

HELPER HANDBOOK



Answers VBS

EMERALD Crossing

An Irish Adventure
Through Psalm 23



Helper Handbook

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Helper Handbook

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Top o' the Morning to Ya!

It's early morning on the Emerald Isle. Gaze ahead as the sun rises on the cool, green pastures dotted with grazing sheep. Listen to the waves crash at the staggering Cliffs of Moher as their towering crags ascend majestically from the sea. Catch the earthy scent of sheep and cattle, fertile meadows, and dense forests. Step into a local restaurant and taste the rich flavors of a land known for its butter and potatoes. Run your hand over the soft wool of a pastured lamb or the rough, stony exterior of an age-old castle. Tune in as lively folk music entertains and delights all who listen.

From the lush meadows of its countryside to the cobblestone streets of its cities, there is something to delight the senses everywhere we turn in Ireland. So journey with us to *Emerald Crossing: An Irish Adventure Through Psalm 23*. Every stop along our path will teach us about the Good Shepherd and how he cares for his sheep. Like David discovered throughout his life, first as a shepherd and later as a king, we'll discover important truths such as:

- I can be a child of God and have the Lord as my shepherd.
- I need the Lord to lead me on the right path through his Word.
- I can turn to the Lord for comfort when I'm feeling anxious or afraid.
- I can have an attitude of gratitude in every situation.
- I need to be on the lookout for God's goodness and mercy, my traveling companions through life.

Beauty and adventure await us each day at Emerald Crossing, where lads and lasses will gather at the **Emerald Isle Assembly**. This high-energy

beginning includes wacky intros, lively songs, a Mission Moment, and prayer.

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

Flock Talk Time, where Bible lessons are taught in creative, hands-on ways.

Celtic Corner Science and Crafts, where kids will create their own crafts and explore God's world through science activities.

Still Water Snacks, where kids enjoy scrumptious Irish fare.

Green Meadow Games, the rambunctious rec time where kids join in some lively competition.

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

Finally, everyone heads back to the **Emerald Isle Assembly** for the closing, where there's more singing, contest results, and the highly anticipated daily drama. Lads and lasses will be introduced to an Irish sheep farmer named Grandpa Fitz, who runs Stillwater Farm. Through some challenges, some fun, and a few big surprises, Grandpa Fitz shows how the Lord has been his comforter and guide his whole life.

So pull on your work boots, grab your walking staff, and get ready for a grand ol' time at *Emerald Crossing*!

Our Goal

We are so thankful for how God has chosen to use the Answers VBS programs over the past years! But why did we decide to embark on such an

undertaking in the first place? And why are we still at it by God's grace?

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

Children are loved by their Creator, and Jesus said to let them come to him (Luke 18:16). We want children to come to Christ and not be hindered in any way from doing so. To that end, we combine a biblically rich VBS with off-the-charts, irresistible fun. In a day and age when content sometimes

suffers, we don't want to sacrifice rich teaching. But it's also crucial that the most exciting book in the world not come across as boring or irrelevant. We want to reflect our creative, inspiring, joy-giving God who made laughter and fun.

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

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

Frequently Asked Questions

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

Terms to Know

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

Lads and Lasses: Terms used when referring to children during VBS week.

Travel Groups: Groups of children (individual classes) named after animals that live in Ireland, such as Hedgehogs, Red Deer, Sheepdogs, and Irish Hares.

Group Guides: Group leaders who lead the travel groups from place to place during VBS. No teaching is required for this position.

Flock Talk Time: Bible and apologetics lesson time.

Shepherds: Teachers of the Flock Talk Time.

Celtic Corner Science and Crafts: Rotation site where crafts are made and science experiments are explored.

Still Water Snacks: Indoor or outdoor location where snacks are served.

Green Meadow Games: Indoor or outdoor site (outdoor is preferred) for recreation time.

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

Good as Gold Memory Verse: Daily Bible verse to learn.

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

Toddlers: 2–4-year-olds.

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

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

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

For multiage K–6 travel groups, we recommend using the material for the Primaries.

Staff Devotions

Devotion 1: The Lord Is My Shepherd

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1

There's no doubt about it—our kids are anxious. Over 22% of children are in therapy, while 40% of high schoolers have experienced persistent hopelessness or sadness. They deal with household substance abuse, parental incarceration, neighborhood violence, and unmet basic needs. Social media, interpersonal relationship drama, and world events all contribute to instability among our youth. They don't know where to turn for comfort.

