incident.
- Be well aware of which children have which allergies and make sure precautions are taken to protect them.
- Keep ice packs in the freezer for minor bumps.
- Keep adequate first aid kits in safe and handy spots around the facility and make sure the VBS staffers are aware of their locations. Note: Volunteers can give out adhesive bandages or ice packs, but anything more major should be handled by trained personnel or 911 calls.
- Be aware of what the protocol is in case of emergencies.
- One test church has enlisted some additional precautions, including the following:
 - » No men changing diapers.
 - » No sitting in leaders' laps.
 - » No piggyback rides.
 - » No front hugs—side hugs, high fives, and fist bumps instead.
 - » No photos taken or shared on social media of others' kids.
 - » Police officer on-site during VBS hours.
- Continue to brainstorm and implement precautions for your situation, asking God to keep you alert, aware, and wise regarding these issues.

Leading a Child to Christ

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Romans 1:16

VBS presents an ideal opportunity to share the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ with all attending. Every leader and team member should be ready to clearly present the gospel and counsel those wanting to learn more. Children are usually softhearted toward things of the Lord, and some will be interested in becoming a follower of Christ. Be ready, because eternal matters matter most!

Before

- **Pray.** Salvation is God's work, not ours. We cannot bring about salvation for anyone. We need to ask God to prepare the children and open their hearts to him.
- **Be prepared.** Learn more about presenting the gospel and counseling a child about salvation.

During

The gospel will be presented during the lesson time. Opportunities may arise, however, to share with a child one-on-one or with a small group of children. If so, keep the following in mind:

- Becoming a child of God involves repenting of one's sin and having faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Repentance involves understanding what sin is (disobeying God's commands) and desiring to turn from that sin.
- You can use the booklet *How Can I Become a Child of God?* along with your Bible to explain the plan of salvation. Children need to see and

hear God's Word, so have your Bible opened and marked ahead of time with the appropriate scriptures.

- Avoid abstract phrases like "asking Jesus into your heart." Instead, use terminology like "becoming a child of God." Most children still think in concrete terms and need examples that are easy to understand.
- If a child indicates an interest to know more after hearing the gospel presentation, ask questions (such as the following) that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer:
 - » What do you want to talk to me about?
 - » Do you know what sin is?
 - » Can you think of a specific sin (wrong) you have done?
 - » Are you bothered by your sin?

These questions are important.

A child who cannot verbalize a sin or does not seem to be repentant about being a sinner may not fully understand his need for a Savior. In this situation, you might list some child-oriented examples of sin and ask him to notice any time he catches himself sinning over the next few days. Give him the *How Can I Become a Child of God?* booklet. Pray with him, then send him on his way. Check back a day or two later, if possible.

- If the child does seem to be sincerely sorry for his sins, you can proceed with more questions like the following:

- » Why did Jesus come to earth? Why did Jesus need to die? Why did Jesus rise again?
- » Why do you want Jesus to be your Savior?
- » Why should God let you into his family? (Make sure the child understands that salvation is not based on what he does but is a gracious gift of God through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus.)
- Pray for discernment while listening to a child's answers.
- When a child seems to have a basic understanding of salvation (belief in Jesus' death and resurrection, admission of and repentance from sin, and a desire to follow the Lord), encourage him to talk to his parents about what it means to become a child of God (if they are followers of Christ). Encourage a child who comes from a non-Christian home to verbalize his understanding to the Lord through prayer. There is no one prayer that should be prayed. Encourage him to ask the Lord to forgive him and help him know he is a child of God.
- Let him see in your words and your face that you are excited that he wants to become a child of God! Read Luke 15:10 to him.
- Some children may not want to make decisions but may want to learn more, to be assured of salvation, or to confess sin. Read Romans 10:9-10 and John 10:28-29 with children who are seeking assurance of their salvation. Encourage them to ask the Lord to help them know they are his children. If a child wants to confess sin, read 1 John 1:9 with him and encourage him to ask the Lord to

help him know he is forgiven when he repents.

After

- Review what it means to be a child of God.
 - » How long does God keep his children? (Hebrews 13:5; John 10:28-29)
 - » Can anything separate God from his children? (Romans 8:38-39)
 - » What happens when God's children sin? (1 John 1:9)
 - » What do children of God believe? (Romans 10:9)
- Explain that Jesus loves his children and wants to spend time with them. Discuss practical ways to grow as a child of God. Provide him with the *Growing Up in God's Family* booklet and share the following:
 - » Read your Bible and obey what you read. You can start your Bible reading with the short Bible study book you will receive the last day of VBS. (Provide a Bible if he doesn't have one. Be sure to fill out the presentation page.)
 - » Pray every day. Prayer is talking to God.
 - » Go to a church that believes and teaches the Bible as the Word of God.
 - » Tell others about Jesus. Tell your friends, family, and neighbors how they can become children of God.
- Fill out a Decision Card and turn it in to the VBS director.
- Stay in touch with the child through postcards, visits, or phone calls. Invite him to upcoming church events.

ESV Memory Verses

Junior/Primary

Theme Verse: To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17

Day 1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

Day 2: They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. Psalm 14:3

Day 3: Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11:9

Day 4: But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12

Day 5: He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. Revelation 21:4

Pre-Primary/Toddler

Theme Verse: To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17

Day 1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

Day 2: There is none who does good, not even one. Psalm 14:3

Day 3: Babel . . . there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. Genesis 11:9

Day 4: But to all who . . . believed . . . he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12

Day 5: He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Revelation 21:4

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