



# BIBLE 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!



**Pinterest:** Growing Up Catholic Board:  
Changemakers Lab:  
<https://pinterest.com/growingupcatholic/changemakers-lab/>



# Bible Lab Leader Guide

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

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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:

- Bible Lab Leader Guide
- Bible Lab electronic files
- Bible Lab Area Poster
- Bible Memory Poster

You will also need one *Changemakers Lab Book* for each child.

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

- Day 1 Questions Cube
- Day 3 Early Church Story Cards
- Day 4 Human Bingo
- Day 5 Storytelling Pictures
- Day 5 Storytelling Dream Bubble

**Media Connections** are included in each guide and posted on the *Growing Up Catholic* Pinterest page 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 Bible Lab!

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Bible Lab is one of three 30-minute activity stations following **IMAGINE** (opening worship). Each Bible Lab session includes four parts: Connect, Encounter, Explore, and Bless. There is also a Bible background essay to read in preparation for leading, and an At-a-Glance Chart to aid in planning.

## CONNECT

Each session begins with Connect to Each Other (“get to know you” activities) and Connect to God (prayer). This section ends with Connect to the Bible which makes use of the Bible Memory Poster and page 18 in the *Changemakers Lab Book*.

## ENCOUNTER

Choose an option for telling the Bible story that works best for your group based on the ages, interests, and attention span of the children. Following the story, Dig In & Live It questions will help children engage in the story and see the ways it relates to their own lives.

## EXPLORE

Choose from among three Explore activities and the list of Media Connections as time allows. Each session includes activities in the *Changemakers Lab Book*. There are art projects, games, or other activities to go along with the story.

## BLESS

Send the children to the next activity station with a prayer of blessing.

# Setting Up and Decorating

As you arrange your room, consider setting up three areas:

1. An **open area** where you'll gather to begin each day. This area can be used for group games and activities where children need to either stand or sit on the floor. Consider adding a rug or picnic blanket that could be easily laid out in this area when you share the Bible story. The rug or blanket would signal the transition to a different time of learning and create a space that will encourage children to focus and listen.
2. A **worship area** containing a small table with a Bible, LED candle, and way to play music where you will gather to pray at the beginning of each session and to bless children before they go at the end of each session.

3. One or two **tables** to use when engaging with the student book or other writing and drawing activities.

As you consider decoration, hang the Bible Memory Poster near the open area where you will begin each day. Keep the decorations beyond this simple but colorful and inviting. Refer to the Decorations section of the Changemakers Lab Director Guide and Pinterest board for ideas that correspond with the theme. Check out the options for free Books of the Bible periodic tables that you can print and use to colorfully decorate the walls!

## Media Connections

Each session plan suggests a variety of books, videos, and websites to extend children's understanding of the Bible story. These can be used in a variety of ways:

- Set up a book corner for children to read books independently.
- Set up a media area with an Internet-connected device that has preselected videos or websites bookmarked. Monitor this area to be sure children use only the approved materials.
- Show a video or read a book to the entire group.

Be sure to preview both books and videos to make sure they will work for the children in your group. Cue videos to avoid having children watch ads. A compiled book list is included in the **electronic files**. Ask a volunteer to go to the library and gather books for the entire week.

Media Connections are posted on the **Pinterest page** for ease of use: <https://www.pinterest.com/growingupcatholic/changemakers-lab/>. The items are organized by day.

## General Supplies

Have these general supplies on hand for use throughout the week:

- Bible(s)
- *Changemakers Lab Book* (one child booklet per child)
- Pencils, pens, and crayons
- Paper
- Internet-connected device (to watch videos)
- Music player (to listen to songs)
- Headphones

# Planning and Leading a Session

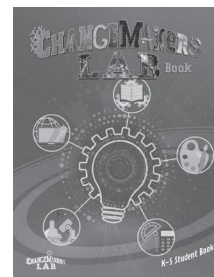
Use the 30-minute time frame in this basic way, modifying as needed:

- **CONNECT:** 5–7 minutes
- **ENCOUNTER:** 10–12 minutes
- **EXPLORE:** 10 minutes
- **BLESS:** 2–3 minutes

The daily session plans include more activities than can be completed in 30 minutes. You may want to use a highlighter and mark the portions of the session you will definitely use and star items you will do if there is additional time.

## Using the *Changemakers Lab Book* (Child Booklets)

The *Changemakers Lab Book* is an essential part of the session. The Bible Memory chart on page 18 is used every day for Connect to the Bible. There is a brief retelling of the Bible story for each day along with activity pages that can be completed independently or in pairs.