Moralistic, therapeutic deism is a dominant worldview among their parents. They believe in a god—a supreme being—who has no connection to the world he created, no personal involvement in their lives, and no demands on how they live. This worldview has an appearance of morality—the highest good is to be good to others—but no basis for saying one action is wrong and another is right. They ignore the biblical foundation for morality and instead impose their own idea of right and wrong; morality is based on “my truth” rather than absolute truth. And this worldview is therapeutic—the purpose for living is my own personal happiness; there is no higher purpose.

Without an anchor for their soul and the knowledge of a sovereign Savior who loves them and is working out all things for their good, it's no wonder our kids are lost. They're wandering on the wrong path of their own making, filled with worry and fear, depressed about their lack of

happiness, and unsure of what the future holds for them.

This week, we are introducing kids to the gentle Good Shepherd through the life of David and Psalm 23. They will meet the God who created them in his image, with great care, for his glory, and the good of all of us. The God who loved the world so much that he gave his Son as a sacrifice for sin. The God who leads us on the right path, who offers comfort in every trial, who provides for all our needs, and in whom every promise is “yes” and “amen.”

Today, as you prepare to share with the children, first remind yourself of who Jesus is—is he *your* shepherd? Have you crossed from being a lost sheep to a beloved member of his fold? Does he know you (John 10:14)? Do you run to the chief shepherd and overseer of your soul when you are anxious (1 Peter 2:25)? Is he the shepherd and rock on which you build your life (Genesis 49:24)? Do you know that he will lovingly carry you forever (Psalm 28:9)?

What amazing mercy that we can say, “The Lord is *my* shepherd.” That the Creator of the universe is *my* personal shepherd. Is he yours? May we pray that we live our lives in light of this Good Shepherd as the Puritans did.

Lord of all being,
There is one thing that deserves my
greatest care,
that calls forth my ardent desires,

That is, that I may answer the great
 end for which I am made—
 to glorify thee who hast
 given me being,
 and to do all the good I can for my
 fellow men;

Verily life is not worth having
 if it be not improved for this
 noble purpose.

Yet, Lord, how little is this the
 thought of mankind!

Most men seem to live for
 themselves,
 without much or any regard for
 thy glory,

or for the good of others;

They earnestly desire and
 eagerly pursue
 the riches, honours, pleasures of
 this life,

as if they supposed that wealth,
 greatness, merriment,
 could make their immortal
 souls happy;

But, alas, what false delusive
 dreams are these!

And how miserable ere long will
 those be that sleep in them,
 for all our happiness consists in
 loving thee,
 and being holy as thou art holy.

Help me to know continually
 that there can be no true
 happiness,
 no fulfilling of thy purpose for me,
 apart from a life lived in and for
 the Son of thy love.

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
 Trust, 2005), 13.

Devotion 2: The Lord Is My Leader

*He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside
 still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of
 righteousness for his name's sake. Psalm 23:2–3*

The algorithms on TikTok and other social media channels bombard our kids with doubts about the existence of God and the reliability of his Word. They learn in school that the universe came into existence on its own and that they are products of evolutionary processes acting over millions of years. They are asking, “Does God really exist?” It’s a question that has crossed the mind of every person at some point. Before we answer that question, let’s ask another question: How can we even know to question the surety of God’s existence?

Here’s the answer: Apart from the perfect, truthful, unchanging, eternal God of the Bible, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge” (Colossians 2:3) and from whom comes knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 9:10), we cannot know anything. Think about it. If there is no god—no ultimate standard of truth and knowledge—and we are simply the product of random processes operating on chemicals over time, then the thoughts in our brains are nothing more than the product of random chemical interactions. How could we *know* anything? The one true God of the Bible has created each person in his image and given us the ability to think rationally, to question thoughtfully, to know truth fully. And he has revealed himself to all people so that everyone is without excuse (Romans 1:18–21). We can know the

one true God exists because we have the ability to know in the first place. And we can praise him that he freely gives wisdom to those who ask for it (James 1:5).

Since God exists, we can also know that his Word is true and trustworthy. Over 3,000 times, the authors of the Bible claimed to be speaking or writing the words of God, and they reference the godly authority of other writers (Daniel 9:2; 1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Peter 1:21, 3:15–16). While on earth, Jesus referred to the Old Testament scriptures as truth and from the Holy Spirit (Matthew 19:4; Mark 12:36; Luke 11:49–51; John 5:46, 17:17). And God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Since the Bible is the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), we can trust that God has given us accurate historical accounts and that he will lead us on righteous paths when we obey the guidelines he has set for his creation through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can joyfully cross from the wrong path to the right path when we become his children through repentance and faith in Jesus and willingly submit to the way he wants us to live. We can anchor our morality in the Word of the Good Shepherd who wants only good for us.

