

# DAY 1: JESUS IS GOD'S PROMISED SON

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## Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of God.

## Bible Story

Jesus asked who people thought He was. (Matthew 16:13-20)

## Bonus Verse

“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” Matthew 16:16

## Leader Devotion

Think of a teacher who significantly impacted and brightened your life. This teacher likely made you feel loved, valued, and understood. This week, you have an opportunity to be that kind of teacher—one who helps children feel loved and valued in significant and uncommon ways. Pause now and pray, asking God to use you to make an eternal impact on the lives of the children you teach. Repeat this prayer each day.

Beyond building relationships, one critical trait of exceptional teachers is their ability to ask great questions that capture attention, inspire deep thinking, and foster renewed curiosity and wonder. These questions can illuminate gaps in comprehension in order to build bridges and strengthen understanding.

Jesus is the Master Teacher. His use of engaging questions is a hallmark of His teaching. Consider these:

1. “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark 4:40)
2. “Why do you break God’s commandment because of your tradition?” (Matthew 15:3)
3. “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things I say?” (Luke 6:46)
4. “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6)

Let’s shine the spotlight on two of the most significant and revealing questions Jesus ever asked His disciples. After spending time with them in a boat, they traveled to Caesarea Philippi—a place known for its pagan gods. Against this backdrop, Jesus pressed His disciples for answers to these two questions: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” and “But you, who do you say that I am?”

Scripture records the disciples answering the first question, but the second question is specifically answered by Peter. Peter declared, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Have you ever wondered why Peter was the first disciple to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah? Surely, there was a less impulsive and more faithful disciple who could have spoken up rather than the flawed and impulsive Peter.

Jesus knew Peter’s weaknesses. He knew Peter would deny Him three times, yet Jesus washed Peter’s feet anyway (John 13). He knew Peter would fall asleep in the garden of Gethsemane, yet He blessed Peter when God revealed to him that Jesus was the Messiah (Matt 16:26). Jesus knew all of Peter’s story—his failures, doubts, and triumphs—and He still chose to love and use Peter in powerful ways. Jesus did not write Peter off or deem him useless. Instead, He entrusted Peter with the opportunity to preach at Pentecost and lead His Church (Acts 2). Peter’s story reminds us that God sees potential where others see character flaws, and He calls us to love, lead, and serve in ways that often do not make sense to others.

## Illuminate Your Heart

- Jesus asks each of us the same question. Take a moment to answer it. “But you, who do you say I am?”
- It may be easy to make a declaration of words, but much harder to live out our belief in Jesus as our Messiah. Peter struggled to walk out the words he declared. Thank God for His redemptive love for each of us and ask Him to use you this week to proclaim the good news of Jesus to each child in your care.

## This Week’s Bible Verse

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

# DAY 2: JESUS IS GOD'S PERFECT SON

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## Was Jesus just an ordinary man?

Jesus is the perfect Son of God who came to be the Savior of the world.

## Bible Story

The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-11; John 1:29-34)

## Bonus Verse

“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” Mark 1:11

## Leader Devotion

Children are often drawn to the tangible act of baptism before fully grasping its meaning and symbolism. As one of our two church sacraments that make theology visible and tangible, baptism is a powerful sign and seal of our adoption into God’s family. But sometimes children mistakenly think baptism itself saves.

When we teach children about baptism, it is good to shed light on why Jesus was baptized. Jesus did not need to repent or be saved from His sin because He was without sin (2 Cor 5:21). We know baptism is not what saves us, because Jesus was baptized and did not need to be saved from sin as we do. Instead, Jesus’ baptism affirmed Him as the Son of God and set an example for Christ’s covenant community.

Matthew 3:13-17 provides clear evidence to answer today’s Spotlight Question: Was Jesus just an ordinary man? Jesus is the perfect Son of God, who came to be the Savior of the world. When Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, John pushed back, recognizing Jesus’ greatness and even suggesting that John should be baptized by Jesus instead. Jesus’ response to John revealed His identity as the Son of God. However, it was not just the words of Jesus that affirmed Jesus as God. All three persons of the Trinity made themselves known at Jesus’ baptism. The Spirit of God descended like a dove and God’s voice from heaven declared, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased” (verses 16-17).

The baptism of Jesus also provides an example for all God’s people. Baptism is a sign of God’s covenant with His people, and a seal that what God has said is really true for those who repent and believe. It is a sign and seal that God in Christ washes away our sins, and that we are a part of the visible church. It is an outward demonstration that we have a relationship with Christ and His church, and a tangible reminder that God will keep all His promises to us - and already did - through Christ.

Think of it this way. Anyone driving along a main route might see a blue and white hospital sign. A seal would be like someone helping you to their car and saying, “I’ll take you there.” The sign is seen by everyone. It’s visible. But driving you there is particular and felt. Baptism fills both of these roles. It is a sign to anyone who should see or hear of it that the baptized person is a part of the church. And for that person, they feel the water and the care of their covenant community and know it’s particularly for them.

