

...walk with me...

WELCOME TO



...walk with me...

TRAINING MANUAL



Welcome to *Walk With Me*

A Workshop for *Walk With Me* Teachers

Focus

Teachers will be more successful using the *Walk With Me* curriculum if they are aware of the values of the curriculum and are given the tips and encouragement they need to plan and teach *Walk With Me* sessions to a group of children.

Room Setup

Think of something simple you can bring, such as flowers, music, or bright place mats, that will help create a welcoming atmosphere. Arrange the room so that people can talk together around tables. Hang the WWM scope and sequence chart somewhere on your wall, and either place workshop packets on the table(s) or hand them out as you begin the session.

Session Planner

Hello *Become acquainted with each other and receive motivation from God's Word to model what it means to be followers of Jesus as we teach.*

■ Welcome and Devotions 10 minutes

Know *Take a closer look at Walk With Me materials for leaders and children and understand how the curriculum values influence all parts of a session. Tell what Jesus said at his Ascension.*

■ Taking a Closer Look at Walk With Me 30 minutes

Grow *Think about the children we teach (or will teach) and consider a list of questions that will help us shape a session to meet the needs of these children.*

■ Shaping Walk With Me to Fit Your Group 10 minutes

Show *Use Walk With Me materials to shape a lesson plan, with your group in mind; feel confident about using Walk With Me.*

■ Planning a Walk With Me Session 25 minutes

Final Preparation

- Read through the devotional suggestions in the session plan. Decide whether you will adapt this devotional and make it your own or plan a different one based on your own selection of Scripture.
- Preview the video and the PowerPoint presentation. Read through this workshop guide several times to catch the flow. Highlight key words and phrases to help you during your presentation. Your preparation will become a good example for your teachers when you ask them to prepare weekly.
- Use several different ways to invite leaders to your workshop (phone calls, e-mail, mailed invitations, bulletin announcements, and so on). Ask each person to bring his or her leader's guide and children's resources for the unit they'll be teaching. Remind experienced leaders that they too need a time of spiritual refreshment, and that you'd appreciate their presence to help and encourage less experienced teachers.
- Photocopy a numbered set of handouts (see back of this guide) for each participant.
- If you'd like to offer refreshments, make arrangements to provide them or have someone else do so.
- Contact people ahead of time if you plan to ask them to read Scripture or offer prayer during the workshop.
- Ask a small group or prayer partner to pray for you and the participants attending the workshop. (You may wish to set up prayer partners for each teacher and group of children as the season begins.)



You may want to find an assistant to help with final details so you can be available to greet participants. Unless everyone knows everyone else, provide nametags or large place cards that can be read from across the room.



To help leaders find the correct hand-out, use different colored paper for each. You'll be able to tell at a glance if everyone is looking at the same page.

Leading the Workshop



HELLO

Welcome and Devotions

Time

10 minutes

Goal

Become acquainted with each other and receive motivation from God's Word to model what it means to be followers of Jesus as we teach.

Materials

- ☐ Nametags
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Handout 1: Agenda
- ☐ Devotional: Making Disciples (pp. 17-18)

Greet participants as they arrive and ask them to put on a nametag. Give each person a copy of the Agenda (Handout 1). When most of the group has arrived, ask them to find a partner and spend a few minutes finding out something unusual about their partner—something the rest of the group might not know (she loves fishing at midnight, he runs marathons, and so on).

After a few minutes, call the group back together and ask partners to introduce each other, mentioning the “something unusual” they discovered during their conversation and the grade or level their partner will be teaching.

Devotions

Feel free to develop your own devotions to kick off your Sunday school year. Or use or adapt the devotional “Making Disciples” (pp. 17-18).



KNOW

Taking a Closer Look at *Walk With Me*

Time

30 minutes

Goal

Take a closer look at *Walk With Me* materials for leaders and children and understand how the curriculum values influence all parts of a session.

Materials

- Walk With Me* video
- PowerPoint slides (Values)
- PowerPoint slides (Lesson structure)
- Handout 2: Identify Your “Smarts”

Explain that you'd like to begin giving participants the flavor of *Walk With Me* by showing them a short video. Then show the 2½-minute video that accompanies this workshop.

Ask the group which words jumped out at them from the video. They'll probably mention faithful, friendly, and fun. Congratulate them on their good listening and comment that these words are the slogan of *Walk With Me* curriculum. Then probe a little deeper. What other words did they notice in the video? Listen to their responses. Then explain that the video featured all seven of the values of the video. Say that you'd like to take a closer look at those values and talk a bit about why they are so important to the curriculum. Powerpoint slides 2-9 will help you do that.



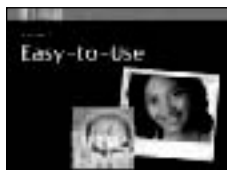
All the sessions in *Walk With Me* are taught from a Reformed perspective. That means they emphasize that the Old and New Testaments are closely intertwined, that God is the main character of all Bible stories, and that the Bible is all about God's redemption of his people through Jesus.

Each *Walk With Me* session comes with a background column called WordSearch that will help you understand the Reformed perspective on the Scripture passage you are teaching that week. It will help you think more deeply about what the passage means to you—and what it will mean to the children you teach.

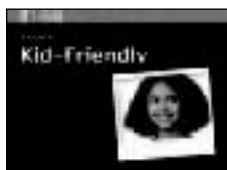


Helping children grow in faith involves more than teaching them facts and content. *Walk With Me* sessions not only teach children the content of the Bible and our faith. They also challenge kids to respond to those lessons with changed hearts and changed lives. They move kids to action not only in church on Sunday but on weekdays too; not only in church, but also in school, at home, and on the playground.

Leaders are encouraged to model their faith for children, showing them what it means to live as disciples of Jesus.



The creators of *Walk With Me* know that you're busy. You need a curriculum that's as easy to use and easy to teach as possible. So *Walk With Me* sessions are designed for busy teachers. Occasionally there are steps that require you to gather some unusual materials, but usually you'll find those steps have an option that requires little preparation. You'll find lots of tips and other helps too that will make your preparation simple and confusion-free.



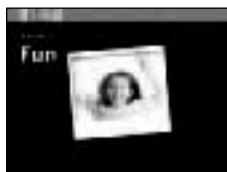
During the past few decades there has been some major rethinking about how people learn. A Harvard professor named Howard Gardner challenged the traditional ways of measuring intelligence. He said IQ tests only measured the intelligences of some people—people who were good with words or numbers. And he said our educational system makes the same mistake.



Gardner identified eight intelligences *[read list]*. Although each of us have all of these intelligences, most of us are stronger in some than in others.

[At this point distribute copies of Handout 2, “Identify Your ‘Smarts,’” and give participants a few minutes to analyze their personal preferences, using a 1 for the activities they find easiest and most fun to do and 8 for those they find most difficult or unpleasant to do. All other activities should fall somewhere in the range between these two. After a few minutes, survey the group. For each list of activities, ask those who rated it 1 to stand up and then those who rated it 8 to stand up.]

The diversity you see in this group is the same kind of diversity you’ll find in the kids you work with each Sunday. It’s important to teach *all kinds* of kids. So *Walk With Me* sessions include activities that will appeal to all eight of these intelligences. You’ll find icons describing the intelligences used after each step in the curriculum. They’ll help you plan sessions that will best meet the needs of kids in your class.



When you teach to a variety of learning styles, including lots of different kinds of activities, your sessions will be *fun*. And that’s good. When kids have fun, they will only learn more but they’ll want to come back the next week. And because the gospel is good news, it’s very appropriate to celebrate and have fun together on Sunday.



Walk With Me celebrates the diversity in God’s family and encourages all learners to do the same. We want kids to realize that God’s family includes people from all parts of the world, from all cultures, and from all races.



Walk With Me encourages leaders and children to become a small group together—to care for each other, to encourage each other, to challenge each other, and to have fun together. Everyone in a *Walk With Me* group should feel loved, accepted, and safe.



When you put them all together, those values shape a curriculum that looks like this.



We’re going to take a close look at how a *Walk With Me* session works.



The Bible passages your session will focus on are clearly listed on the first page of each session. You'll want to allow time for reading the passages as you prepare to teach.



Each unit includes memory work, a Scripture passage that the children may learn over the four-session period. It's called Memory Fun for younger children and Memory Challenge for older kids.

Note: Although we believe memory work is an important tool for helping young believers keep God's words in their hearts, we recognize that not all teachers will have time to include it in their sessions. So suggestions for helping children learn these passages are usually optional. If you place a high importance on memory work for your kids, be sure to stress that to your leaders now! You may also want to explain that the memory work appears in two Scripture versions, NIV and NRSV, and talk about which version you prefer to use.



Here you'll find the key teaching or theme of the session.



This session planner outlines the session for you, both main steps and options. By checking the boxes before the steps you plan to use, you can create a session plan that fits the needs of your group.



This section is for you, the leader. It's meant to help you

- understand the background of the Scripture you're teaching (Think About It).
- look for new ways to grow spiritually (Pray About It).
- think about ways that this Scripture connects with the lives of the children you teach (Tell About It).



Each session is divided into four steps: Hello, Know, Grow, and Show.

These steps will help you plan your session and measure whether you've succeeded in teaching the children successfully. All steps have some common features:

- a goal that will help you focus your teaching on what the children should learn and do
- an estimate of how much time the step will take
- a list of materials needed for each step and each optional activity
- multiple intelligences icons that will help you decide which kinds of learners will benefit most from an activity



The Hello step gives you suggestions for fun, interactive things to do as the children arrive, activities that will hook their attention and make them want to learn more.



The Know step usually involves presenting the story or Scripture to the children.



The Grow step usually includes activities that help the children recognize what the Bible story or passage means for their own faith and life.



Learning is more than listening and understanding. We want to encourage everyone to respond in tangible ways to what they've learned. The Show step includes activities that provide ways for children to act and serve.



Not all kids or groups are alike. The options in these sessions help you customize your lesson to fit the distinct needs and abilities of the children you teach.



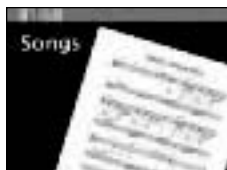
Throughout the session plan you'll find tips that will make it easier to meet the particular needs of your situation and your group.



If you have more than 45 minutes, Overtime ideas will help you expand your session to 60 minutes or longer.



If you have less than 45 minutes, you'll want to look for the clock symbols in most sessions that will help you decide which learning activities you can cut or shorten.



At the back of each leader's guide you'll find the music and words of the songs that are suggested and used in the sessions.



These songs are also on the CDs that accompany this curriculum. Each session for preschool through grade 5 has a CD that includes all the songs, stories, sound effects, and other things you need to teach your sessions for all the units of this year.



Sometimes you'll need scripts, activities, or patterns to enhance your session. You'll find these at the back of each leader's guide. You'll also find a letter to families that you can photocopy and send home with the children after the first session.



As you opened this manual (or looked in your box), you probably noticed the colorful resources stapled into it. These pictures, charts, posters, and other visuals are designed to help you lead the sessions. Each page is clearly labeled with the session number it was created for.



Along with your leader's manual, you also received take-home resources for the unit or units you will teach.

[The following comments are based on the assumption that each of the leaders has a full quarter of materials—three units.]

- If you teach four-year olds, you received a packet of cards, one card per child for the 40 weeks of the course.
- If you teach K-1, you received a set of four take-home papers and two sticker sheets for each unit.
- If you teach grades 2-8, you received a different type of children's format for each unit, and you'll continue to see that variety throughout the year. These include posters, magazines, take-home papers, newspapers, trivia cards, journals, handouts, and more.



Be sure to include your substitute teachers in this workshop! It's very important that they understand the *Walk With Me* curriculum if you expect them to step in and work effectively with various groups of children.

3

GROW

Shaping *Walk With Me* to Fit Your Group

Time

10 Minutes

Goal

Think about the children we teach (or will teach) and consider a list of questions that will help us shape a session to meet the needs of these children.

Materials

- Handout 3: Planning Your Session
- Pencils or pens
- “How Children at Each Age Level Learn” (photocopied from *Coordinator’s Handbook* as appropriate for each teacher, optional)



If you are planning to use the “Opening Session with Families” (*Coordinator’s Handbook*), you may want to ask each leader to personally invite the parents or guardians of the children he or she will be working with this year.