Today, as we encourage our children to look to the Lord and to follow his righteous paths, let's think about the behaviors and activities we may participate in that aren't on the right path. Do you gossip in the neighborhood chat? Tell white lies on social media? Envy the lives of those on Instagram? Do you anger quickly? Are

you impatient with your children? Christ is calling us to the path of righteousness (Colossians 3:5–10). Are you engaging with his Word and desiring for him to conform you to his image through it? May we pray this with the Puritans:

O God of truth,
 I thank thee for the holy Scriptures,
 their precepts, promises,
 directions, light.
 In them may I learn more of Christ,
 be enabled to retain his truth
 and have grace to follow it.
 Help me to lift up the gates of my
 soul that he may come in
 and show me himself when I
 search the Scriptures,
 for I have no lines to fathom
 its depths,
 no wings to soar to its heights.
 By his aid may I be enabled to
 explore all its truths,
 love them with all my heart,
 embrace them with all my power,
 engraft them into my life. . . .
 From it show me how my words
 have often been unfaithful to thee,
 injurious to my fellow-men,
 empty of grace, full of folly,
 dishonouring to my calling.
 Then write thy own words upon
 my heart and inscribe them
 on my lips;
 So shall all glory be to thee in my
 reading of thy Word!

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
 Trust, 2005), 190.

Devotion 3: The Lord Is My Comforter

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

After a frustrating day, a friend asked, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Yet we know that no one is good—no, not one—except the Good Shepherd, who defines goodness.

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

Because God is absolutely pure and holy, untouched by sin, he cannot partake in sin nor approve of it in others. He established a penalty for falling short of his standard: death. The goodness and holiness of God demands that he judge sin. As the righteous judge, he had no choice but to carry out the punishment that he had set for breaking his rules. He placed a curse on his beloved creation. All of creation now groans under the weight of that curse. He imposed a sentence from which we have no means of escaping on our own. We can’t get away from our punishment for sin, which is death, eternal separation from our Creator.

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

When we walk through the valley brought on by the curse, we can know that the same God who cursed his creation also provided a way of

escape from the curse—Jesus Christ. Jesus took on flesh so that he could live the obedient life Adam didn’t live while experiencing every temptation we experience. Because he knows what it means to be human (for Jesus walked through the valley of the shadow of death many times with those around him), he can offer the comfort we need when we go through our own valleys. Knowing that Jesus is sovereign over all and that nothing happens apart from his good decrees for us, we can cross from living in fear to walking in the peace that only he can give.

As you share the Lord as comforter with our children, be careful to emphasize that the mess we find ourselves in is not the fault of our good and loving Creator. This will help children answer the “why” question when they encounter a tragedy or simply have a bad day. In general, these are results of living in a cursed world, which is the deserved punishment for sin. We need to also continually point them toward the great gift that the Creator has for us (salvation through Jesus Christ) and the comfort he provides through his Word.

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

Thou Maker and Sustainer of
 all things,
 Day and night are thine,
 heaven and earth declare
 thy glory;
 But I, a creature of thy power and
 bounty, have sinned against thee
 by resisting the dictates of
 conscience,

the demands of thy law,
 the calls of thy gospel;
 yet I live under the dispensation of
 a given hope.
 Deliver me from worldly
 dispositions,
 for I am born from above and
 bound for glory.

May I view and long after holiness
 as the beauty and dignity
 of the soul.
 — Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
 Trust, 2005), 139.

Devotion 4: The Lord Is My Provider

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
 you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23:5*

“Good luck’ with that!” “I’ve had a bit of ‘bad luck’ lately.” We often say this in an offhand way, but if we aren’t careful with our words, we can inadvertently teach kids a sort of syncretism—I believe in God but I also believe in luck. Yet the two are mutually exclusive. God is sovereign, and nothing happens to us apart from his good plans for us. He is the one who prepares the table for us and overflows our cups. There is no room for inanimate luck to somehow drive our lives.

We may not kiss the Blarney Stone, but how often do we engage in activities that counter our trust in God and his provision for us? Ever read a horoscope? Checked the tarot cards? Hung a rabbit’s foot on the rearview mirror? Knocked on wood to keep bad circumstances away? Used crystals to promote good energy? Thanked “Mother Nature” for a good weather forecast? Asked for good vibes or good thoughts? Sent positivity into the universe? Hidden in a closet on Friday the 13th? Used Phil’s shadow on Groundhog Day to form your opinions on the advent of spring?

In his letter to the people of Colossae, Paul demonstrated the

supremacy of Jesus in all things. As you read Colossians 1:15–20, think about what the acknowledgment of luck does to the sufficiency of our Creator and Savior.