The baptism of Jesus powerfully declared His identity as the perfect Son of God and His obedience to the Father’s plan. Though sinless, Jesus humbly set an example for us. The voice from heaven and the presence of the Holy Spirit affirmed that He was no ordinary man—He is the Savior of the world.

## Illuminate Your Heart

- Have you been baptized? If not, pray about setting up a meeting with an elder. If so, think about your own baptism if you remember it, and/or think about the way God is keeping His promises to you.
- Is your focus on the perfect Son of God? Read Eph. 2:1-10 and remember what God has promised. This is what the sign of your baptism points to, and what is sealed and guaranteed to you as a believer in Jesus.
- As children hear today’s Bible story and reflect on Jesus’ baptism, tell them of God’s covenant promises to save His people, and that He will always keep His promises, as He did in Jesus.

# DAY 3: JESUS IS THE POWERFUL SON OF GOD

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## Was Jesus just a teacher?

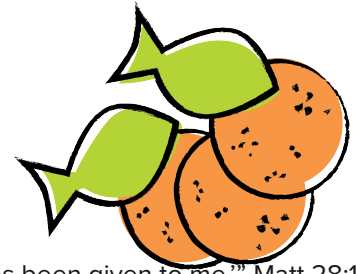
Everything Jesus said and did showed that He is the powerful Son of God.

## Bible Story

Jesus performed miracles. (Matthew 15:29-39)

## Bonus Verse

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’” Matt 28:18



## Leader Devotion

Matthew 15:29-39 provides compelling evidence that Jesus was more than just a teacher. He is the powerful Son of God. Let's shed some light on this passage. This account takes place on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee where large crowds gathered, bringing people who were in desperate need of healing.

Bringing those in need up a mountain to Jesus must have required physical effort and determination. Perhaps word had already spread about the paralyzed man whose friends lowered him through a roof to be healed by Jesus (Mark 2:1-5). Regardless, their actions reflected their faith in Jesus' ability to heal.

The details of how Jesus healed each person in this passage are left out. Scripture simply states, “They put them at his feet, and he healed them.” It was not unusual for Jesus to heal multiple people in one setting, as the Gospels record several similar occasions (Luke 4:40, Matthew 9:35, Mark 6:56).

Following this incredible display of healing, another miracle occurred—one that impacted everyone present. Jesus was moved by compassion because the people had been with Him for three days and had nothing to eat. The disciples pointed out the obvious challenge: they were in a remote place with little access to food. When Jesus asked how much food they had, the answer was just seven loaves of bread and a few fish, hardly enough to feed more than 4,000 hungry people. Yet, as they were about to witness, in the hands of Jesus, a little is more than enough.

After Jesus took the loaves and fish, He gave thanks and then began breaking the bread for the disciples to pass out to the people. The result? Matthew 15:37 says, “They all ate and were satisfied. They collected the leftover pieces—seven large baskets full.” Jesus was no ordinary teacher; He is the powerful Son of God. He could do things no one else could, and the disciples often had a front-row seat to His miracles.

What must it have been like to see these miracles unfold—to watch people be healed and to see over 4,000 people fed from just 7 loaves and a few fish? In both instances, Jesus responded to a need by involving people in His work. In this event, Jesus did not go looking for people to heal. People took the initiative to come to Him. For the hungry crowd, Jesus used what was given to Him by the disciples to meet the needs of the multitudes.

As you prepare to teach children about the powerful Son of God, also look for ways to share this amazing truth in everyday conversation with your good friend or your hair stylist or your kid's baseball coach. Be prepared to give personal examples of how Jesus has proven to be powerful in your life. Never underestimate what God may want to do through your efforts to share the gospel with the people around you both inside and outside of VBS.

## Illuminate Your Heart

- What are you doing to bring people to Jesus? Are you willing to give any necessary effort (physical or otherwise) and whatever possessions you have to carry people to Jesus to be saved?
- Pray for the children and families who are being brought to the feet of Jesus this week. Ask God to show you the people in your sphere of influence who you may need to bring to VBS, to church, and to Jesus.

# DAY 4: JESUS IS THE PROVEN SON OF GOD

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## Was Jesus just someone who lived a long time ago?

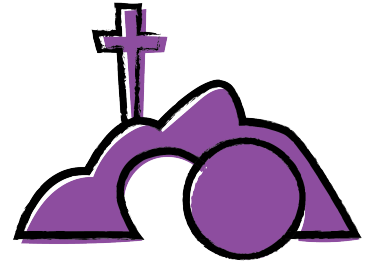
Jesus lived, died, and rose to life again to be our Savior, now and forever.

### Bible Story

Jesus died and rose to life. (Mark 14:43-16:7)

### Bonus Verse

“And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’” Mark 15:39



### Leader Devotion

Do you remember the first time you heard the story of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection? If you grew up in a Christian home, it may be difficult to recall that moment, and you may have never questioned whether Jesus was more than just a man from long ago. For some children at your VBS, this week may be the first time they’ve heard the life-changing truth of Jesus’ resurrection and the salvation He offers each of us.