Tell the group that one important thing all teachers of children and young teens need to remember is that because every group is different, curriculum lessons usually need to be adapted and shaped to fit a particular group of kids. *Walk With Me* makes that very simple by providing lots of options, by suggesting ways to shorten and lengthen your lesson, and by providing the icons that help you know which

types of kids are best reached and served by a given step. Sometimes leaders will want to add their own ideas to the lessons—activities they think will work well because they know the children they teach. That’s great!

Then introduce Handout 3, “Planning Your Session,” with comments like these:

An important starting place in planning to teach a session is to think about the kids in your group. Each week you’ll discover more about them as individuals—what they wonder about, what they’re interested in, how they learn, and where they are on their faith journey. Have group members take a look at the handout. At the top, they’re asked to write down the names of each child or young teen in their group and to jot down what they know about that child: family, hobbies, interests, learning styles, and so on. Ask members of the group to spend a few minutes filling in this space. If this workshop takes place before your Sunday school begins, provide a class list for each teacher. Ask them to write down what they know now and to plan to add to that list throughout the year.

After a few minutes, draw the group’s attention to the rest of the handout. Explain that all of these questions, grouped under the curriculum values that we looked at earlier, are designed to help them do the best job they can in planning a session. Either read through the questions together or give group members a few minutes to read them silently. Ask if participants have any questions they would like to add to the list. Are any of the questions confusing? Any of them especially helpful?

Then encourage teachers to keep this checklist somewhere where they can use it each week as they plan and prepare. Once again remind them to keep updating what they know about their kids they teach too!



Plan to photocopy the appropriate pages from “How Children at Each Age Level Learn” from your *Coordinator’s Handbook*. Give each leader a copy of the characteristics of the children he or she will be working with during the coming year.

4

SHOW

Planning a *Walk With Me* Session

Time

25 minutes

Goal

Use *Walk With Me* materials to shape a lesson plan for teaching, with your group in mind; feel confident about using *Walk With Me*.

Materials

- Leader's materials and student resources for one session (photocopy sessions from the back of this workshop manual or encourage leaders to bring the materials they are about to teach)
- Handout 3: Planning Your Session

Explain to the group that for the remainder of your time together, they will get the chance to dig in and apply what they've learned to a specific session. They should work on a session at their level—maybe session 1 of unit 1 if you are planning to hold this workshop before your Sunday school season begins.

[If teachers do not have their materials with them, you can photocopy and distribute the sessions printed in the back of this manual. But remember that it will be far more meaningful and effective to have leaders working on the actual materials they will teach.]

Explain that participants will have 15 minutes to develop a session plan that they think will meet the needs of their particular group of kids and fit within the time frame of your Sunday school. Remind them to use the session planner but also to feel free to make additions that they think will work well with their group. Encourage them to use the questions from the handout Planning Your Session as a checklist and guide in their planning.

After fifteen minutes, invite participants to share any frustrations, questions, insights, and so on that they encountered during the planning process. How did the process work for them? How might they want to amend it as they plan sessions from week to week?

Then ask the group to pair up once again with the partners they introduced at the beginning of the session. Explain that they have five minutes to tell each other some of their concerns about the year ahead and to pray together about their role as teachers, for the children they will be working with, and for God's presence with them and the children during this year of walking and growing together. You might want to challenge group members to continue as prayer partners during the coming year!

Conclude by thanking your teachers for coming *and* for agreeing to take on this important and challenging work in God's kingdom. Assure them of your willingness to support them and help them in any way you can. And, if possible, leave a little time to answer questions and listen to concerns.



Looking for a way to give your teachers the encouragement they need—not only today but throughout the coming year? Consider giving each of them a copy of *Trail Mix—Good Stuff for Walk With Me Teachers*. This book offers inspiration and encouragement from experienced Sunday school teachers. It's loaded with helpful tips and problem-solving ideas that will help your leaders grow in their ability and calling to teach God's children.

Agenda

1. Hello: Welcome and Devotions
2. Know: Taking a Closer Look at *Walk With Me*
3. Grow: Shaping *Walk With Me* to Fit Your Group
4. Show: Planning a *Walk With Me* Session

Identify Your “Smarts”

Rank the list of activities below from 1-8, using all eight numerals. Use 1 for activities you find the easiest and most fun to do, 8 for activities you find most difficult or unpleasant to do. All the other activities should fall somewhere in the range between those two.

- A. _____ Garden, take care of pets, hike in the woods, camp in a wilderness area.
- B. _____ Sing, hum, whistle, play an instrument, listen to music.
- C. _____ Balance a checkbook, develop computer programs, work on logic puzzles, create charts and time lines.
- D. _____ Be with other people, work on a group project or game, take part in a discussion.
- E. _____ Exercise, dance, swim, play an active game, run, take part in a drama.
- F. _____ Read, solve word puzzles, write letters, e-mail, practice tongue twisters and limericks, tell and listen to stories.
- G. _____ Think or reflect alone; keep a journal or diary; work on personal growth, socially or spiritually.
- H. _____ Doodle, draw maps, paint or draw pictures, take photographs, watch movies or TV.

Planning Your Session

Who are the children or young teens in your group?

Write down each of their names. Behind their names, write some things that you know about them. What do you know about each child's family, hobbies, interests, school, and so on? Do you have any sense of where this person is on his faith journey? Do you know what learning styles she most appreciates?

Name

What I know . . .

What I hope to learn . . .

[illegible]

Use the following questions and guidelines (organized by the values of *Walk With Me*) to shape your session to meet the needs of these kids.

Biblical and Reformed

- Have I read the WordSearch?
- Do I have the focus and goals for the session firmly in mind?
- Have I thought about this session in the context of the unit theme?

Grows Faith

- What can I do or say in this session to help the children grow in faith?
- How best can I meet the Grow and Show goals of the session?

Easy-to-Use

- What materials do I need to gather?
- Which steps and options will best fit into the time I have to prepare and teach?
- Have I filled out my session planner?

Kid-Friendly

- Have I chosen the steps and options that best meet the learning needs of the kids I teach?
- Have I provided variety in the session?
- Is there anything I could add to the session that would meet the needs of a specific child or children in the group?

Fun

- Does my session plan allow times for fun and laughter?

Celebrates Diversity

- Are there ways I can use this session to remind kids of the richness and diversity of God's family?
- Are there ways this session can help kids feel respect for one another and unity within the group—in spite of differences in race, gender, income, ability, and so on?

Builds Community

- How can I build relationships with individual children through this session?
- How can I use this session to build community within the group?
- How can I use other adults and teens as volunteers in this session?

Making Disciples

A Brief Meditation on Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:39

[Bolded lines suggest a possible framework for building your own devotional based on this one.]

Who is the “me” in *Walk With Me*? Does it refer to kids? Are we inviting them to “walk with me?”

Sure.

When Jesus had conquered death for us and was about to return to heaven, he told his disciples, in their turn, to make disciples. Disciples disciple. That’s such an important part of being Christ-followers. When we seek to follow the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we invite others to walk with us too because we all need Jesus.

In the Greek the Great Commission doesn’t tell us, “go and make disciples”; instead it says, “going, make disciples . . .” (Matt. 28:19). Jesus tells us that as we go, wherever we go, we are to do three things:

- make disciples
- baptize
- teach.

We go to lots of places: hiking trails, office buildings, barns, hospitals, restaurants, bus stations, and churches. . . . **They’re all fair game for our discipleship.** That’s because the Father has now given *all* authority in heaven and on earth to Jesus, our Lord (v. 18). As Abraham Kuyper once said, “There’s not an inch of all creation of which Jesus does not say, ‘Mine!’”

In Sunday school, “Walk With Me” is our invitation to kids. But which kids? Covenant kids? Church kids?

Sure. Peter points out that the new covenant promise in Christ’s blood is “for you and your children.” But the promise extends well beyond them too—“to all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). So the invitation “Walk With Me” extends to all who want to learn more about Jesus.

The “me” in *Walk With Me* is *us*. It challenges us to warmly invite all who will join us in following the Lord with heads, hearts, hands, and feet.

Of course, there's a whole other, equally valid way of understanding the invitation "Walk With Me." The "me" can just as well refer to Jesus himself! We can't disciple others if we ourselves are not constantly disciplined.

Notice our Lord's closing promise. Wherever we find ourselves going, he promises to walk right along with us: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

Good thing, don't you think? **How could we ever do this work of discipling, baptizing, and teaching if Jesus wasn't going with us?** Not even the disciples were up to the task! Look back at verse 17. Notice how even after Jesus rose from the dead and proved his resurrection in so many ways, "some doubted." What a bunch of little-faiths! What must Jesus *do* to get through to them? What must he do to get through to us?

Notice that Jesus doesn't tell them off. He doesn't sternly lecture them. He just invites them to do his work wherever they go. And as they invite others to walk with them, they'll discover Jesus walking there beside them too. In the faces and hearts of those little ones who come from near and far, we'll see our Lord.

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these . . . you did it for me" (Matt. 25:40).

1

Noah

Scripture

Genesis 6:5-9:17

Memory Fun

John 14:15

Focus

Noah obeyed God, and God saved Noah's family.

WORDSearch

Think About It

In Noah's day the wickedness of people had become so painful that God regretted having created them. God's decision to do away with them is flavored by deep grief. Make sure your class senses that this was a very difficult decision for God to make.

Pray About It

Notice how deeply our sin wounds God and how incredibly gracious God is in promising never to send such destruction again. God would rather tolerate our sin than lash out in anger like this again. He only did that once more—on Golgotha. There he visited on his own dear Son the punishment we all deserve. Thank God for such patience and love. Pray that you may reflect those qualities as you lead your class this week.

Session Planner

Hello *Feel welcomed and eager to hear God's story.*

☐ Nametags 15 minutes

☐ Option: Animals for Noah's Ark 10 minutes

Know *Tell how Noah obeyed God.*

☐ God's Story: Noah 10 minutes

Grow *Love and obey God.*

☐ Family Album 10 minutes

Show *Show ways that we can obey God this week.*

☐ Musical Pantomime 10 minutes

☐ Option: Posters 10 minutes

Overtime

☐ Worship: Animal Parade 15 minutes

☐ Rainbow Mobiles 15 minutes

One man "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). This is pure grace given to Noah and his family. Don't give the idea that being righteous and blameless earned Noah the right to be saved. Nothing we do is ever good enough to save us. Only Jesus Christ was that good. The text helps us get it right: Noah "found favor." The Lord never gives up on those who "walk with God" (v. 9).

God gives Noah careful instructions on building the ark and bringing two of every living creature into it. Emphasize as you tell this story that "Noah did everything just as God commanded him" (v. 22). Noah's faith (Heb. 11:7) leads him to obey God, right down to the smallest detail.

The story of the flood is told in living color. All people and animals not adrift on the ark are wiped out by the water.

Imagine Noah's family's fear and anxiety. Were they doomed to float aimlessly on the water until they all died too? But then "God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and livestock" (Gen. 8:1). Of course God didn't suffer a lapse of memory here. Throughout Scripture, when God "remembers" someone, it means that God performs the saving action that has been promised.

Their first clue that God "remembers" them is that the waters begin to recede. Emphasize Noah's mounting impatience as he sends out the raven and then the dove to search for dry land. It would have been no picnic cooped up with all those animals. Finally, on New Year's Day (8:13)—relief! God commands them to come out of the ark and to resume life on dry ground.

Then the final twist to this story. God decides never again to destroy all living creatures (v. 21) in such a horrible flood. From now on God will graciously and patiently tolerate sinful people. As Jesus tells us, God

Tell About It

How do you explain God's fearsome decision to send the flood? Make clear to your class that God starts over with Noah and his family in order to give humankind a fresh start and another chance. The kids may remember starting projects that went so badly that they either had to just give up or had to start over. God loves us too much to give up on us. So God started over.

“causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:44).

As a sign of that covenant promise, God uses the rainbow. Appearing so brilliantly after the rain, it reassures us that our world is in good hands—safe in the keeping of our faithful, patient Creator.