David knew from reading about the life of his ancestor Abraham that the Lord provided what he needed (Genesis 22:1–14). On Mount Moriah, God had provided the ram for Abraham to sacrifice in place of Isaac. Later, David’s son Solomon would build the temple on Mount Moriah, providing a stable place for people to meet with God. And still later, near Mount Moriah, the descendant of Abraham and David who had been promised to both, Jesus Christ, was sacrificed on the cross—the ultimate provision by the king of the universe.

When we are tempted to grumble about our circumstances, a form of idol worship (“I know better than God what is good for me!”), or praise luck instead of the provision of our God, let’s remember who God is and how he has provided in the past, provides in the present, and will continue to provide in the future.

May this Puritan prayer tune our hearts to sing our thankfulness to Jehovah Jireh, our provider, alone.

I bless thee for the soul thou
 hast created,
 for adorning it, sanctifying it,
 though it is fixed in barren soil;
 for the body thou hast given me,
 for preserving its strength
 and vigour,
 for providing senses to
 enjoy delights,
 for the ease and freedom
 of my limbs,
 for hands, eyes, ears that do
 thy bidding;
 for thy royal bounty providing my
 daily support,
 for a full table and
 overflowing cup,
 for appetite, taste, sweetness,
 for social joys of relatives
 and friends,

for ability to serve others,
 for a heart that feels sorrows and
 necessities,
 for a mind to care for my
 fellow-men,
 for opportunities of spreading
 happiness around,
 for loved ones in the joys
 of heaven,
 for my own expectation of seeing
 thee clearly.

I love thee above the powers of
 language to express,
 for what thou art to thy creatures.
 Increase my love, O my God,
 through time and eternity.

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
 Trust, 2005), 15.

Devotion 5: The Lord Is My Promise Keeper

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
 and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23:6*

If you are hosting your VBS in June,
 you are likely inundated with rain-
 bows—those formed after the spring
 rains or those featured in storefronts
 and in parades. The former are a
 reminder that God is a promise
 keeper. After the flood that was sent
 in judgment on the wickedness of
 mankind, God gave the beautiful rain-
 bow as a sign of his promise to never
 flood the earth again. The latter come
 from those who shake their fists at
 their holy Creator, determined to live
 their lives on their own terms, build-
 ing their faith on the shaky ground of
 man-made morality.

Our kids are caught up in the
 undercurrents of this new moral-
 ity—they have friends who are “out,”
 friends who are furies, friends who

are whatever they choose to be. Once
 they become emotionally involved,
 it’s more difficult to say with certainty,
 “Thus says the Lord.” For example,
 a friend said, “But what about Steve,
 who is like an uncle to my kids? How
 can I tell him his lifestyle is wrong
 when he’s so fun to be around?” This
 is part of that moralistic, therapeutic
 deism worldview—if there is a god,
 he wants people to be happy in what-
 ever they do and can’t lay claim to
 their lives.

Yet the *real* rainbow shows us
 there is a personal God—the one who
 created us in his image—who has
 defined right from wrong. Anyone
 who rebels in *any* way is under his
 wrath (Proverbs 6:16–19) and needs
 to repent of sin and trust in Jesus for

salvation. In the days of Noah, God showed his wrath on sin and his provision of salvation from judgment through the ark. And he showed—through the rainbow—his mercy for those who walk in newness of life. For us, this personal God has given his personal revelation through his Word and provided his personal salvation through the Word, Jesus Christ. These promises, found in the Bible, provide a sure foundation on which we can stand and proclaim with boldness the need for all to repent, receive salvation, and walk the right path with their gentle Good Shepherd.

Today, as you share with the children, evaluate your own foundation. Are you tossed to and fro by every “new” idea? Does your position on right and wrong change based on your involvement with others? Or do you stand firm on the unchanging Word of God, evaluating each teaching in light of what Scripture says, then sharing the true gospel with those around you who need to hear it?

May we pray with the Puritans that the Lord, our promise keeper, would continually remind us that his Word is sure and we can trust it. We look forward to the fulfillment of all his promises in that future time when his children will surely have a place in his courts forever.

Glorious Jehovah, my covenant God,

All thy promises in Christ Jesus are
yea and amen,
and all shall be fulfilled.

Thou hast spoken them, and they
shall be done,
commanded, and they shall
come to pass.

Yet I have often doubted them,
have lived at times as if there
were no God.

Lord, forgive me that death in life,
when I have found something
apart from thee,
when I have been content with
ephemeral things. . . .

Help me to leave my concerns in
thy hands,
for thou hast power over evil,
and bringest from it an infinite
progression of good,
until thy purposes are fulfilled. . . .