**DESTINATIONS** activities can be done as a large group or can be set up as separate stations for the children to rotate through. It's recommended to have more than one activity ready. A group may move through an activity quickly due to excitement or abilities and it will be useful to have something else for them to do. Keep the children aware of the time, giving reminders about how much time is left for their activities.

## Creating a Safe, Welcoming Environment

Many behavior problems can be prevented by thorough planning, approaching children as individuals, and teaching according to the appropriate developmental, emotional, and educational abilities represented in your group.

- **Establish rules.** It is important to set rules, such as “Be respectful,” “Be kind,” and “Be safe.” Rules need to be simple and number no more than three. This lets the children know what is and is not acceptable. Be consistent in making sure the children follow the rules and determine ahead of time how you will handle misbehavior.

- **Speak calmly and respectfully.** Your tone of voice and choice of words is important when giving instructions, redirecting behavior, and communicating with individual children. This sets an example of how you want the children to interact with each other. Use children's names when speaking to them. This shows that you know and respect them as individuals.
- **Have fun!** When you show enthusiasm for the Bible story and accompanying activities, children will be drawn into your excitement. This creates a joyful, worshipful atmosphere.

# 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 essay for Day 1 on page 6 in this guide.
- Pray for the children and adults who will participate in VBS today.
- Read through the session plan and decide which activities you will use. Be sure to have **one** *Changemakers Lab Book* for each child.
- Communicate with volunteers about their roles and tasks.
- Create a worship area where children can gather in a circle. Include a Bible, possibly an LED candle, or other things that could make this space inviting for the children to focus and connect with God.

	SUPPLIES	TO DO
<b>CONNECT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible Lab Area Poster</li> <li>• Bible Memory Poster</li> <li>• Day 1 Questions Cube (electronic files)</li> <li>• Heavy paper</li> <li>• Tape</li> <li>• Crayons</li> <li>• <i>Changemakers Lab Books</i> (one per child)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hang up the Bible Lab Area Poster and Bible Memory Poster.</li> <li>• Print on heavy paper the Day 1 Questions Cube and assemble as shown.</li> </ul>
<b>ENCOUNTER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story figures (can be as simple as peg dolls, clothespins, or even stones of different shapes/sizes)</li> <li>• Dark blue scarf or cloth</li> <li>• Flashlight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice telling the Bible story.</li> </ul>
<b>EXPLORE AND BLESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Changemakers Lab Books</i></li> <li>• Writing utensils</li> <li>• Internet-connected device</li> <li><b>Questions Game</b></li> <li>• Internet connected device</li> <li><b>See the Change!</b></li> <li>• Empty water bottles</li> <li>• Balloons</li> <li>• Bowls of very warm water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preview and select Media Connections.</li> <li>• Check books out of the library as needed.</li> <li>• Choose Explore activities based on the ages and interests of children, the amount of time you have, and available supplies.</li> </ul>

# Session Plan

## CONNECT

### to Each Other

Welcome the children and have them stand in a circle. Take the assembled Day 1 Questions Cube (electronic files) and gently toss it to a child. The child should share her or his name and answer whatever question is facing up on the cube. Then that child can toss the cube to another child. Continue until all have introduced themselves and responded to a question.

### to God

Move together to the worship area you created and have the children sit in a circle. Pray:

**God, you know our names and love us. You've brought us together this week to grow in our love for you and for each other. Be with us as we learn and grow as changemakers. Thank you! We love you! Amen.**

### to the Bible

Read the Bible memory passage from the Bible Memory Poster or a Bible. Say:

**This passage is found in the Gospel of Matthew, which tells stories of Jesus' life.**

**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)**

Give each child their *Changemakers Lab Book* and crayons. Turn to page 18 and encourage children to draw a picture of one of their gifts or talents (*singing, sense of humor, sport, being a good friend, etc.*). Give children a few minutes to draw and then share. Then say:

**Jesus' words "You are the light of the world" remind each of us that we are special. God has given each of us special abilities and talents to help us be changemakers in the world!**

### Teaching Tip

Most elementary children do not yet think abstractly. As you explore this metaphor-filled story together, focus on the asking of the questions rather than the questions' specific content. Hold up Nicodemus as a great example of someone seeking to learn more about following Jesus and how that meant asking questions. Children are great at asking questions, as anyone who has been around a child for more than a few minutes knows! Children's natural curiosity can help them to grow in faith. Emphasize that no honest question is too difficult, silly, or unimportant for Jesus.