HELLO

Nametags



Picture Smart



People Smart

Goal

Feel welcomed and eager to hear God’s story.

Time

15 minutes

Materials

- ☐ 3 x 5 index cards
- ☐ Paper punch
- ☐ 24" (50 cm) pieces of yarn
- ☐ Markers or crayons
- ☐ Assorted stickers of children’s favorite things such as pets, toys, and so on (optional)
- ☐ Bible

Ahead of time, make a nametag for each child and for yourself. Punch two holes about two inches apart in the top of each card; string yarn through the holes and tie to form a necklace. (Be sure to have extras for visitors.) As the children arrive, greet them warmly and introduce yourself. Invite them to use the markers or crayons to print their names on the nametags; offer help if they need it. Encourage them to decorate the nametags with drawings or stickers of their favorite things. Make sure you decorate a nametag for yourself too!



As the children work, introduce them to one another and tell them how happy you are to have them join you each week. Then invite the children to show their nametags and tell about their favorite things. After each introduction, have the group greet the child by saying something like “Hi, [child’s name].”



A child too shy to participate in this activity will appreciate being introduced. Say her name and notice her favorite things (maybe pointing out things that are the same as one of yours or another child’s). It may take several weeks before a shy child is ready to participate, but your warmth and patient understanding will draw her back each week.

Let the children know how excited you are to see each one of them and how eager you are to tell them about God. Hint that you’ll tell them stories from God’s Word about an ark, a BIG wall, and more. Then offer a brief prayer thanking God for bringing [name each child] to your group. Ask God to help everyone learn how to love and obey God more.

that everyone can hear a story from God's Word. Show the children the folded ark and tell them to listen carefully to hear what God said about a BIG boat.

Before you begin the story, ask the children to help you. Distribute the animal story visuals (give some children two if your class is small). Have them lay the animals on the floor in front of them. Clear a space on the floor for your "stage" and place the ark, the people, the dark blue and green construction paper, and the rainbow backdrop nearby.

The story follows:

A long, long time ago, God was very sad. The people in God's world did not love and obey God. All but Noah. (Place Noah figure on "stage.") Noah and his family still loved and obeyed God. (Add Noah's wife and family.)

God decided to punish the people who did not love and obey him—all but Noah and his family. God told Noah, "Listen carefully. I am very sad about this world. People do not love me. They do not obey me. I must get rid of them."

Noah listened carefully. Then God said, "Noah, I want you to build an ark—a BIG, BIG boat. I will send rain to destroy the world. It will rain for forty days. The water will cover the whole earth. But you and your family will be safe in the ark."

What do you think Noah said to God? Noah wondered about what God said, but Noah obeyed God. Noah and his family worked hard. They cut wood (**invite children to mimic sawing motion**), and pounded nails (**invite children to mimic pounding motion**), and lifted and carried heavy loads. Noah's neighbors began to see that Noah was building a giant boat! (**Display ark.**)

"Look at that!" said his neighbors. "Noah, what a silly thing to do! There's no lake here! There's no place anywhere to sail your boat. You're wasting your time!"

"No!" said Noah. "God told me to build this boat. God is going to destroy this world. Listen to God! God loves you and wants you love him and stop doing the bad things you do. It's not too late!" But the people just laughed. They didn't care!

But Noah loved and obeyed God. Noah kept on building, and finally the ark was ready. God said, "Noah, I want you to put all kinds of food in the ark for you and your family and all the animals I will save." What do you think Noah did? Yes, Noah obeyed God. Noah loved God.

Then God called the animals to come. And they came. Two by two they waddled and hopped and crawled into the ark. (One by one, invite children to come and place their animal figures on the deck of the ark, placing some inside the ark if the deck becomes too full.)

Then it was time for Noah and his family to go into the ark. (Place Noah and his family on the deck.) When every-



For this unit, we suggest that you wear a costume as you introduce and tell the story. The costume can be a robe, jacket or vest, or even just a cap or hat. (Aim for something a bit unusual though—a bright orange polka-dotted tie would get the kids' attention.) Putting on this costume signals that the story is about to begin and will help to establish a routine. Children can sit in a circle on carpet squares or small cushions or around a story rug or blanket. Teach the children to know that each time they come to this place, they should be ready to listen with ears wide open so they will not miss a word!



one was safely inside (**move Noah and his family and the animals inside**), God closed the door.

Then God sent the rain. It rained, and it rained, and it rained some more! (**Invite the children to raise their arms and wiggle their fingers as they lower their arms, imitating the rain.**) The lakes and the rivers filled up and overflowed (**spread arms out wide**). Soon the ark began to float. (**Slide sheet of dark blue construction paper under ark.**) It rained some more! It rained for *forty* days and nights. Water covered the whole earth! But Noah and his family and the animals were safe inside the ark.

Finally, it stopped raining. The water began to go down. It took a long, long time before the earth began to dry out again. Noah's family and the animals waited and wondered *when* it would be time to leave the ark.

At last it was time! God said, "Noah, the earth is dry. Now it's time to leave the boat." What do you think Noah did? Yes, Noah and his family obeyed God! (**Slide sheet of green construction paper under ark. Take Noah, his family, and the animals out of the ark.**)



You may feel uncomfortable telling this story, wanting to spare children the reality that many people and animals drowned. However, what is difficult for adults is often easy for children to accept because their experience is limited. They do understand that sin needs to be punished. Don't try to hide the truth if the children ask about this issue, but do highlight God's love and care for Noah.

The first thing Noah and his family did when they stepped onto dry land was to praise and thank God.

God was happy that the flood was over too. God put a beautiful rainbow in the sky. (**Hold rainbow backdrop behind ark.**) God said, "I will never send a flood to destroy the whole earth again. Never! It's a promise! When you see a rainbow in the sky, remember that I will never again send a flood to destroy the whole earth."

As the story ends, ask the children to tell you the name of the man who loved and obeyed God. Ask them to tell what Noah did to show that he loved and obeyed God.



When you're finished with the story visuals (ark, people and animal figures), don't throw them away! You may want to use them in session 4 (see option, p. 35).



GROW

Family Album



Picture Smart



Body Smart



Music Smart

Goal

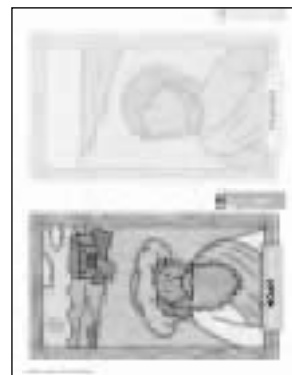
Love and obey God.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Bible
- ☐ Scrapbook or photo album or three-ring binder with plastic sleeve on cover
- ☐ Family album cover (reproducible page 51)
- ☐ Bright-colored paper or cardstock
- ☐ Portrait of Noah (leader's resources)
- ☐ CD player
- ☐ Song: "True Story" (p. 41; CD, track 1)
- ☐ Song: "Who Built the Ark?" (children's take-home paper 1)





You can use the album throughout the year, creating a visual reminder of God's faithfulness as God's people obey him. At the end of the season, you can send the pictures you've taken throughout the year home with the children. It's a great way to say, "You belong to God's family."

During this unit you will make a family album. Ahead of time, photocopy the cover "God's Big Family" on bright-colored paper or cardstock. Glue the album cover to the cover of a scrapbook or photo album. Or slip the cover inside the plastic sleeve on the cover of a three-ring binder.

You'll be adding Noah's photo to the album during this session. In session 4, you and your children will add your own pictures to the album. To be sure you have a photo of each child, bring your camera to class each week so you can include children who join your group. Or invite a volunteer photographer to capture each child and you in action.

Open your Bible to John 14:15 and read this verse:

If you love me you will obey my commands.

Ask the children to say it with you one time. Then ask again how Noah showed that he loved God. Read the verse again like this: **Noah, if you love me you will obey my commands.** And Noah did! Noah obeyed God.

Show the family album cover to the children, and tell them that God has a *big* family of people who want to love and obey him. Noah belongs to God's family—and so do we! Invite a child to help you put Noah's picture in the album, and explain that you'll be adding more pictures to the book in the next few weeks. Hint that you'll be adding their pictures—and yours too—because they and you want to love and obey God.



John 14:15 is the Memory Fun verse for this unit. If you'll be asking the children to memorize this verse, you may want to have them say it with you a few times right now.

Play the first stanza of the song "True Story" a couple of times, then invite the children to join in on the shout ("Right there!") and the echo as you sing the narration. Introduce the motions, and invite the children to mimic you.

If you have time, sing the song "Who Built the Ark?" The words and music are printed in take-home paper 1.



SHOW

Musical Pantomime



Body Smart



Music Smart

Goal

Show ways that we can obey God this week.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- Song: "I Can Obey" (to the tune of "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush")

Invite the children to share ways they can love and obey God at home and school all week long. Introduce the song "I Can Obey." To the tune of "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush," sing one or two stanzas like the examples given on page 14, encouraging the kids to pantomime the action the stanza suggests. Then give each child the opportunity to suggest a way to show love and obedience. For example, Eric might say that he can share his toys. Then invite the whole group to sing, "This is the way we share our toys . . ." as they pantomime the action.

This is the way we hug our friends . . .

Sometimes children wonder if God loves them when they are disobedient. Assure them that God loves them even they are naughty or unkind. When they understand that when we are sorry, God forgives us. God loves us, always!

Option to step 4

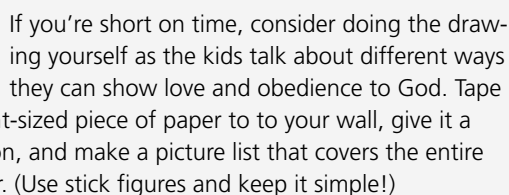
Self Smart

10 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Drawing paper
- ☐ Markers or crayons
- ☐ 11 x 17 sheet of light-colored construction paper

After you've talked with the kids about ways they can show that they love and obey God this week, give them drawing paper and markers and encourage them to draw a picture of one of those ways. As the children work on their pictures, help them write this sentence on their papers: [name] loves and obeys God.



If you wish to display the posters in your room, write this caption on construction paper:
We Love and Obey God.

Worship: Animal Parade



15 minutes

- ☐ Bible
- ☐ CD player
- ☐ CD with “Parade of the Animals,” No. 14 Finale, by Camille Saint-Saens
- ☐ Songs: “Say to the Lord, I Love You” (p. 45; CD, track 2); “Jesus, I Love You” (p. 46; CD, track 3)

Invite the children to name some of the animals Noah took on the ark. Then play the recording of “The Parade of the Animals” as the children listen carefully and imagine what animal the music suggests. As each segment ends, let the children offer their guesses. Talk with the children about how God made every animal so different: some walk slowly, some

prance and dance, some hop, some slither, and some skim lightly through the air; some are graceful, and others are clumsy. Yet all of them are praising God in their own way. Then play the music through one more time, and invite the children to pretend that they are animals who are parading to Noah's ark. Encourage them to move to the music, acting out the animal the music suggests to them.

Close your worship time by singing one or both of these songs:

- "Say to the Lord, I Love You"
- "Jesus, I Love You"

Rainbow Mobiles

AA Word Smart

Picture Smart

Number Smart

Time

15 minutes

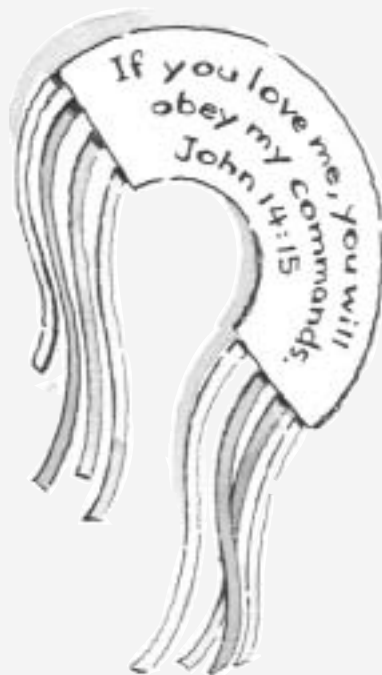
Materials

- Rainbow shapes cut from stiff paper plates
- Paper punch
- 24" (60 cm) lengths of yarn
- Markers or crayons
- Bright-colored crepe-paper streamers, ribbons, or lengths of heavy yarn
- Glue or clear tape

Invite the children to make a colorful reminder of God's promises. Give each child a rainbow shape and have them write the memory verse on the shape with markers or crayons. (You'll want to print the verse on the chalkboard or newsprint for them to copy.) Then show them how to glue or tape crepe-paper streamers, ribbons, or lengths of yarn to both ends of the rainbow. Encourage the children to hang the mobiles at home as a reminder of God's promise.



tip Ahead of time, cut rainbow shapes from the rim of paper plates (you can make two shapes from each plate). If your children don't know how to write, write the Memory Fun verse (John 14:15) on the rainbow shapes. Punch a hole in the center of each shape, and attach a length of yarn.