Grant me a distinct advance in the
divine life;

May I reach a higher platform,
leave the mists of doubt and fear
in the valley,
and climb to hill-tops of eternal
security in Christ

by simply believing that he
cannot lie,
or turn from his purpose.

Grant me the confidence I ought to
have in him
who is worthy to be praised, and
who is blessed for evermore.

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth
Trust, 2005), 132.

Top 20 Tips When Working with Children

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

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

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

Age-Level Characteristics

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

use when looking at characteristics of children as a whole. Understanding how God has wired different age groups can help us be more effective in teaching and interacting with them.

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

Common Characteristics

- Children are born sinners (Romans 3:23).
- God has given each a conscience, and they (generally) want good to win over evil.
- God has shown himself to all children through his creation, making it obvious to all that there is a Creator.
- Children enjoy active learning—moving around, seeing things, touching things, smelling and hearing things, and being involved.
- Children need to be loved, encouraged, and praised.
- Children are rapidly growing and changing.
- Children trust the adults who are responsible for them.
- Children can get discouraged by criticism and failure.
- Children are eager to learn and are curious about the world and God.

Toddlers (2–4 years old)

Physical Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

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

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

Emotional/Social Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

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

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

Toddlers are curious and want to touch, smell, feel, see, and experience

their world. They have short attention spans and learn/communicate in short sentences. They understand short and simple directions. They believe what you say. Their attitude toward God and others is in the process of being formed during these years.

Takeaways for Us

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

Pre-Primaries (4–6 years old)

Physical Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

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

Emotional/Social Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

- Let them be helpers. Give them simple jobs to do and have them help pick up things and straighten

the room at the end of the lesson. Let them know they've done a good job.

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

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

- In downtime, give them time to ask questions. Be ready to patiently

answer. But while you are teaching, be careful you don't get so wrapped up in letting them talk that the lesson doesn't happen!

- Vary activities often. The longer an activity goes, the wigglier the children become.
- When engaged in pretend activities, name them as such (e.g., “Let's pretend to be explorers!”). At the same time, point out often that God's Word is not pretend but true!
- Repetition of songs and stories works well, and Pre-Primaries enjoy it.
- Sing the memory verse songs with them. They will be able to learn at least parts of the verses by the end of the week.
- Use visuals.
- Teach them about sin and asking God for forgiveness.
- Show interest in each child, letting them know you care.
- Be careful to speak accurately and truthfully.
- Show care and respect for your Bible and help them see your love for it and for the Lord.

Primaries (6–9 years old)

Physical Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

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

Emotional/Social Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

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

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

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

Juniors (9–12 years old)

Physical Characteristics

Juniors vary widely as they grow in height, weight, and physical maturity. Some may be experiencing a growth spurt launching them into puberty and causing them to tire easily. They're continuing to grow in

physical abilities. Some are becoming known for athletic abilities. Juniors enjoy going places and doing interesting things. They enjoy games and competitions.

Takeaways for Us

- Don't comment on physical appearance, such as someone's height. Juniors can feel sensitive and awkward about their bodies.
- Some may show physical, musical, or academic gifts/talents. Help each child realize that they are God's masterpiece, created exactly as they are for a special purpose.
- Some love being active, and some don't. But it's good to keep them involved and moving.

Emotional/Social Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

- Make sure the teens and young adults in their VBS world are good role models.
- Don't tear down Juniors or resort to sarcasm. Be an encourager, be a good listener, and be patient with them.
- Show interest in each child, helping them sense your care for them.
- Incorporate small group discussion into the lesson time with activities that use groups or pairings.
- Be careful to walk worthy—act and speak in godly ways.

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

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

Takeaways for Us

- Ask thought-provoking spiritual questions. Be a safe person to bounce thoughts and ideas off of.
- Listen well and pray with them.
- They can spot inconsistencies. Make sure to walk the walk and not just talk the talk.
- Be careful about asking children to read out loud unless they volunteer or you know they can read well.
- Give them opportunities to be involved in missions or service projects.
- Challenge them to ask God to help them grow in their love for him and his Word. Help them set up Bible reading plans and encourage them to memorize passages of Scripture.
- Be careful to speak accurately and truthfully. Show respect for your Bible and let them see your love for it and for the Lord.

Tips for Managing a Group of Kids

Kids are fun, and kids have energy! This page of strategies is in the teacher/leader guides to help your staff. There are also additional ideas on the next page you can share.