# ENCOUNTER

## Get Ready

Set out the story figures representing Jesus and Nicodemus. Turn on a flashlight, and dim or turn off the lights in the room if possible. If not, wrap a dark blue cloth around the story figures to depict nighttime.

Open the Bible to John 3 and say:

**John is another book from the Bible that tells stories about Jesus, God's Son who came to earth to show us what God is like. This nighttime story is full of questions. Listen and try to count the number of questions asked.**

## Bible Story

*(Shine the flashlight on the Nicodemus story figure.)* Nicodemus was an important man. He was a religious leader and teacher. Jesus *(shine the flashlight onto the Jesus story figure)* was a new teacher in town. He had been doing and saying unusual things. So Nicodemus went to visit Jesus in the middle of the night.

*(Shine the flashlight on Nicodemus.)* “Teacher,” Nicodemus began, “God is with you. I can tell by what you do.”

*(Shine the flashlight on Jesus.)* Jesus talked to Nicodemus about the kingdom of God—about the world becoming the way God meant it to be. Jesus said, “If you want to see God’s kingdom, you must be born from above. That is the first step.”

*(Shine the flashlight on Nicodemus.)* Nicodemus was confused. “How can a grownup be born a second time? People can’t become babies again, can they?”

*(Shine the flashlight on Jesus.)* Jesus replied, “When God’s Spirit brings a new start, it is like being born a second time. God’s Spirit is mysterious—it’s like the wind. You can’t see the wind, but you know it’s there. It changes everything it touches. That’s what God’s Spirit is like too.”

*(Shine the flashlight on Nicodemus.)* Nicodemus asked, “How is this possible? It’s hard to imagine.”

*(Shine the flashlight on Jesus.)* Jesus answered, “As a teacher, don’t you know? God loves the whole world so much that God sent God’s only Son. Now everyone who trusts in him will find a new life.”

## Dig In & Live It

Leave the lights dim and continue to use the flashlight as you help the children reflect on the Bible story and connect it to their own lives and experiences.

- *(Shine the flashlight on Nicodemus.)* I wonder why Nicodemus chose to go see Jesus at nighttime.
- *(Shine the flashlight on Jesus.)* I wonder what Jesus most hoped that Nicodemus would understand about God.
- *(Shine the flashlight on children)* I wonder why there are so many questions in this story. How many did you count?
- *(Shine the flashlight on Jesus.)* I wonder how it would feel to sit down and talk with Jesus. I wonder what questions you would want to ask him.
- *(Shine the flashlight on Nicodemus.)* I wonder if Nicodemus was changed after talking to Jesus. I wonder if there have been times you’ve wanted to be changed or to start over.

# EXPLORE

## Questions Game

Show the video by Living Room Theater suggested in Media Connections. It explains a game where you have a conversation about a specific topic using only questions. Starting at the 2:15 mark (after the video explains and demonstrates the game), have the children partner up to try the game using the topics the video suggests. Afterward, talk about what was fun and what was challenging about using only questions to have a conversation. Note that when Jesus was asked a question, he often responded with another question. Why do the children think Jesus did this?

## See the Change!

Jesus said God's Spirit is like the wind—we can't see it, but we *can* see that it changes things!

In this experiment, heat makes air rise and move around. Have children form pairs and give each pair an empty plastic bottle, a balloon, and a bowl of very warm water. Have them put the opening of the balloon on the mouth of the bottle so that the balloon is attached to the top of the bottle. Talk about how the only thing in the bottle is air. Stand the bottle in the bowl of warm water and watch the balloon inflate as the air inside the bottle warms up. Talk together about how the air moved up into the balloon and changed its shape, and how God's Spirit might change us and the world around us.

## Changemakers Lab Book

**Younger children** may turn to page 4 and reflect on how they can share God's love for the whole world.

**Older children** may turn to page 5 to complete a word find puzzle (solution on page 32 in this guide) and consider the sorts of questions they'd like to ask Jesus.

## Media Connections

### Books

- *The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth
- *National Geographic Little Kids First Big Book of Why* by Amy Shields
- *National Geographic Little Kids First Big Book of Why 2* by Jill Esbaum

### Art

- "Nicodemus and Jesus" art by Jesus Mafa

### Video

- "Play The Question Game! MULTIPLAYER Improv Theater Game for Kids" by Living Room Theater (YouTube).
- "Las tres preguntas - Jon J. Muth" by Sofia Santini (YouTube)

# BLESS

Gather children back together and offer these words of blessing before they move on to their next stop:

**Beloved changemakers, go forth to be curious and ask questions, knowing that Jesus welcomes them—and, more importantly, that Jesus welcomes you! Amen.**



SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

**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)**