Dear Family:

Today, your child began a new church school unit entitled “I Love and Obey God.” The four sessions in this unit will focus on three Old Testament people who obeyed God—Noah, Naaman, and Rahab. We’ll also spend a great deal of time talking about how we too can love and serve our great God by living obediently!

Your child will take home a colorful paper each week, along with other crafts and activities we plan to do together. I hope you’ll take time to look through the paper with your child and to ask him or her to tell you about some of the things we’re doing in class during the next four weeks.

Please pray for the children and me, as we learn and grow together!

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

Today, your child began a new church school unit entitled “I Love and Obey God.” The four sessions in this unit will focus on three Old Testament people who obeyed God—Noah, Naaman, and Rahab. We’ll also spend a great deal of time talking about how we too can love and serve our great God by living obediently!

Your child will take home a colorful paper each week, along with other crafts and activities we plan to do together. I hope you’ll take time to look through the paper with your child and to ask him or her to tell you about some of the things we’re doing in class during the next four weeks.

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Sincerely,



1

Creation: Skies and Seas, Plants and Trees

Scripture

Genesis 1:1-19

Memory Fun

Genesis 1:1, 31a

Focus

God created our world beautiful and good.

WORDSearch

Think About It

“In the beginning God . . .” Right off the bat the biblical story starts with God. It calls us to stop and marvel at God’s mighty and majestic work. The sheer goodness, beauty, and excellence of what God made boggles our minds. As you tell the story, be sure to model that wonder. Encouraging the children to praise their Creator fits perfectly with the tone and purpose of this passage.

Pray About It

This would be an excellent time to shelter yourself, even for just a moment, from the tyranny of your busy schedule. Go ahead and toss this guide aside for a while (we know we can trust you to pick it up again later!). Take a quick stroll down the block or in your backyard. Don’t just think about God’s good creation, go look at it! Too dark to see the plants or the trees? Look up! The ancients believed those stars were just peek holes in the sky that let us glimpse a bit of God’s glory streaming down from heaven. They were right. Be sure to talk to God about what you see. This will be the most important part of preparing for your lesson.

ground and the seas, good places where animals and humans can live. Notice, in each case, how the Creator takes what is chaotic and mixed-up (night, the waters, and the sea) and separates it,

Session Planner

Hello *Feel welcomed and ready to listen to God’s Word.*

■ Getting Acquainted 8 minutes

Know *Describe what God did during the first four days of creation.*

■ Telling the Story: Skies and Seas, Plants and Trees 12 minutes

■ Option: Shortcut Story 5 minutes

Grow *Be amazed at God’s power in creating the world.*

■ Review and Praise 10 minutes

Show *Identify created things and praise God.*

■ Creation Treasure Hunt 15 minutes

■ Option: Picture Creation 10 minutes

Overtime

■ Worship 10 minutes

■ The Aromas and Tastes of Creation 10 minutes

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” That’s the bottom line. Genesis gives us a covenantal view of creation. It starts with a God who deeply cares about and delights in and is connected to what has been made. Because it’s so precious to our Creator, we also need to treasure it (and take good care of it).

Help your class marvel at God’s power. God creates just by speaking. Challenge your students to make something out of absolutely nothing. Unimaginable, isn’t it? God is truly great!

First God creates light. How that’s possible before there are heavenly bodies Genesis doesn’t say. Next God creates a space dividing the waters above (that come through holes in the sky when it rains) from the waters below (that are found in the sea and the springs that bubble up from the ground). Then God creates the dry

Tell About It

Don’t get involved in a lengthy explanation of the creation versus evolution debate. That’s too difficult for second- and third-graders, and it’s really beside the point here. Help them marvel at the wonder of creation and the still greater wonder of the Creator. Then remind them how much this great Creator loves them. After all, God made them too.

putting each thing in its rightful place. Then, because God continues to be in charge of it, the Creator gives it a name.

The fourth creative act is a bit different. God allows the land to bring forth plants—each separate variety continuing to reproduce itself. God does not permit chaos. Roses produce roses, not coffee beans. Like your bedroom the way Mom wants it: a place for everything and everything in its place.

For a full understanding of God’s creating, we must wait until we come to the creation of human beings and the day of rest. So for now, let your class delight in the marvels of God’s beautiful world. Then turn heavenward to bring God the glory. That’s why God made our world in the first place!



HELLO

Getting Acquainted



Word Smart



Number Smart



Picture Smart



People Smart

Goal

Feel welcomed and ready to listen to God’s Word

Time

8 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Nametags (leader’s resources)
- ☐ Black markers
- ☐ 24" (60 cm) pieces of yarn
- ☐ Paper punch

Greet the children warmly as they arrive. Some will come eager to begin, others will be shy and reluctant. Your genuine greeting and welcoming attitude will signal to them that each child will always be welcomed, accepted, and appreciated in this place.



This is also a wonderful time to introduce volunteers to your group—people who assist you by purchasing and preparing materials, bringing and serving the snacks, telling the stories, or whatever. Tell the children a little bit about each person and encourage the children to thank them by shaking their hands or standing in a circle around them and giving them a round of applause.



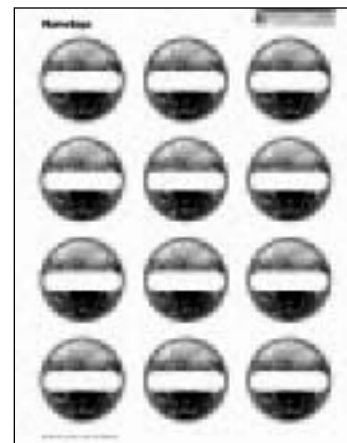
Since you’ll be talking about God’s amazing creation for the next few weeks, you may want to set up a creation table that the children can visit as they arrive. Include items from nature (rocks, shells, plants, leaves, flowers), books and magazines about nature, and games that involve plants or animals. You could even bring a small pet in a cage or bowl. Spending time talking together or playing with some of the items on the table will help build community in your group.

Direct the children to the table on which you have placed the materials listed above. Ask each child to take a nametag, print his or her name on the line, punch the hole, string a piece of yarn through the hole, and then knot it.

As the children

work, talk to them about their favorite things to do and also about things they don’t like to do, making a point of mentioning each child by name. Be sure to share your own likes and dislikes as well. As you chat, point out that the nametags have the shape and picture of the world, which is what you will be learning about for the next few weeks.

When the children are wearing their nametags, ask them to form a circle and tell them you’ll continue getting to know each other with this “mixer” activity. Begin by saying (for example) that you see someone in the circle who has blue eyes and a Superman T-shirt. Who can name that person? Give children time to respond, then welcome that child. Continue until you have described and introduced each child. Or, if the children feel comfortable, let each describe another child.



2

KNOW

AA Word Smart

Self Smart

Earth Smart

Number Smart

Telling the Story: Skies and Seas, Plants and Trees

Goal

Describe what God did during the first four days of creation.

Time

12 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Materials to make a Story Satchel (paper shopping bag, glue or staples, four animal pictures from leader's resources)
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ Nature patterns (leader's resources)
- ☐ Small leaves, twigs, flowers, petals, and similar plant items from nature
- ☐ Paper clips and stir sticks



Ahead of time, make a Story Satchel by gluing or stapling the four animal pictures on the sides of a paper grocery bag. Clip each of the nature patterns and objects from nature onto a stir stick. Then place your Bible and the visuals inside the Story Satchel.

Introduce the children to the place in your room where you'd like them to go each week to hear the story (you can call it your story place, story corner, or whatever seems appropriate). Show them your Story Satchel and explain that "satchel" is a fancy word for sack or bag. Show them the animals on the outside and point out that they will learn about a special time when God actually made all the animals. Then take out the Bible, and tell the children that the Bible is in your satchel because it is God's story, God's book. It is the most important book in the whole world! Show them the first page of Genesis and say that today's story is about the beginning of the whole world, and that's where God's book begins.



Before starting the story, ask the children to think about this question: **If you were going to make some of the wonderful things in the world—things like skyscrapers, swimming pools, and big trucks—what would you need? How could you do it?** Give them a few minutes to suggest some of the materials they would need.



Children become comfortable with new surroundings in many ways. One is by having familiar routines and places for various activities. The Story Satchel will always indicate that the story is coming. The Bible will always be in the satchel. Children will enjoy having a special place for the story.

Tell the children that you have some surprises in your satchel. Ask each child to reach in and take one item out of the satchel. Ask them what they would use to make *these* special creations. What might they use to make a star? The moon? A twig? Encourage them to talk with a partner about this question.

After a few minutes, ask the children to share their thoughts. Agree that it is a hard question to answer—in fact, it's much easier to figure out what you need to make a big, complicated building than it is to imagine how you might make a leaf or a flower.

Ask the children to lay their visuals on the floor in front of them or on their laps, and distribute the rest of the visuals in the satchel. Explain to the children that you are going to tell them how God actually *did* make all these things. Encourage them to listen very carefully because you will need their help to tell the story. When you mention the moon, for example, the person with the moon should hold it up for everyone to see. When the children understand the instructions, begin the story.

The story follows:

Can you imagine what *nothing* is like? Close your eyes and try to take everything out of your mind until there is nothing at all left. That's how it was when God decided to make the world. No colors. No light or even dark. There was *nothing*!

Then God stepped up to make the world. God didn't bring a toolbox. God didn't bring a basketful of stuff. In fact, God brought nothing. God spoke.

God said, "Let there be light." Imagine that—all God did was speak! And immediately the light came forward out of that mishmash. And then God separated the darkness from the light. God called the light *day*; the darkness, God called *night*. And that was the end of the first day.

Then God stepped up to the world and spoke again. God called for the watery matters to separate, creating a grand blue space way up above. That's where the rain would come from someday. And God looked at the great blue space and called it *sky*. And that was the end of the second day.

God came to the world on the third day and spoke again. God ordered the watery material below to form huge lakes and ponds and the dry ground to separate from the waters. God named the dry ground *land* and the water *seas*.

Then God told the land to produce plants and trees and bushes that would have fruit and seeds of all kinds. And when God spoke, the dry ground did just exactly what God ordered it to do. It sprang up green! Tall, willowy trees appeared—some with leaves, some with needles like Christmas trees. Fruit and nuts grew on bushes and trees. Some plants were bright green and some were a dark shade of blackish green.

God looked over the creation—the ground and sea and trees and bushes—and it was good. There was order to the world. There was color. Oh yes, it was good! That was the end of the third day.

On the fourth day, God came to the world and spoke again. God brought nothing but words. God called for lights in the sky so that there would be day lights and night lights. And as God spoke, that giant ball of fire, the sun, paraded across the daytime sky. The moon appeared and lit up the night while the stars popped out and dazzled the dark night sky.

God looked again at the creation. It was good. Yes, it was so good! And then the fourth day ended.

Shortcut Story Picture Smart Music Smart

Time

5 minutes

Materials

- Children's magazine, pages 2-3 (completed according to directions in the optional Show step)

Using the completed pages 2 and 3 of the children's magazine as your visual aid, point out the number of the day and then read the corresponding verses for each day of creation. Discuss with the children the amazing fact that God created it all with the power of words!

To involve the children in the story, either have them read the verses with you or invite them to join in a refrain after you read each verse. Try something like this: **God made you and God made me/God made everything we see.** Practice the refrain with the children several times before beginning to read the verses. Invite them to clap along to the rhythm, if you wish.

Option to step 2




If you have a short class session and children who are visual learners, you may want to use this option to step 2.