Attention-Getters

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

- **Teacher:** Where are my sheep?
Kids: Everybody sleep! (they sit still and close eyes)
- **Teacher:** Potato, pot-ah-to!
Kids: Tomato, tom-ah-to!
- **Teacher:** Shamrock!
Kids: Shamroll!
- **Teacher:** Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo . . .
Kids: Violet!
- **Teacher:** Emerald!
Kids: Isle!
Teacher: Emerald!
Kids: Isle!
Teacher: Shh!

Rainstorm—Use your fingers, hands, legs, and feet to simulate rain that goes from very light to heavy and back to very light. Start with silence then rub hands together for the wind. Snap fingers for light rain then pat your legs for a heavier rain. Clap hands and add stomping feet for heaviest rain. Do in reverse to wind back down to no rain.

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

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

Soft Talk—Start talking about something important very softly or in a whisper. Kids will often get quiet to hear what you are saying. Or say, “If you can hear me, clap once.” Continue softly with other commands

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

Lining up and Walking Through the Building

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

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

Proactive Tips

Be Prepared—One of the best ways to ward off discipline problems is to be prepared. Think through and organize your schedule, leaving no downtime. Keep things moving! This takes more time on your part, but it’s worth it.

Active Participation—Keeping kids actively engaged in the lesson is perhaps the best thing you can do to keep the class from getting rowdy. The lessons are written to

be creative, fun, and full of active participation. Play the games, act out the Bible accounts, and do the other ideas listed. Occupy kids' minds and attention with good stuff!

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

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

Calming Rowdiness

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

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

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

Praise in Public, Correct in Private—If someone does need correction, be careful not to embarrass him in front of his peers. If you need to talk to a child about a misbehavior,

pull him aside at a time when the rest of the group is distracted. Kids will be less defensive if they don't feel they have to "save face" in front of their peers, and if they feel you really care and aren't just coming down on them.

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

Additional Suggestions to Share with Your Leaders

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

Notice the Good—Sometimes a poor behavior is an attention-seeking device, so be proactive and give attention to that child so she doesn't feel the need to act out negatively. Negative behaviors can be a cry for love and attention.

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

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

- **Stone Face**—Have a competition to see which child can hold a frown for the longest without cracking a smile.
- **I Spy**—Look for Irish things to spy.
- **Simon Says**—Simon can say Bible-themed things, like read your Bible (hands in front of you making a book), pray (praying hands), tell others (cup hands around mouth), go to church (make a church with a steeple out of your interlocked hands), etc.
- **Quiet Mouse**—Have a competition to see who is the quietest in line.
- **Follow the Leader**—Play the normal version or an Irish version using animals and activities, like the following:
 - » Fly like a magpie (bird).
 - » Hop like an Irish hare.
 - » Moo like a Highland cow.
 - » Hoot like a barn owl.
 - » Hold your shepherd's staff.
 - » Bend like a rainbow.
 - » Climb the Cliffs of Moher.
 - » Churn the butter.
 - » Do a jig like an Irish step dancer.
 - » Strum a harp.

Child Safety Precautions

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

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

Leading a Child to Christ

Answers VBS presents many opportunities to share the gospel, and every teacher should be ready to explain how to be saved, whether it's one-on-one or with a small group. Use the following steps as a guide to explain salvation, ask questions, read scripture, and pray with and for students.

Pray. Salvation is God's work, not ours. We cannot bring about salvation for anyone, but we can ask God to prepare a child's heart to receive the truth.

Explain. Prepare a clear presentation of the gospel. Avoid abstract phrases like "asking Jesus into your heart" and instead use clear biblical language, such as "becoming a child of God." You may want to use the following three key words to share how to receive eternal life:

- » **Admit** you have sinned (disobeyed God's commands). Ask God to forgive you of your sins. The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23).
- » **Believe** Jesus, God's Son, died in your place and rose again, paying the penalty for your sins (John 3:16; Romans 10:9–10).
- » **Receive** the gift of eternal life by telling God you want to be his child (John 1:12).

Ask. To encourage discussion and to gauge understanding, ask open-ended questions, such as the following:

- » What is sin?
- » Can you think of specific sins you have done?
- » Are you bothered by your sin?

- » Who is Jesus?
- » Why did Jesus have to die?
- » Why did Jesus rise from the dead?
- » When you receive the gift of eternal life, is there anything else you have to do? Emphasize that salvation is not based on what we do but is a gift from God through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Respond. When children demonstrate a basic understanding of salvation, encourage them to talk with their parents about what it means to become a child of God (if parents are believers). If they come from a non-Christian home, encourage them to express belief in Jesus through prayer, confessing sin and asking Jesus to save them.

Some children may not be ready to make a decision. For children who have previously made a decision, they may need reassurance or want to confess sin.

