



# ACTION LAB

## Leader Guide

# Overview

DAY	TITLE & SCRIPTURE	STORY SUMMARY	SPARK FOR CHANGE
1	<b>How Is This Possible?</b> <i>Nicodemus</i> John 3:1–17	A Jewish leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night to ask him about the amazing signs Jesus was doing. Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit. Jesus compared this new birth to the blowing of the wind and told Nicodemus about God's great love for the world, believing in the Son of man, and having eternal life. Those who do what is true come into God's light.	Changemakers ask questions.
2	<b>Who Will Fix It?</b> <i>Five Friends</i> Mark 2:1–12	When Jesus was preaching, some people carried a paralyzed man to see him. When they could not get through the crowd, they dug through the roof and lowered the man into the house. Jesus saw their faith and forgave the man's sins. The scribes present cried, "Blasphemy!" Jesus asked which was easier—to forgive or to heal. Jesus healed the paralyzed man, revealing his authority to forgive as well. The people were amazed and glorified God.	Changemakers work together to solve problems.
3	<b>Will There Be Enough?</b> <i>Early Church</i> Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37	The early church demonstrated commitment and unity as they shared a common life. After the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, an ever-increasing group of people listened to the apostles' preaching and ate and prayed together. People who owned possessions sold what they had and gave the money to the apostles, who then gave the money to those in need. Everyone in the community had enough. Many who saw this joined the community of Jesus' followers.	Changemakers respond to the needs of others.
4	<b>What Are We Building?</b> <i>Peter and Cornelius</i> Acts 10	In Caesarea, a Roman believer named Cornelius received a vision to send for Peter in Joppa. Peter received a vision of his own in which he heard a voice telling him to eat without worrying about what was allowed by Jewish law. When Peter went to Cornelius, Peter realized the meaning of his vision was that the message of Jesus was for more than the Jews. He shared the good news about Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles.	Changemakers build bridges.
5	<b>Can You Imagine?</b> <i>A New World</i> Isaiah 65:17–25	Isaiah describes a vision of a new heaven and a new earth. God will rejoice in the people. There will be no more weeping. All people will live long, healthy lives. People will build houses and plant crops and have what they need. God will be close by, answering before people call. People will enjoy the fruits of their labor; predators and prey will eat together.	Changemakers create a new kind of world.

## BIBLE MEMORY

### Early Childhood:

You are the light of the world.  
—Matthew 5:14a (NRSV)

### Grades K–5:

You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.  
—Matthew 5:14a,16 (NRSV)

## Get Connected!



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Changemakers Lab:  
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Published by The Pastoral Center • <https://pastoral.center> • GrowingUpCatholicVBS.com • 844-727-8672 • [support@pastoral.center](mailto:support@pastoral.center)

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## **Credits for Action Lab Leader Guide and Action Lab electronic files:**

**Writer:** Joan L. Daggett

**Editors:** Colleen Smith, Paul Canavese, Chrissie Muecke, Joan L. Daggett, Rachel Nussbaum Eby

**Designer:** Merrill Miller

**Illustrations:** Images not otherwise credited are from Getty Images.

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**Changemakers Lab** is an interactive Vacation Bible School where children learn that everyone can make a difference in the world! The five Bible stories in this curriculum explore examples of people who experienced and brought about change in the world around them. Children will meet Nicodemus, five friends on their way to meet Jesus, people from the early church, Peter and Cornelius, and the prophet Isaiah. These people provide a model for asking hard questions, working together to solve problems, caring for all people, reaching across differences, and imagining a new world.

<b>IMAGINE (35 min)</b> Children start in small groups and then gather for worship.	<b>INVESTIGATE (90 min + snack)</b> Small groups rotate between three activity stations and have a snack.	<b>TRANSFORM (10 min)</b> The large group gathers for worship and dismissal.
<b>Spark Lab (10 min)</b> (small groups)  <b>Changemakers Lab (25 min)</b> (large group, songs, offering, drama, questions, prayer)	<b>Bible Lab (30 min)</b> (Bible study)  <b>STEAM Lab (30 min)</b> (science, technology, engineering, art, and math activities)  <b>Action Lab (30 min)</b> (active games)  <b>Snack Time (15 min)</b>	<b>Changemakers Lab (10 min)</b> (large group, songs, sharing)  <b>Dismissal</b>

## Items you will need:

- Action Lab Leader Guide
- Action Lab electronic files
- Action Lab Area Poster

The **electronic files** include a folder of teaching aids to accompany the leader's guide. Each Action Lab Leader should be given access to the relevant folder in order to print pages for the chosen activities. The Action Lab folder includes the following:

- Day 1 New Life Scenes
- Day 2 Scavenger Hunt Checklist
- Day 3 "Make the Right Move" Cards
- Day 4 Meandering Maps
- Day 4 "This or That?" Cards
- Day 5 Vision Phrases

**Media Connections** are included in each guide and posted on the [Growing Up Catholic Pinterest page](https://www.pinterest.com/growingupcatholic/changemakers-lab/) for ease of use: <https://www.pinterest.com/growingupcatholic/changemakers-lab/>. The items are organized by day. Additional songs, decorating ideas, snack ideas, and offering-related videos are also included.