GROW

Review and Praise

 Music Smart

 Body Smart

Goal

Be amazed at God's power in creating the world.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Nature patterns and objects (see step 2)
- ☐ Creation songs (pp. 41-50; CD, tracks 1-4)
- ☐ CD player

Gather the nature patterns and objects from the children and hold then up one at a time. Ask the children to recall their ideas for making these things. Each time, ask the children to say again what God used to make them. As you do this after each item, the contrast will provide a cumulative effect of praise and awe. God used *nothing*. God simply spoke, and it was so. God's power and greatness are amazing!

Introduce one or more of the creation songs on your CD. "Creation Song" (p. 41; track 1) is a delightful call-and-response song that will be easy for the children to learn. After you shout a question or answer (in a loud speaking voice), the children echo it (singing).

"Six Days Was All It Took" (p. 43; track 2) is not only lively and fun, but it will also help your children remember what happened on each of the days of creation. Get kids actively involved in this song. They could put up the correct number of fingers whenever a number is sung or shouted and they could use motions or signs for the items created. Have fun as you praise together!



If you feel uncomfortable singing to the children or teaching them to sing, consider inviting someone who might enjoy singing with them from time to time. This would be a great way to involve the musicians—adults or teens—in your congregation.

"The Lord Is Great" (p. 47; track 3) is another wonderful song of praise to the Creator. Try clapping on beat 1 and snapping fingers on beat 3. Consider adding tambourine, triangle, woodblock, or other rhythm instruments. Bells could be played on G and D.

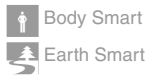
"Let Everybody Praise the Lord" (p. 48; track 4) is a wonderful song to move to! Sing the refrain with or without the stanzas. The chorus is very high-energy and fun! Show kids how to put arms overhead with hands together and then sweep them down to the sides on "Praise the Lord." Encourage kids to skip around the room and shout on the "Praise the Lord."

After singing together, ask each child to say a silent prayer of thanks to God for this wonderful world.



SHOW

Creation Treasure Hunt



Goal

Identify created things and praise God.

Time

15 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Paper sacks or baggies
- ☐ Treasure Hunt list (reproducible page 54)
- ☐ Table on which to display items
- ☐ Family letter (reproducible page 51)

Weather permitting, take the group outside on a treasure hunt for items that God has made. You'll want to recruit extra helpers to ensure the safety of your group. Give each child a bag to collect things and a copy of the scavenger list. Pair the children so that they can help each other. It's important that you tell them your rules and expectations before you set out: for example, always walk in pairs, cross streets only in groups with the help of an adult, respect neighbors' property. Tell them they should be looking for items on the scavenger list, but if they find something interesting that is not on the list, they should be sure to include it to show the group later.

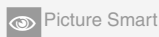


If your church is in an inner-city area, you may have to search for evidence of God's creation within a confined space (a fenced-in area or a small patch of grass, for instance). You may want to emphasize the senses of smell, touch, and hearing.

After the walk, bring your items back to your meeting room and create a nature display table (if you already set up a creation table for the Hello step, invite the children to add their items to this display). Have children show and talk about what they've found. Be sure to spend time wondering about and pointing out the marvelous features of the found items.

Don't forget to send a copy of the family letter home with each child today (see p. 51). (If you plan to have the children memorize the unit memory fun, see the last paragraph of Overtime Worship.)

Picture Creation



Time

10 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Children's magazines
- ☐ Crayons, markers, pencils
- ☐ Nature patterns and objects from step 2. Invite the children to help you remove the clips and stir sticks so they are ready to use.

Pass out the magazines and have the children write their names on the front. In the meantime, set out the crayons, markers, pencils, and patterns. Then direct the group's attention to pages 2 and 3 in the magazine. Read the caption and verses together. Tell the children that they may draw pictures for the four days of creation or they may trace around the patterns. Or, if they prefer, they may place the patterns *under* the paper, and rub *over the top* of the paper with a crayon that has had the paper torn off. Do point out that there isn't room on the paper for them to use each one of the patterns, so they will have to make choices.

As the children work, talk about the wonder of God's world. Ask them to imagine what it might have been like to be there watching. Talk about the order God brought to the world—seasons follow in order, the sun rises every day, seeds grow into plants and trees and fruit, and rain cleans the earth and waters plants. Only God could make the world!

Option to step 4



If you have a short class session and children who are picture smart, you may want to use this option to step 4.



OVERTIME

Worship  Body Smart

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Copies of Memory Fun (NIV or NRSV, reproducible pages 52-53)
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Envelopes

Invite the children to praise God by silently acting out how they would respond if they were the sun God called forth and put up in the sky. Using only their bodies, have them show how they would have risen up and then praised their Creator God. Give them time to respond, then go on to another object, using questions like these:

- If you were a tree called forth by God, how would you rise up, stretch out your branches, and praise the Creator?
- If you were the milky-white moon, how would you shine and survey the world?
- If you were the sparkling stars, how would you dazzle?
- If you were daisies blowing in the wind, how would you bend and stretch?
- If you were puffy marshmallow clouds or heavy, dark rain clouds, how would you move?

When you have finished, have the children stand with their hands high above their heads and wave in praise to God.



Think carefully about how you will include children with physical disabilities in activities that involve creative movement or dance. There are several such activities in this unit. The key is to focus on the *abilities*, not the disabilities, these children have. A child may not be able to stand on tiptoe, but she may be able to stretch out her arms or her neck, for instance, or smile and blink her eyes. Sometimes children with disabilities also enjoy being assisted with a hand-over-hand technique, where the leader or volunteer lays his hand over the child's hand and the two hands move as one. As much as possible, make it your aim in activities to involve all children in some way.

Introduce the Memory Fun for this unit by opening your Bible and reading Genesis 1:1, 31a to the children. Ask the children to repeat the words with you. Then give each of them a copy of the Memory Fun (see pp. 52-53). Have them cut the verses into strips and try to put the strips into the correct order. Give each child an envelope for the strips so they can take the Memory Fun home with them.

The Aromas and Tastes of Creation



Number Smart



Body Smart

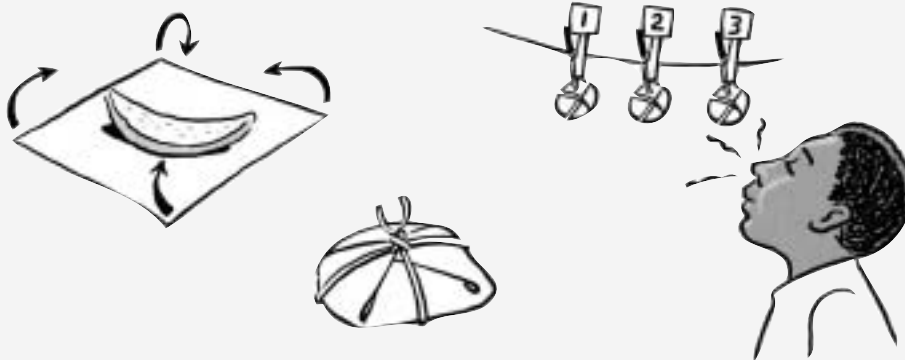
Time

10 minutes

Materials

- 5" (12.5 cm) squares of cotton fabric
- Rubber bands or twine
- Assorted aromatic substances (for example, orange peel, cinnamon, chunk of banana, coffee, onion; and/or cotton balls dipped in food flavorings such as vanilla and lemon)
- Long piece of string
- Clothes pegs or safety pins
- Marker, paper, pencils
- Highly flavored snack such as vanilla wafers, banana chunks, orange segments, cinnamon candies

Place each item on a separate piece of material, folding the corners diagonally across to close, and tie up with a band or piece of twine to form a small pouch. (See diagram.)



Write a different number on each sack with a marker. Stretch a line across the room, or from one chair back to another; pin the sacks to the line with clothes pegs or safety pins.

Tell the children that God gave people senses to enjoy the world. People can *see* beautiful colors, *hear* birds singing, *touch* rough bark, *taste* yummy food, and *smell* wonderful smells. Explain that today, they'll have a chance to try out their sense of smell and their sense of taste. Give each child a piece of paper and pencil and ask each to write down the numbers of the sacks. They are to sniff and guess what might be inside the pouch, writing down their answers on the paper. (Don't let them touch the sacks!)

After everyone has completed the activity, have kids sit in the circle. Take down the pouches and compare notes on their guesses. For those items that prove difficult, pass the sack around the circle for another try, giving hints that tell what the smell might be associated with; for instance, "You might smell this when you drink your juice in the morning."

Conclude by enjoying the snack you've brought. Thank God for the zillions of smells and tastes God created that we can all enjoy. Our God is truly an awesome God!



Invite children to work in pairs, especially if your group is large.

Dear Family:

Today your child began a new theme in church school: “God Made Everything.” The four lessons in this unit focus on the beautiful world God made and our responsibility for caring for that world. We’ll also spend one week hearing about the mess we made of God’s creation through disobedience and sin—and how God kept loving us anyway.

Your child is working through a magazine in class for these four weeks. You can expect to see it come home at the end of this unit. Please take time to look through the magazine with your child and to ask him or her to tell you some of the things we’ve learned together over the past weeks.

Please pray for us as we learn more about our powerful and loving Creator God.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

Today your child began a new theme in church school: “God Made Everything.” The four lessons in this unit focus on the beautiful world God made and our responsibility for caring for that world. We’ll also spend one week hearing about the mess we made of God’s creation through disobedience and sin—and how God kept loving us anyway.

Your child is working through a magazine in class for these four weeks. You can expect to see it come home at the end of this unit. Please take time to look through the magazine with your child and to ask him or her to tell you some of the things we’ve learned together over the past weeks.

Please pray for us as we learn more about our powerful and loving Creator God.

Sincerely,

Memory Fun

In the beginning

God created

the heavens and the earth.

God saw

all that he had made,

and it was

very good. Genesis 1:1, 31a (NIV)

Memory Fun

In the beginning . . .

God created

the heavens and the earth.

God saw

everything that he had made,

and indeed,

it was very good. Genesis 1:1, 31a (NRSV)

Creation Treasure Hunt

See how many of these things you can find! If you can take the item with you, put it in your bag. If you can't take it with you, describe the item on this page.

- 
- ☐ something that smells sweet

- _____
- ☐ something that feels rough

- _____
- ☐ something green

- _____
- ☐ something that's not alive

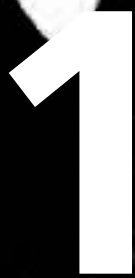
- _____
- ☐ something that may change shape

- _____
- ☐ something smooth and hard

- _____
- ☐ something with legs

- _____
- ☐ a sound you hear

- _____
- ☐ something that is soft



God's Good Creation

Scripture

Genesis 1:1-2:3

Memory Challenge

Psalms 24:1-4a

Focus

God created everything, and it was very good.

WORDSearch

Think About It

"In the beginning God . . ." The Bible's account of how the world began starts with God. It's a call to faith. We just can't miss its invitation to bring glory to our great Creator. The overwhelming goodness, beauty, and excellence of what God has made will make us break out in praise.

Session Planner

Hello *Understand that only God could create the world out of nothing.*

☐ Make a Flower, If You Can 10 minutes

Know *Give examples that show the wonder and beauty of God's creation.*

☐ Creation Story: God's Good Call 10 minutes

Grow *Experience awe and wonder at the grandeur and goodness of God's world.*

☐ Circle Walk 20 minutes

☐ Option: Nature Artists 15 minutes

Show *Praise God for the goodness and grandeur of each day of creation.*

☐ Say It Gladly! 10-15 minutes

☐ Option: Creative Praise 15 minutes

Overtime

☐ Memory Challenge and Prayer 5 minutes

☐ Guessing Game 5 minutes

Pray About It

Take a moment to reflect on the awesome universe God created. God created trillions upon trillions of stars. Each one of these stars is so far apart from all the others that we humans will never be able to reach even our sun's closest neighbor! Yet God has made us so intricately and with such complexity that even the world's greatest scientists have only the faintest beginning of understanding of how we're put together. When you draw near to your Creator with praise and adoration, you most intimately fulfill God's deepest purpose for creating all those stars—and for creating you to gaze on them.