- » Read Romans 10:9–10 and John 10:28–29 with those who need assurance, encouraging them to trust in God's promises.
- » For those wanting to confess sin, read 1 John 1:9 and remind them that God forgives when they repent (turn from sin).

Celebrate. Rejoice together! Read Luke 15:10.

Grow. Explain that children of God receive the Holy Spirit, who helps them understand and obey the Bible. Share practical ways for them to grow in faith and follow Jesus:

- » Read the Bible and obey what it says. (Provide a Bible.)

- » Pray every day. Prayer is talking to God.
- » Attend a church that teaches that the Bible is God's true Word.
- » Tell others about Jesus.

As you faithfully teach and guide children in the gospel, trust God to work in their hearts. Continue to pray for them and encourage them as they grow in their understanding of what it means to follow Christ.

Day 1 Overview

Lost to Found

Bible Passages	Lesson Focus	
Psalm 23:1 1 Samuel 17:34–37	Like David, I can be a child of God and have the Lord as <i>my</i> shepherd.	
Animal Pal	Apologetics Focus	
Mia (My-a) the Connemara Sheep	Is the Lord a distant God? Did he create the universe and then just sit back and watch?	
Crafts	Snacks	Memory Verse
Baa-loved Sheep Keepsake Ornament— Shepherd's Staff	Cross Trail Mix Sweet Sheep	Psalm 23:1
		Games
		Gaelic Football Lost Sheep Relay
		Cool Contest
		Guess the Rainbow Skittles
		Experiments
		Sink or Float Wet Woolly



Day 2 Overview

Wrong Path to Right Path

Bible Passages	Lesson Focus	
Psalm 23:2-3 1 Samuel 17	Like David, I need the Lord to lead me on the right path through his Word.	
Animal Pal	Apologetics Focus	
Guide the Border Collie	Is the Bible a trustworthy guide to lead us through life?	
Crafts	Snacks	Memory Verses
S.O.A.P. Bible Puff Ball Zipper Pull	Scene 23:2 Border Collie Paw Print	Psalm 23:2-3
		Games
		Shamrock, Riverdance, Viking Strongman Challenges
		Cool Contest
		Group Spirit Day
		Experiments
		Sling Fling Genetically You






Day 3 Overview

Fearful to Peaceful

Bible Passages	Lesson Focus		
Psalm 23:4 1 Samuel 19–23	Like David, I can turn to the Lord for comfort when I am anxious or afraid.		
Animal Pal	Apologetics Focus		
Shadow the Raven	Why do we even have hard times?		
Crafts	Snacks	Memory Verse	
“Don’t Worry, Just Pray” Magnet Night-Light in the Darkness  	Stuffed Staff Bird’s Nest	Psalm 23:4	
			Games
			Run, David, Run Walk Through the Valley
			Cool Contest
			Dress-Up Day
		Experiments	
		Shadow Play Fear Not	
			

Day 4 Overview

Grumbling to Grateful

Bible Passages	Lesson Focus	
Psalm 23:5 2 Samuel 9:3-7 1 Samuel 16:1-13	Like David, I can have an attitude of gratitude in every situation.	
Animal Pal	Apologetics Focus	
Pesky the Woolly Aphid	Are good things because of "good luck" or a good God?	
Crafts	Snacks	Memory Verse
Gratitude Attitude Game Thankube	Piled-High Popcorn Full Float	Psalm 23:5
	 	Games
		Raiders My Cup Overflows Relay
		Cool Contest
		Bible Challenge
		Experiments
		Sticky Stuff Overflow Your Cup

Day 5 Overview

Shaky to Sure

Bible Passage	Lesson Focus	
Psalm 23:6 1 Chronicles 22	Like David, I need to be on the lookout for God's goodness and mercy, my traveling companions through life.	
Animal Pal	Apologetics Focus	
Shirley the Highland Cow	What should rainbows remind us of?	
Crafts	Snacks	Memory Verse
Psalm Scroll Highland Cow	Cow Patties Spud Circles	Psalm 23:6
		Games
		Psalm 23 Partner Obstacle Course Pot o' Gold
		Cool Contest
		Mission Money Mania
		Experiments
Firm Foundations Real Rainbows		