# Welcome to Action Lab!

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Get outside and play some active games! Physical activity is crucial in child development. Research has shown that active play in the natural world has many benefits, including physical health benefits, improved mood, and increased attention span.

Action Lab is one of three 30-minute **INVESTIGATE** Stations following **IMAGINE** (opening worship). Each Action Lab session includes three parts: Connect, Explore, and Bless.

Each session plan also includes a **Bible background essay** to read in preparation for leading and an At-a-Glance Chart to aid in planning.

## CONNECT

Gather the children for a brief recap of the Bible story and provide instructions for the chosen games for the day. Because these are active games, it is essential to establish clear behavioral expectations and to explain the boundaries of the play area so that all children are safe.

## EXPLORE

Choose from the game options. The At-a-Glance Chart at the beginning of each session gives a summary of the type of game and activity level to help you decide which games to offer. Consider your group's size, space, and number of volunteers. It's best to be prepared with more games than you think you will need. That way you have a backup plan if one of the games doesn't work for a group, or if there is a change due to weather or supervision.

Each game option includes "Talk About It" prompts to help the children connect the game to the Bible story and their own experiences.

## BLESS

Work together with the children to clean up materials in preparation for the next group, and then gather the children for a short prayer of blessing.

# Setting Up

It's ideal if Action Lab activities are done outside in a field. An empty parking lot can also work, provided no cars are allowed to drive into it. Being outside is not possible for many churches, so games can also be played in a gymnasium or other large empty room. Make modifications to the games as needed based on your available space.

Although some activities require little setup, others may require preparation work, such as gathering supplies, printing items from the electronic files, or arranging the space in a particular way. Instead of purchasing new items for activities, check to see if you can get donations from church members.

## Choosing Activities

There are several factors to consider when choosing activities, including available supplies, age of children in the group, number of volunteer helpers, group size, available space, and length of time. If you know of children who have physical limitations, be sure to make modifications so that they can participate in the games.

Action Lab activities are purposefully created to provide a variety of levels of engagement and

Use the Action Lab Area Poster to designate a gathering place where children will come for Connect and Bless. This will also be the place to have "Talk About It" conversations after each game.

Have field markers, such as cones, to set boundaries for some of the games. For example, if children will be playing tag in a field or parking lot, it will be important to mark boundaries. For tag and running games with a small group, a 20 x 20 ft / 6 x 6 m space is enough.

Depending on the weather, have a large cooler of water and cups available in case children get thirsty. Have first aid supplies on hand in case of injury.

energy. Activities are varied and include cooperative and competitive games. Provide a variety of activities throughout the week.

Be prepared to redirect the group to a second or third game in case of rain or if the group is not connecting with the selected activity. It's best to have a backup plan rather than scramble in the moment to come up with something different.

## Leading Conversations

After playing each game, gather briefly near the Action Lab Area Poster to discuss the experience. Discussion questions are provided in the "Talk About It" section of each game description. However, you know your group best! Feel free to take the conversation in a different direction. The goal is to help children connect their experiences with the Bible stories.

When leading conversations, never force children to answer, but invite them to share if they are comfortable. Ask open-ended questions, and refrain from asking questions that require a simple yes or no. If a child stumps you with a question or comment, thank the child for providing a response, and say that you will do some research and get back to him or her. Be sure you follow through. This lets children know that they have been heard, and that you care about responding to their curiosity.

# Safety

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It is important to ensure the safety and well-being of all children in VBS, particularly during active games. Educate yourself about any safety protocols and policies that your church already has in place. If there is not a specific policy, discuss the following types of questions and make a plan with your VBS Director:

- How many volunteers should be on hand for supervision (one adult for every five to ten children)?
- How will you keep track of which children have asthma, bee sting allergies, other allergies, or medications?
- What safety supplies will you have, such as drinking water, a first aid kit, sunscreen, or a cell phone?
- What happens when a child needs to use the restroom?
- If someone is injured, what protocol will you use to get help, inform parents/guardians, bring comfort, treat wounds, and record details of the incident?
- Is there a medical professional who can be on site to assist in case of injury?

Establish safety rules and clear expectations for children so they are mindful of their limitations and are cautioned about any potential issues. Adult leaders should demonstrate how to safely tag people. Tagging should be done with a gentle hand on the back, leg, arm, or shoulder. Players should always be aware of their surroundings, and especially aware of other children who are nearby. To avoid any accidental collisions, some of the high energy games give instructions to walk briskly instead of running.