Our lesson rightly follows Romans 4:17 and Hebrews 11:3 in teaching that God created everything out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). But Genesis spends much more time emphasizing how God ordered this world. It describes the earth before creation as "formless and empty" (Gen. 1:1). It's dark, chaotic, and dangerous, like a house hit by a hurricane. It needs to be tamed and made livable. Its pieces need to be sorted out and put in their right place.

Genesis does not give us a cut-and-dried scientific lecture on how God made everything. So don't spend too much time with your class sorting out all the details. Genesis is much more interested in telling us how much our world really matters to God. Our Creator has a deep personal investment in our world, and an equal investment in human beings, the crown of creation. Genesis tells us how we are created in

God's image, after God's likeness. From the ground up we're designed to live in a special relationship of love and obedience to God. Our Creator makes us partners with God in taking care of the world. By managing it well we make the world even better than it is—a place that brings the Lord ever more glory.

Tell About It

What impressions about this entire story should you leave with your students? First, that creation is a delight to God (Prov. 8:30-31; Ps. 65). God finds it very good. So should we. Above all, share the excitement of being invited by our Creator to make the world an even better place.

Second, give them a deepened sense of God's greatness. Let the billion-starred galaxies and the delicate intricacy of the housefly walking on your classroom window invite you to praise God together. God will find that very, very good.

“On the seventh day God rested from all his work” (Gen. 2:2). Don’t assume that God was tired and needed a nap. The day of rest is a divine sign that the work of creation is finished. It signifies that God will not interfere with this created order or add to it. God will continue the work of maintaining it and giving it life. But creation is complete. And, praise God, it’s very, very good.



HELLO

Make a Flower, If You Can



People Smart



Earth Smart

Goal

Understand that only God could create the world out of nothing.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- Pairs of matching items from nature: similar flowers, weeds, leaves, branches, pine needles (or go all out and take two goldfish in separate bowls!) Bring enough so that each child receives one item to match with someone else’s item.
- Nametags and markers (optional)

You may want to provide nametags for the children to complete as they arrive, especially if all or some of the children are new to the group.

Greet each child warmly and hand each an item from nature (see list above). Be sure that another child gets a matching item.

When all the kids have arrived and are seated, tell them to pair up with the person who has a similar flower or leaf or whatever they have (a child with a dandelion would find another child with a dandelion). Once the kids have paired off, ask them to talk about these questions for one minute:

- If you had to make this dandelion or pine needle or whatever you have, how would you do it? What materials would you use?
- Would it be possible for you to actually make a flower or a branch or a stone—even if you had the necessary materials?
- Who could do such a thing?

After a couple of minutes, ask the pairs to respond. Affirm any suggestions they offer (such as using dirt to make a flower or iron ore to make a rock).

Then ask them to imagine how much more difficult it would be to make a flower out of . . . absolutely nothing. Zero. Zip.

Affirm that only God Almighty could create a flower, a bird, a person, or a whole world out of nothing at all.

Have the group stand up and applaud our great and awesome God. Then open the session with a short prayer, praising God for being the awesome Creator of all things.



Write the schedule of the morning’s activities on the board or on newsprint. This will help you and the kids stay on task and on schedule. Give the activities interesting and fun titles. Use ours or feel free to make up your own.

2

KNOW

AA Word Smart

Picture Smart

Creation Story: God's Good Call

Goal

Give examples that show the wonder and beauty of God's creation.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Bible
- ☐ Large clear glass bowl or plastic cake cover full of water
- ☐ Flashlight or overhead projector
- ☐ Story: "God's Good Call" (CD, track 1; children's resources, poster, side 1)
- ☐ CD player
- ☐ Food coloring (blue, green, orange)



If your time is limited, try a shortcut approach to the story:

- Play the story on the CD and have the children follow along on side 1 of the poster.
- As you listen to the third paragraph (God's call for light), light a candle. Briefly pause the CD to have kids lightly shade the fourth paragraph with blue, the fifth with green, the sixth with red, the seventh with orange, and the eighth with purple.

Open your Bible to Genesis 1. Read verse 1 aloud. With a sense of awe explain that the very first chapter of the Bible in the book of Genesis tells us that there was a Creator who made all things out of nothing. That Creator was God.

Explain that we are going to be listeners. As listeners we'll be thinking about the world coming into being through God's voice. As listeners we'll use our imaginations, picturing the shape and form of things as sounds and colors burst forth across the earth.

Turn off the lights and set a bowl of water on an overhead projector or set the bowl of water on the table and use a flashlight to shine on the bowl.

Today's creation story, "God's Good Call," is told on the CD (track 1). As the children listen, do the following (hit the pause button on your CD player to give yourself enough time):

- At the phrase "Let there be light," turn on the overhead light or shine the flashlight.
- At the phrase "The blues of the sky," add a drop or two of blue food coloring to the bowl of water.
- At the phrase "out of green plants," add a drop or two of green food coloring at a distance from the blue coloring (you don't want the colors to blend into each other).
- At the phrase "orange-colored fish," add a drop or two of orange food coloring at a distance from the other colorings you added earlier.



Set aside the bowl of colored water after the story, but save it for next week. By that time it should be murky, which is what you want it to be.



GROW

Circle Walk

Picture Smart

Body Smart

Goal

Experience awe and wonder at the grandeur and goodness of God's world.

Time

20 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Poster, session 1 (children's resources)
- ☐ Seven white paper clouds made from newsprint for creation, labeled "Day 1," "Day 2," and so on
- ☐ Masking tape
- ☐ Seven trays with crayons, chalk, or oil pastels in the following colors:
 - Day 1: black and white
 - Day 2: several shades of blue
 - Day 3: blues, greens, browns, reds, yellows
 - Day 4: yellows, reds, silver
 - Day 5: blues, grays, browns, oranges, neon colors
 - Day 6: all colors
 - Day 7: golds and purples
- ☐ Newsprint with drawing of sunrise and the word *East* on it, large enough to cover top half of doorframe to your room

This "circle walk" activity is based on a Navajo tradition that will first help the children learn about creation and then praise God for what they've learned. According to this tradition, the children start in the east. Then they move in a circular pattern, spiraling inward with a clockwise motion. Once they reach the center of the spiral, they leave in a counter-clockwise motion. Entering the spiral represents learning, and leaving the spiral represents giving back in some way. For this creation activity, entering represents learning the days of creation, and leaving represents giving back praise to God.

- If you haven't already done so, distribute the poster for session 1 from the student resources. (You should have one poster for each student and one for yourself.) Call attention to the painting "And It Was Good" by Christian Navajo artist Elmer Yazzie. Read the caption to the group. It explains the details of the painting.



- Tape seven clouds (that you have cut out of newsprint and labeled "Day 1," "Day 2," and so on) to the walls



To save time, tape the clouds to the wall before today's session.

around the room. Start on the right as you enter your room and tape them at a level where your students can comfortably draw while sitting on a chair. For each day supply the appropriate colors to represent what was created on that day (see materials list).

- Assign one cloud representing one day of creation to each child.
- Direct students to use the crayons in the tray to illustrate the day of creation they have been assigned. (You may want to remove the papers from the crayons to encourage using broad strokes rather than just the tips.) They may check Genesis 1 or the story on side 1 of the poster to review what God made on that day. Let them know they'll have about five minutes to do this.
- While the children are working, open your room door and cover the top half of the door opening with a large piece of newsprint with a sunrise and the word *East* on it. The writing and drawing should face toward the hall outside your room. It should be low enough so that the children will need to bend or kneel to go under it.



If your group is larger than seven, assign two or more children to each cloud; if smaller than seven, assign one child to work on two or more clouds.



- When the children are finished illustrating the days of creation, exit the room with the entire group and stand outside the door. Explain that this activity is based on a tradition of the Navajo tribe. We will be doing this in a way that shows our respect for everything God has made. Offer an explanation along these lines:

We are about to enter the creation room.

We enter from the East because the sun rises in the east and that represents beginning. Inside the room, the clouds represent what our great God has made.

To show our awe and humility, we will enter the room on our knees.

Once we're inside the room, we will stand up and walk the "circle of creation" together.



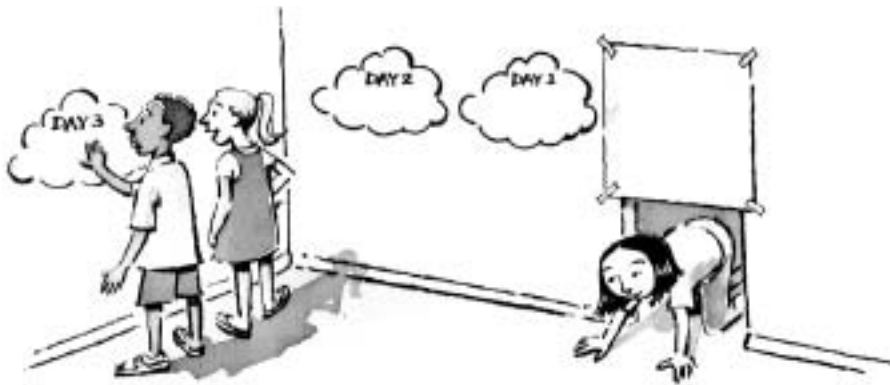
Some children in your group may be interested in knowing a little more about the poster "And It Was Good." Share some of the following comments from artist Elmer Yazzie with them as they look at the poster with you. Or simply use them for your own reflection.

In the center of the poster are four corn plants with seven fruitful cobs. These plants represent God's desire for all of creation to experience complete fruitfulness according to God's plan. Each plant is rooted into the three center circles, indicating that this complete fruitfulness of creation takes place through the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

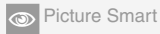
Four rain clouds in three sections surround the corn plants. These clouds contain God's blessing for the elements of creation. Water is one valuable element necessary for life.

And finally, all seven days are built on the three layers of God's design: to control the elements of nature, to give all seed-bearing plants to humanity, and to give humanity the responsibility to care for the earth.

- Kneel and crawl under the “East” sunrise display. Once everyone is inside, walk around the room, naming the days and acts of creation. After the seventh cloud picture, spiral inward toward the center of the room, asking the group to stand quietly and remember all that God created. Remain there for a minute or so. (You will complete this activity in the next step.)



Nature Artists



Time

15 minutes

Materials

- Sheet of cardboard, about 8½ x 11, with a one-inch square cut out of the middle, one per student
- Drawing paper, one per child
- Markers, crayons



If you have a short class session, you may want to use this option to step 3.

Here's a substitute for the circle walk described above and continued in the next step. Give each child a piece of cardboard, drawing paper, and markers or crayons of various colors. Take the group outside and have them look at grass blades, flowers, tree bark, leaves, and so on through the cardboard opening. When they find something they think is especially interesting, they should sit down and sketch a full-sized picture of it, using the drawing paper and markers. They can use the cardboard as a reasonably firm surface to write on (or supply clipboards or magazines for this purpose).

Encourage kids to study their subject carefully like real artists, taking frequent looks at it as they create their sketches. If they wish, they may look at their own skin or the eye of a friend, but warn them not to look at the sun. (Providing plastic magnifying lenses for each child would be another great way for them to explore details around them.)

Back in your meeting room, kids can show their drawings and let the others guess what it is (if it isn't obvious).

Option to
step 3

4

SHOW
Say It Gladly!

Music Smart

Word Smart

Goal

Praise God for the goodness and grandeur of each day of creation.

Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

- Songs: “Creation Song” (pp. 41-42; CD, track 2);
“In the Beginning” (pp. 43-44; CD, track 3)
- CD player

Before the children spiral their way out of the circle, explain that when we entered the circle and walked through the days, we were learning about God’s creation. As we leave the circle, we will give back praise to God for each day of creation.



Tip: Keep the prayers voluntary. Some children enjoy praying aloud, others are afraid to do so. It may help to give kids a sentence starter to complete: “Awesome God, we praise you for creating . . .” Or have the entire group say the same praise line aloud: “Awesome God, we praise you for creating . . . (people, plants, and so on) out of nothing.” Tell the group how you will end the praise phrase before saying it together.

Lead the class back through the circle, walking counterclockwise and stopping first at Day 7. Ask who would like to say a word of praise to God for this day of rest. Pause for a short prayer of praise. Continue with each day in this same manner.