If it is hard to imagine children in your classroom not knowing about Jesus, consider this: Over the past 25 years, 40 million people have stopped attending church.<sup>1</sup> As a result, church membership in America has dropped below 50 percent.<sup>2</sup> This means we can no longer assume that every child in Vacation Bible School is attending church regularly or has even heard the true story of Jesus. What if you are the first person to tell them the truth of the gospel? How does that impact the way you prepare for this session?

It’s not just children who have never heard about Jesus and who need convictional teaching this week—it’s also people who have heard about Him but are surrounded by a world that questions and devalues the life of Jesus. To navigate an increasingly post-Christian world, children need a biblical worldview that upholds the Bible as absolute truth. A 2022 study found that only 18% of 13- and 14-year-olds listed the Bible as their primary source of truth<sup>3</sup> and 61% “either believe Jesus Christ sinned or may have sinned while He was on earth.”<sup>4</sup> It is important that we continually point children to the Bible as the source of all truth and show them the evidence found in the Scriptures to support Jesus as the proven Son of God.

Throughout this week, children will be having “light bulb moments” as they are learning who Jesus is and how His life provides proof that He was more than just a teacher who lived a long time ago. Jesus did things no one else could do, like heal people who were sick or who had physical disabilities, provide sight to people who were blind, and turn a small amount of food into more than enough to feed the multitudes. He spoke with an authority no one had heard before. The ultimate proof came through the resurrection—the undeniable evidence that He is who He claimed to be.

### Illuminate Your Heart

- How have you experienced Jesus personally? Thank Him for being present in your life.
- There could be no greater privilege than to tell children about the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Pray for the children in your care who may be hearing this story for the first time. Ask God to speak through you as you tell the good news of Jesus.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Jim Davis, Michael Graham, and Ryan P Burge. *The Great Dechurching: Who’s Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Zondervan, 2023), 5.
2. Jefferey Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” *Gallup*, March 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.
3. George Barna, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child’s Heart, Mind and Soul* (Arizona Christian University Press, 2023), 27. (hereafter cited as *Raising Champions*).
4. *Raising Champions*, 28.

# DAY 5: JESUS IS GOD'S PLAN FOR FORGIVENESS

## Why do I need to respond to Jesus?

Jesus is the only way to receive God's forgiveness.

## Bible Story

Peter preached about Jesus. (Acts 2)

## Bonus Verse

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'" Acts 2:38-39

## Leader Devotion

This week, the focus has been on laying a foundation for children to hear and believe that Jesus is their Savior. These truths are boiled down into the "Spotlight Questions" they've heard each day.

Today, kids will hear the message Peter preached that immediately led over three thousand people to see their need for a Savior. So now the spotlight will turn to each child with a deeply personal question:

### Why do I need to respond to Jesus?

Recognizing and believing Jesus is a great teacher, a powerful performer of miracles, and a compassionate servant leader is easy for most of us. The Bible is full of events that lead us to those conclusions. However, James 2:19 reminds us, "You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder." Unless we also acknowledge our desperate need for Him as our Savior—the One who willingly died for our sins and offers forgiveness—we miss the good news of who He truly is. Without Him, we deserve the punishment of death for our sins. In Him, we find grace, redemption, and forgiveness only He can bring.

Children need to understand why they need forgiveness to know why they need to respond to Jesus. Recognizing personal sin is one of the signs a child is beginning to follow Jesus on their own. Children must know what sin is and the problem it causes for their relationship with God. Children often define sin as a wrong choice like disobeying parents, cheating on a test, or fighting with a sibling. While those wrong choices are sin, the result of that sin makes them unable to have a relationship with a holy and perfect God. A simple definition of sin that children can easily understand is "anything we think (point to your head), anything we say (point to your mouth), or anything we do (hold out your hands) that does not please God." When children understand the impact of their sin - it separates them from God - they are often ready to answer today's spotlight question: Why do I need to respond to Jesus?

Take a moment to answer this question for yourself. Confess your own sin and receive the forgiveness of your loving Father. And then ask the next logical question of yourself: How do I respond to Jesus? In other words, how does my life give evidence that Jesus has saved me? How is my life lived for His glory? How do I daily respond to His call on my life, His direction and guidance, His Word, and His Spirit's leading?

VBS has always been an important part of our church's mission to share Jesus with our community. We know that this faith is not for us alone, but for all who will believe. Pray that Jesus will carry on the work that has started this week in the lives of these children, their families, and your co-laborers.

## Illuminate Your Heart

- Have you experienced the Holy Spirit piercing your heart in conviction and leading you to repentance? (See Acts 2:37.) When was the last time you were grieved over your sin?



- Spend some time in prayer for each of the children in your care. Ask God to help them understand their need for Jesus and give them the courage to step out in faith to receive the forgiveness Jesus offers to each of them.