For relay races, children should take turns running. The team stands in a line and as each player finishes, the player comes back and tags the hand of the next player in line, allowing that player to go. To easily see who has already had a turn, players can sit down at the back of the line after finishing their turns. Adult leaders can demonstrate how to wait in line and how to tag the next person.

Allow opportunities for children to drink water, especially if the activity requires high energy.

Being clear about your emergency protocol and the individual cautions for your children can prevent a minor injury from becoming a serious issue.

## Supporting Children's Participation

Children may be hesitant to play one of the games. Do not force participation. Encourage and invite, but do not ostracize children who do not want to participate or guilt them into joining the activity. Children may be reluctant to participate for a variety of reasons, including feeling tired, anxious, hot, uninterested, or insecure. Some children struggle with physical activities and may be embarrassed about being slow or uncoordinated. One option is to invite them to participate in other ways, such as by keeping score, being a referee, reading instructions, or setting up the playing field.

One way to make sure that all children can participate is to offer a variety of activities, including some that are low energy. Another way to encourage participation is to have adults join in the games. Keep the atmosphere fun and light, reducing the pressure for children to keep up with their peers. You may want to avoid competitive games altogether. There are plenty of other options.

# 1

## Day 1

# How Is This Possible?

### Scripture Text

John 3:1–17

### Spark for Change

Changemakers ask questions.

### Story Summary

A Jewish leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night to ask him about the amazing signs Jesus was doing. Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit. Jesus compared this new birth to the blowing of the wind and told Nicodemus about God's great love for the world, believing in the Son of Man, and having eternal life. Those who do what is true come into God's light.

### Bible Essay

The Bible is regarded by many as a book of answers, but it might more accurately be a book of questions. Throughout scripture, faithful people like Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, and Mary all ask questions of God in the face of startling circumstances. Questions were also a key part of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is asked something like 183 questions in the four Gospels—most of which he does not directly answer. Instead, Jesus frequently responded to questions by asking *more* questions. He asks more than 300 unique questions throughout Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John!<sup>1</sup>

Questions—not always with answers—are welcome, essential, necessary, and vital to follow Jesus. And though Jesus doesn't answer all our questions, he never ignores, belittles, or dismisses an honest query. We see this in Jesus' nighttime encounter with Nicodemus. Nicodemus, like Jesus, was regarded as an answer man—he was a religious scholar and leader. He was the expert; if anyone should have answers about what God wanted and what God was up to in the world, it's a Pharisee like Nicodemus!

Yet when Jesus started doing things no one had ever seen (in John 2, we see how Jesus turned water in wine and cleared the temple of moneychangers), Nicodemus finds himself bursting with questions. And so he visits Jesus at night. Perhaps he doesn't want to be seen. Perhaps he feels embarrassed that a scholar like him needs to ask questions of a small-town preacher.

Still, Nicodemus feels confident Jesus is going to give him answers: "Rabbi," he begins, "we know that you are a teacher who has come from God" (John 3:2). But what Jesus has to say about wind, birth, new life, God's kingdom, water, and the Spirit shows Nicodemus that learning at the feet of Jesus means not receiving answers, but more questions.

Just as the specific questions and answers of this extended dialogue befuddled Nicodemus, they might feel confusing to us, and especially to children. As you read this story with your group, you don't need to dwell on or delve into the exact theological content of each question (feel free to breathe a sigh of relief!). Instead, this story offers a great introduction to some very good news: the One who came to show us God's great love for the whole world (John 3:16–17) doesn't judge our questions, but welcomes them with open arms, day or night. After all, Jesus changed the world by asking lots of questions—that's a great starting point for our changemaking journeys too!

"An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better that we found it."

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #183

<sup>1</sup> Martin B. Copenhagen, *Jesus Is the Question* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), xviii.



# Day 1 At-a-Glance

## Advance Preparation

- Read John 3:1–17 and the Bible background essay for Day 1 on page 6.
- Read through the Action Lab session plan. Choose games to play depending on the space, group size, available materials, and amount of time you have. Gather needed supplies.
- Communicate with volunteers about their roles and tasks.

## Session Plan

### CONNECT

Welcome the group and read the Bible story summary on page 6 in this guide. Set behavioral expectations and give instructions about the chosen games for the day.

### EXPLORE

Play one or more of the chosen games. Leave time at the end to return materials and prepare the space for the next group.