When the group reaches Day 1, listen to “Creation Song” on the CD (track 2) and then circle the room again, thinking of all that God has placed on the earth. Since the song uses the call-and-response technique, it will be easy for the children in your group to join in.

Encourage kids to use this song during the week, perhaps singing it as they take a nature walk later on in the day or during the week. If you have time, you may also want to introduce the lively song “In the Beginning” (track 3). It provides a fun and helpful way of remembering the days of creation and thanking God for each one of them. Consider adding these motions:

- God: point up
- heavens: arms raised toward sky
- earth: bring hands together over head, forming a circle



Shout out the days and numbers (Day 1 . . .). As the children become familiar with the order of creation, they may wish to respond with what was created on each day.

Before children leave, invite them to take their posters home and display them. Point out the additional “Creation Riddles” on side 1 that the children can enjoy reading at home.

Creative Praise Word Smart Music Smart Self Smart

**Option to
step 4**

Time

15 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Songs “Creation Song” (pp. 41-42; CD, track 2);
“In the Beginning” (pp. 43-44; CD, track 3)
- ☐ CD player
- ☐ Poster paper
- ☐ Markers, crayons

If you chose the “Nature Artists” option in step 3, choose one of the following instead of the Show step described above.

- Display the outdoor nature art done by the kids. Invite each artist to write a short prayer of praise to God for that particular bit of God’s creation. Say the prayers aloud (or collect them and read them to the group as you point to each drawing). Use “Creation Song” and “In the Beginning” as described in the regular Show step.
- Challenge kids to make their own creation poster using the “And It Was Good” poster as an inspiration. They may use the first verse of the Memory Challenge (Ps. 24:1) as a take-off point or come up with their own idea.
- Write a new stanza or add motions to “Creation Song.”
- Sing other creation songs the children may be familiar with (“He’s Got the Whole World”).
- God is like . . . Explain that the writers of the psalms often described God by comparing God to something God created. For example, “The Lord is my rock” (Ps. 18:2). Ask children to think of something in nature that they could compare God to. Then allow each person to explain his or her comparison.



OVERTIME

Memory Challenge and

Prayer Body Smart Word Smart Music Smart

Time




5 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Memory Challenge sheet photocopied from page 49.

Give each child a copy of the Memory Challenge for this unit (Ps. 24:1-4a). Choose some fun ways to become familiar with this passage:

- Have kids invent motions to go with the verses.
- Say as an echo chant, with the leader reading a short phrase and giving it a strong beat (“The EARTH is the LORD’S, and EVERYthing IN it”) and the children repeating the line with the same beat and emphasis. Add clapping too.
- Divide into two groups. Group 1 reads a line, then Group 2, and so on. Repeat, switching lines.

Guessing Game

Earth Smart

Body Smart

Number Smart

5 minutes

- ☐ Small pieces of many varieties of fruit
- ☐ Blindfolds (optional)

Have the kids put on blindfolds (or just close their eyes). Give each a small piece of the same fruit. Have them taste it and say (aloud) what they think it is. Identify the sample, then repeat with other types of fruit. Clap after each correct guess as a sign of rejoicing in all of God's goodness.

Dear Family:

Today your child began a new theme in church school called “God’s Beautiful World—Spoiled.” The four sessions in this unit focus on God’s creation of the world, our fall into sin, the tragic story of Cain and Abel, and the tower of Babel.

Through a variety of dramas, stories, games and other hands-on activities we will be exploring what God’s Word teaches us through these stories from Genesis. We’ll find out what these stories mean for our lives today and how we need to respond to them.

Please pray for us as we learn from these stories from God’s Word together.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

Today your child began a new theme in church school called “God’s Beautiful World—Spoiled.” The four sessions in this unit focus on God’s creation of the world, our fall into sin, the tragic story of Cain and Abel, and the tower of Babel.

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Please pray for us as we learn from these stories from God’s Word together.

Sincerely,

Memory Challenge

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the waters.
Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart.
—Psalm 24:1-4a (NIV)

Memory Challenge

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.
Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts.
—Psalm 24:1-4a (NRSV)



Decisions, Decisions!

Scripture

1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 2:1-5; 12:15; Philippians 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Memory Challenge

Colossians 3:23-24

Focus

When faced with a difficult decision, we can be guided by God's Word, by prayer, and by the advice of other Christians.

WORDSearch

Think About It

Decisions, decisions!

We're constantly facing new ones. Most of the decisions we make don't take much thought. But others are so difficult that they keep us awake at night. Tough choices are an unavoidable part of life.

When we face tough choices, how do we know we're making the right decisions—especially when we can't always foresee the consequences? How do we know if our decisions will lead to a dead end, a frightful adventure, or blessed rest?

Whether we know the consequences or not, our main concern must be to obey God. We entrust our futures to God, who knows our deepest needs. If we do what's right, God will bless us—sooner or later. But how do we figure out what God wants us to do? How do we recognize the right choices? Here are three practices that can guide us.

We consult the Bible. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 the apostle Paul explains, "All Scripture is God-

breathed and is useful for

teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." This doesn't mean we can dig out a proof text that magically delivers us an answer to every problem. When we open our Bibles, we enter into a long conversation with God about our lives. The Bible calls us to reflect widely on the God-created norms for life. It makes us examine our motivations. It transforms us with a vision of Christ and his kingdom. It encourages us to rely on God's promises. Gaining

Session Planner

Hello *Recognize that life is full of decisions we need to make.*

☐ Your Choice! 5-7 minutes

Know *Identify situations in our lives that call for tough decisions.*

☐ Create a Scenario 10-15 minutes

Grow *Recognize that God provides help when we need to make tough decisions (and even some not-so-tough ones).*

☐ God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions 20-25 minutes

☐ Option: Slogans 10-15 minutes

Show *Apply guidelines to a decision we're facing or might soon face.*

☐ Trying It Out 10 minutes

☐ Option: Scenarios Revisited 20 minutes

Overtime

☐ The Rusty Robot 10 minutes

☐ Free Advice! 10-15 minutes

Pray About It

OK, you've made a decision to teach this class. Maybe that was a big decision for you. Maybe not. But one thing is sure—you'll need a lot of wisdom to teach your students about making decisions. Look again at Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 3:6-9). Then humble yourself before God in prayer and ask for whatever wisdom and insight you'll need to teach this unit on making tough choices.

Tell About It

Emphasize that none of these three disciplines are last-minute fixes. Without regular Bible reading your students won't have a clue about where to begin looking when a difficult choice breathes down their necks. And if they're not in the habit of talking with God and consulting with other wise people, it won't even dawn on them to do those things when the going gets tough. The time to start preparing for life's really big decisions is *now*.

biblical wisdom to make wise choices involves a lifelong discipline of reading, studying, and reflecting on Scripture.

We pray. We often fool ourselves by rationalizing and making pious excuses. We often avoid listening to what we don't want to hear. Only God can open our eyes and give us true spiritual discernment. Listen again to Paul: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6). In prayer we dialogue with God, inviting God to direct us and, if necessary, to change us. When King Solomon prayed for wisdom to distinguish between right and wrong, God was pleased with his request and gave him great wisdom (1 Kings 3:7-12).

We seek advice. Wise people have experience; they've "been there, done that." They speak in ways that build people up and help them find sensible solutions. In the Bible, wise people are also godly people; they walk faithfully in God's ways (Ps. 119:105). Wise people look for guidance from other wise people, and they heed godly advice (Prov. 12:15).

Life is complicated. But if we faithfully practice these basic disciplines, they'll help us on our journey. The road signs to God's blessed kingdom will more readily pop into view.



Goal

Recognize that life is full of decisions we need to make.

Time

5-7 minutes

Materials

- Several sheets of newsprint, prepared as described below
- Markers in assorted colors
- Masking tape to hang newsprint on wall (if desired)

Before you begin this session, prepare several sheets of newsprint with questions that ask kids to make a choice. Some sample questions (one per sheet, leaving room for responses) follow:

- If you had to watch the same TV show every night for a month, what show would it be?
- If you had an extra hour each day, how would you spend it?
- If you could avoid eating one kind of food for the rest of your life, what would it be?
- If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?
- If you could live anywhere you wanted to in the world, where would you live?
- If you could be doing anything right now, what would you like to do?



Feel free to add or substitute your own questions. Maybe you know of something going on at school or in your community that involves a choice that would be especially interesting to your group. In this unit on choices, try to give your group choices whenever you can.

Tape the question sheets to the classroom walls or lay them on a table or on the floor. As kids arrive, hand each one a marker and invite everyone to write or draw answers to any of the questions on the sheets.

After three or four minutes, ask everyone to stop. Then have some fun together sampling the responses. Point out that you've been talking about choices—for example, about favorite TV shows, foods, things to do, and so on. As you make this point, you could say something like this: **You'll probably never have to make the silly choices these questions ask about, but you *will* be making many, many other**



If your time is quite limited, use only two or three of the questions.

Let the group rattle off a bunch of responses—what they ate for breakfast, what TV shows or videos they watched last night, what they decided to wear, and so on. Then wrap up this exercise by saying something like this:

During our next four meetings we're going to be talking about making choices. Some choices are made quickly and easily, but others make us scratch our heads and wonder what God wants us to do. For example, let's say your best friend shows you some cool stuff that he's shoplifted from a local store. You're bothered by this, so you mention it to your parents. "You have to tell your friend's parents," they say. But if you tell, you'll lose a friend. And if you don't tell, you'll be disobeying your parents. So what do you do? We'll be learning together about how to make good choices that honor God in situations like that—and many more.

Open with prayer, asking God to help everyone learn a lot about decisions and tough choices during the next four sessions—and enjoy being together.

KNOW

Create a Scenario

 Body Smart People Smart

Identify situations in our lives that call for tough decisions.

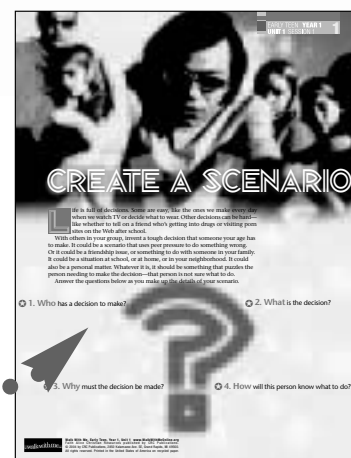
10-15 minutes

- ☐ Student handout 1: “Create a Scenario”
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Newsprint
- ☐ Markers

Distribute student handout 1 (“Create a Scenario”), one to each student.

Read aloud the directions on the handout.

Then form groups of two, three, or four, depending on the number of kids you're working with. It's best to have at least two or three small groups. Tell the groups they have about five minutes to fill in the details of their scenario.



Working in small groups is an important way to *build community*—one of the goals of the *Walk With Me* curriculum.

When doing group work, you may want to choose the groups yourself to maintain a balance of talkers and non-talkers. If possible, let groups go to an area where they will not be distracted by the others—in the hall, in the corner of a stairwell, in an empty room nearby.

When the time's up, have each small group present their scenario to the others, either by describing it or acting it out.

Don't be concerned if some of the kids' scenarios are more ordinary and less tough than others. The intent here is to get kids talking about the decisions they see as difficult and challenging.

Summarize by commenting along these lines:

At some points in our lives we have to make tough choices. We might be confused and uncertain about what to do. So in this next activity we're going to look at some guidelines from the Bible that will help us make wise decisions.

3 GROW

God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions

AA Word Smart
Number Smart

People Smart
Picture Smart

Goal

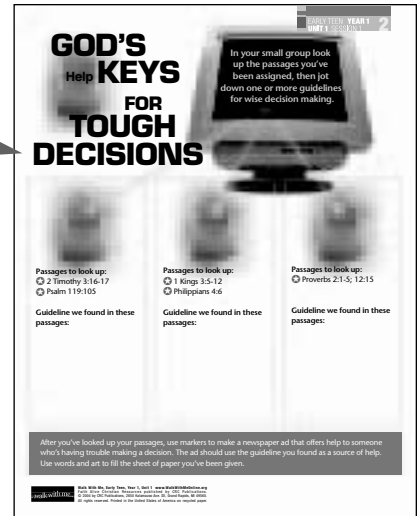
Recognize that God provides help when we need to make tough decisions (and even some not-so-tough ones).