OPTIONS	TYPE	SUPPLIES	TO DO
<b>BEACH BALL BONANZA!</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cooperative</li><li>• Low energy</li><li>• Some preparation</li><li>• No cleanup</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beach Ball</li><li>• Permanent marker</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a permanent marker to write a variety of lighthearted questions on a beach ball or other lightweight ball. Some examples:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is your favorite dessert?</li><li>• What is your favorite room in your house?</li><li>• What is your favorite time of day?</li><li>• Who is your favorite TV or movie character?</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>NEW LIFE SCULPTURES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cooperative</li><li>• Low energy</li><li>• Some preparation</li><li>• Some cleanup</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Day 1 New Life Scenes (electronic files)</li><li>• Basket</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Copy and cut apart the Day 1 New Life Scenes.</li><li>• Fold them and put them in a basket.</li></ul>
<b>DARKNESS AND LIGHT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Competitive</li><li>• Medium energy</li><li>• Some preparation</li><li>• No cleanup</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flashlight</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine the location and boundaries for this game.</li><li>• Designate an area for the “holding tank.”</li></ul>
<b>AIR POWER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Competitive</li><li>• High energy</li><li>• Some preparation</li><li>• Some cleanup</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Masking tape</li><li>• Table tennis balls</li><li>• Straws</li><li>• Paper plates</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather materials.</li><li>• Put down masking tape to designate the finish line.</li></ul>

### BLESS

Gather the group and say a closing prayer. Pray:

God, thank you for listening when we ask questions. Shine your light on us so that we may help others find their way to you. Amen.

# Explore

## Beach Ball Bonanza!

Welcome everyone and gather in a circle. Toss the prepared beach ball to a child. (See At-a-Glance Chart.) When individuals catch the ball, they should answer the question closest to their left thumb. Toss until everyone has had a turn.

### Talk About It

In today's story, Jesus answered Nicodemus' many questions. Nicodemus learned about what it means

to be a follower of Jesus and how God's Spirit works in the world. Asking questions is one way that we learn new things. What new things did you learn about each other that you didn't know before today?

### Supplies

- ☐ Beach ball
- ☐ Permanent marker

## New Life Sculptures

Divide your group into smaller groups of three to five children. Choose a "sculptor" and invite the rest of the children to pretend to be lumps of clay. The "sculptor" pulls one of the New Life Scenes (electronic files) from the basket and then gently moves the children in their group into positions to illustrate the scene. Remind the "clay" to hold their positions! The "sculptors" then explain what life scene they were making.

### Talk About It

Jesus told Nicodemus that he would have new life as a follower of God. How do each of these scenes demonstrate or represent signs of new life?

### Supplies

- ☐ Day 1 New Life Scenes (electronic files)
- ☐ Basket

## Darkness and Light

In preparation, find a room or space where lights can be dimmed or turned off. The space should also have places where children can hide.

1. Ask for a volunteer to be the flashlight tagger. Designate one section of the room to be the holding tank.
2. The flashlight tagger will hide his or her eyes and count to 25 while the other children hide. After the children are hidden, dim or turn off the lights.
3. The tagger will try to find the children who are hiding and shine the flashlight on them. Whoever the flashlight shines on must go to the holding tank. Children in the holding tank can be freed if they are tagged by a child who is not officially in the holding tank.

4. Children may move to different hiding spots under the cover of darkness.
5. After everyone is in the holding tank, a new tagger is chosen and the game continues.

### Talk About It

Talk about some of the tense moments in the game when you were afraid that the tagger would find you. What were you thinking and feeling? Think about Nicodemus, who was a respected leader in his community. He wanted to ask Jesus questions. Why do you suppose he met Jesus at nighttime?

### Supplies

- ☐ Flashlight

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# Air Power

In preparation, place the table tennis balls (one per team), straws (one for each child on the team), and paper plates (one per team) at one end of the room. Place a strip of tape on the floor at the opposite end of the room to indicate the finish line. Divide the group into two teams. Give each team a table tennis ball and each team member a straw.

**Round 1:** Team members will take turns kneeling on the ground and blowing through their straws to move their table tennis balls across the room to the finish line. After a team member's table tennis ball crosses the line, that team member will pick it up and run back to hand it to the next person in line. This continues until all team members have blown the table tennis ball across the room.

**Round 2:** Give each team a paper plate. Team members will take turns fanning the plate to move the table tennis ball across the room to the finish line. After the team member's table tennis ball crosses the line, that team member will pick it up and run back to hand it and the plate to the next person in line. This continues until all team members have fanned the table tennis ball across the room.

## Talk About It

Jesus compared God's Spirit to wind. We don't see the wind, but we can feel its powerful effects. How was the game different when you used the plate to fan the ball rather than blowing through the straw? Trying to follow Jesus on our own can be like blowing through a straw. God's Spirit helps us to follow Jesus.

## Supplies

- ☐ Table tennis balls
- ☐ Straws
- ☐ Paper plates

**You are the  
light of the world.**

**Let your light shine  
before others,**

**so that they may see  
your good works**

**and give glory  
to your Father in heaven.**

**—Matthew 5:14a,16 (NRSV)**