Time

20-25 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Student handout 2: "God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions"
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Newsprint (or poster paper)
- ☐ Markers in assorted colors



With everyone remaining in their small groups, explain that each group will next look up a couple of Scripture passages to find a guideline for wise decision making. Then they'll make a newspaper ad that aims to "sell" their guideline to someone who's puzzled about making a decision.

First have the groups use handout 2, "God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions," to discover biblical guidelines for wise decision making. Assign one set of passages to each group. (It doesn't matter if more than one group gets the same set of passages.)

When the small groups are finished reading and writing, give them newsprint (or poster paper) and markers in assorted colors, and ask them to make a newspaper ad. Be sure they understand the assignment, as described on the handout. If they're having trouble getting started, you could explain that ads often use a headline or an illustration to grab people's attention. For example, a headline might read, "In the dark about a decision?" and it could picture a person groping around in a dark, scary place. Then the ad could go on to say, "God's Word can shed light on your problem."

Let the groups quickly read or summarize their passages and present their ads. After each group's presentation, talk about the guideline they came up with.

Help Key #1

The guideline here is to find help in God's Word. Ask, **How can reading God's Word help us make wise decisions?** Clarify that using the Bible in decision making doesn't mean searching for a single verse that gives us the answer (though we may be helped in general ways, as with the wisdom in Proverbs or the advice of Jesus or Paul). Instead it means we need to read the Bible faithfully so that we know how God wants us to live. A good question to ask when we have to make a tough decision is whether any of our choices goes against God's commands or other teachings. A choice that would require us to hurt someone, for example, is not in line with what we know God teaches in the Bible.



Try not to let the small groups rush through the Bible passages. Be sure to mention that someone in each group should read the passages aloud and that each person should write down a key idea or guideline from the passages.



You may want to let the small groups choose between inventing a TV ad or a newspaper ad. A TV ad may appeal to groups that prefer acting things out to writing and drawing.

Help Key #2

The guideline here is to find help in prayer. Ask, **How can praying help us make wise decisions?** Affirm that God wants us to ask for help when we face tough decisions. Remind everyone about how pleased God was when Solomon—who didn't know how he could handle the job of being a real king—asked God for wisdom (1 Kings 3:6-10). God hears our prayers for help. God's answers are sometimes surprising, sometimes disappointing, sometimes a long time in coming. But, as the saying goes, "God answers knee-mail." Prayer, talking with God, is our greatest help in tough times—and in all other times as well.

Help Key #3

The guideline here is to find help by seeking the advice of others. Ask, **Who are some people we could go to for help?** Talk about how helpful parents, grandparents, teachers, and pastors can be. Wise people listen to the advice of others whom they trust, especially those who are wise in God's ways (Prov. 12:15).

Summarize by saying something like this: **When we read God's Word and try to live the way God wants us to, when we pray about our decisions, and when we talk to other Christians, we are using a biblical decision-making process. And guess what? It really helps!**

Option to
step 3

tion option option o

Slogans

AA Word Smart

People Smart

Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Student handout 2: "God's Help Keys for Tough Decisions"
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens or pencils



If you have a short class session, you may want to use this option to step 3.

Once each of the small groups has found their guideline using handout 2, have them invent a slogan for it (for example, "When in doubt—pray!") and share it with the class (instead of creating a complete ad, as in the main step). Then use the questions from the "Help Key" items in step 3 to talk about each guideline.



SHOW

Trying It Out

Number Smart

People Smart

Self Smart

Goal

Apply guidelines to a decision we're facing or might soon face.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Student handout 3: "Checklist for Making Tough Decisions"
- ☐ Notecards—one for each person
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Memory Challenge (reproducible page 45), optional

Give each person a notecard. Explain that you'd like each person to think about a decision he or she is facing or might soon face. On the notecard each person should complete one of two sentence starters (after copying these on one side of the card and choosing one to complete on the other side):

- This week I will need to decide if I should . . .
- I'm not facing any tough decisions right now, but one thing I might have to make a tough decision about is . . .

Explain to your students that if they choose to complete the first sentence, the decision they describe doesn't have to be something super-big that will affect them the rest of their lives. Maybe they have to decide how to deal with a situation at home or at school or to settle an issue with a friend. Maybe they need to decide how to fix a situation or relationship they've messed up. It should be a decision to which they can apply the guidelines of finding help in God's Word, in prayer, and in advice from others.

If the kids can't think of a decision they need to make in the coming week, they should choose to complete the second statement.

Allow a couple of minutes for everyone to finish. Then distribute handout 3, "Checklist for Making Tough Decisions," introducing it with a few statements like these:

This page can help you through the decision-making process. You can use it this week if you're facing a decision right now. Or you can save it and use it to help you make a tough decision some other time.

If there's enough time, you may want to walk through the handout quickly with the group.

Close your session with prayer, noting that it's one of the guidelines God gives us for decision making. If you like, use one of the following approaches, or try an idea of your own.

- Invite each person to find a partner (one group of three is OK), and together they can share what they wrote on their notecards, if they wish. Partners can then pray silently or aloud for each other, asking God to lead them in making a decision or simply to be with them as they face tough decisions in their lives. Encourage the partners to continue to pray for each other throughout the coming week.
- Ask for volunteers from the entire class to share what they wrote on their cards. Then lead the group in prayer, asking for God's help in the situations that were mentioned and in all other decision making that the group members may face.
- Have group members hold up their notecards in their palms (turned upward as in an offering to God). Then invite everyone to repeat this prayer after you (one statement at a time):

Dear God, these are the decisions that we face this week or later in the future.
We commit these decisions to you, Lord.
Give us wisdom to know what choices to make.
Bless all our decisions, Lord.
May they be pleasing to you and good for others and for us.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Have your middle schoolers take the handouts home with them. If you're going to be assigning memory work, give each person a copy of the Memory Challenge (Col. 3:23-24) as well (see reproducible page 45 at the back of this leader's guide). Also hand out "The Rusty Robot" (student handout 4) and encourage everyone to read it at home. Sometime this week send a copy of the family letter (reproducible page 39) to the parents or guardians of each member of your group.



You may want to explain that some things that call for tough decision making are

- use of leisure time (movies, TV, video games, music, sports, giving time to help others, and so on)
- school issues (behavior in classroom, cheating, extracurricular activities, competition, tests, papers, homework, and more)
- home issues (rules, chores, parents, siblings, and so on)
- friendship issues (loyalty, gossip, competition, and so on)

Looking back at the scenarios from step 2 may also help students think of a tough decision they need to make.

Checklist for Making Tough Decisions

- ☐ **Decision I Need to Make**
What decisions do I need to make?
- ☐ **Apply God's Word**
Can I rule out any choices that seem to go against God's Word? For example, do any of the choices involve breaking one of God's commandments by lying to someone or hurting someone?
- ☐ **Pray About It**
When will I pray about this decision?
- ☐ **Ask Other Christians**
What people could help me make this decision?
- ☐ **Decision Time**
Now that I've applied God's Word, prayed about it more than just once or twice, and asked for advice, what will I decide to do about this situation?

What choices seem to be most in line with what God's Word teaches? Remember especially God's commands to love the Lord above all and to love others as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39).

Are there any Bible passages I could read that might help me make this decision? (The book of Proverbs is full of good advice. You might also check a concordance, which will list passages for words like kindness, love, courage, anger, and so on. Or you could get advice about helpful passages from your parents, a pastor, or a trusted Christian friend.)

What persons will be affected by what I decide?

Whom shall I ask to help me? When?

Option to
step 4

Scenarios Revisited



People Smart



Number Smart



Self Smart

Time

20 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Student handout 3: “Checklist for Making Tough Decisions”
- ☐ Pens or pencils

Instead of using the notecard activity in step 4, you could have the class select one of the scenarios they created—and liked—in step 1. Distribute handout 3: “Checklist for Making Tough Decisions.”

For more mature kids who know the Bible fairly well, divide into small groups and ask each group to discuss the scenario using the questions under “Apply God’s Word” on the handout. Ask the groups to decide what the person in the scenario should do and why. Then have each group give its response to the entire class.

For younger kids who may not be as familiar with the Bible, walk through the questions together, helping the kids apply biblical standards to the scenario they’ve chosen.

Close by inviting your middle schoolers to think about a decision they are facing now or may be facing soon. Invite brief sharing, then lead in prayer.



OVERTIME

The Rusty Robot



Word Smart



Self Smart

Time

10 minutes

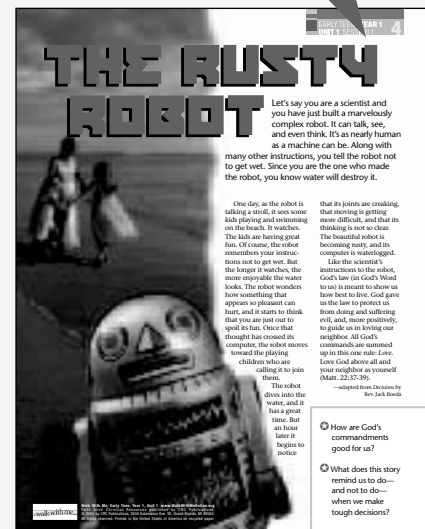
Materials

- ☐ Student handout 4: “The Rusty Robot”

You can add this short parable to your session plan (during step 2 or 4) to help your group understand the guiding role that God’s Word—and especially God’s law—plays in decision making. Read the story to the group and discuss the two questions that follow the story:

- How are God’s commandments good for us?
- What does this story remind us to do—and not to do—when we make tough decisions?

Emphasize that our choices need to be made within the bounds of God’s Word and God’s law—not just because “God says so” but because God knows that we hurt ourselves and others when we violate God’s rules for living. So when we talk about making decisions, we always need to ask what God’s Word has to say about the choices we’re facing.



Free Advice! **Word Smart**

Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Letter-writing paper
- ☐ Pens or pencils
- ☐ Envelopes
- ☐ One or more “advice writers” from your congregation or broader faith community

This activity calls for selecting one or two individuals from your congregation or community who know and like kids of middle-school age, and who are willing to write advice that will help them make wise decisions. Youth workers, pastors, teachers, and retired persons may be among those you might consider. Of course, you could also write the advice yourself, but it's good to involve others from your faith community in the education of young people (good for the kids and for the adults too!).

Tell your group you have selected people who are willing and able to help them with their decision making. Without naming them, describe the advice givers as caring, wise Christians who have “been around the block a few times” and are willing to help. Build them up so that kids feel they can trust these people to give good advice.

Hand out paper and envelopes and invite kids to write for advice about a specific decision they face or think they will be facing soon. They should give enough details so that the advice giver understands the situation well enough to give good advice. Kids can sign the letters with pen names such as “Puzzled,” “Not Sure,” “Searching,” and so on. (Tell them to remember how they’ve identified themselves so that when the letters come back, they’ll get to the right persons!)

Collect the letters and distribute them afterward to your advice writers. It would be great if they could have their replies back to you before your next meeting with the class.

If your advice writers are willing, you could also invite kids to hand in other requests for advice throughout the four weeks of this unit on tough choices.



Be sure to check out “Tips for Using Music with Your Middle Schoolers” at www.WalkWithMeOnline.org.

Dear Family,

Today our church school group started a new *Walk With Me* unit on tough choices. Your child is beginning to encounter situations in life that don't have easy answers, that may not have a clear "right" or "wrong" solution. Together we'll be looking at some tough questions and situations and talking about how we make decisions as Christians.

Through our discussion of Bible passages and stories, we'll look at biblical guidelines that can help us make choices—even when the answers are far from obvious. We'll also be talking about the role of love in the decisions we make, about the importance of prayer and Bible reading in our decision making, and about Christian adults and friends who can help us when we're struggling for answers.

Please pray for our group as we look for ways of understanding and addressing life's tough choices.

Sincerely,

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Please pray for our group as we look for ways of understanding and addressing life's tough choices.

Sincerely,

Memory Challenge

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

—Colossians 3:23-24 (NIV)

Memory Challenge

Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ.

—Colossians 3:23-24 (NRSV)