ESV Memory Verses

Junior/Primary

Theme Verse / Day 1: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1

Day 2: He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Psalm 23:2–3

Day 3: Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

Day 4: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23:5

Day 5: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23:6

Pre-Primary/Toddler

Theme Verse / Day 1 Verse: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1

Day 2: He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. Psalm 23:2

Day 3: I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Psalm 23:4

Day 4: You prepare a table before me. . . My cup overflows. Psalm 23:5

Day 5: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me. Psalm 23:6

Bonus Verses

Philippians 4:6–8

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Lamentations 3:22–23

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

KJV Memory Verses

Junior/Primary

Theme Verse / Day 1: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1

Day 2: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Psalm 23:2-3

Day 3: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

Day 4: Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Psalm 23:5

Day 5: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. Psalm 23:6

Pre-Primary/Toddler

Theme Verse / Day 1 Verse: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1

Day 2: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. Psalm 23:2

Day 3: I will fear no evil: for thou art with me. Psalm 23:4

Day 4: Thou preparest a table before me. . . My cup runneth over. Psalm 23:5

Day 5: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me. Psalm 23:6

Bonus Verses

Philippians 4:6-8

⁶Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

⁷And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Lamentations 3:22-23

²²It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. ²³They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

Terrific Trivia Tidbits

Did you know the island of Ireland is actually home to two separate nations? The majority of the island is known as the Republic of Ireland and is its own sovereign country. A smaller section to the northeast is called Northern Ireland and is part of the United Kingdom.

Use this and the following trivia tidbits (also available on the [Resource Download](#)) to start thinking about our fun theme—Ireland—as well as our spiritual theme—Psalm 23. These fun facts can be shared ahead of time at staff meetings with adults and teens or during the week of VBS with the kids. Use them at arrival and dismissal times or during any downtime between rotations.

Part 1: General Information

- Fashion-forward: Celtic people, who arrived in Ireland centuries before Christ's birth, were known for their love of colorful clothes, which they dyed bright colors. It's also believed they were some of the first people in Europe to wear pants instead of tunics!
- Rhyme time: The phrase *Emerald Isle* was penned in 1795 by Irishman William Drennan in a poem that encouraged unity between opposing religious groups. Since then, the term has become so popular it can be used interchangeably with the word *Ireland*.
- Strum, strum, strum! The harp is the national symbol of Ireland. There is even a bridge shaped like a harp called the Samuel Beckett Bridge.
- Wham! The Irish sport of hurling is considered the oldest and fastest field sport in the world. In this fast-paced game that's a combination of baseball, hockey, and lacrosse, players hit the ball up to 100 mph!
- In Cork, Ireland, a butter museum houses a 22-pound slab of 2,000-year-old butter found in a peat bog in 2016. Experts say it is still edible. Would you try it?
- Afraid of heights? The Cliffs of Moher are one of Ireland's most visited natural attractions. Their sheer vertical drops measure over 700 feet tall at the highest point.
- Road trip: The Wild Atlantic Way is the longest coastal route in the world, stretching over 1,600 miles. In 2017, a 65-year-old man walked the whole road in 103 days.
- Potato, po-tah-to! Before the Irish Potato Famine, a grown Irishman would eat up to 14 pounds of potatoes a day.
- Did you know potatoes have more potassium than bananas and are rich in vitamins, minerals, and fiber? *Bon appétit!*
- Gingers unite! Roughly 10% of Ireland's population has red hair, the highest per capita percentage of redheads (aka gingers) in the world.
- Ooh-la-la! Did you know having red hair and blue eyes is the rarest hair/eye combination possible?
- Shamrock ceremony: The Irish prime minister visits the United States each year around St. Patrick's Day and presents the president with a crystal bowl filled with shamrocks.
- In the 1800s, Ireland was considered the butter capital of the world,

- exporting butter to countries all over the globe. Yum!
- Got milk? Ireland produces enough dairy products each year to feed 52 million people.
 - Did you know there are over 30,000 castles in Ireland? Interestingly, Dunluce Castle in Northern Ireland is believed to have been the inspiration for Cair Paravel in C. S. Lewis' series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*.
 - Claim to fame: The *Titanic* was built in Belfast, Northern Ireland. When it left the dock on April 2, 1912, over 100,000 people gathered to witness the massive ship embark on its voyage.
 - An unlikely royal: At Ireland's annual Puck Fair Festival, a feral domestic goat is caught and crowned king as part of the festivities.
 - Try saying this Irish location three times really fast (pronounced "muck-an-UH-ee-DARE-da-HAUL-yuh"): Muckanaghederdauhaulia, Muckanaghederdauhaulia, Muckanaghederdauhaulia. In English, it roughly means "pig marsh between two seas."
 - Test your abilities further by pronouncing these unusually named Irish locations: Illaungraif-fanavrankagh, Glassillaunvealnacurra, Ballywinterourkewood, Sruffaunoughterluggatoora Stream, and Corragunnagalliaghdoe Island.
 - Roll the cameras! During the filming of the *Star Wars* movie *The Last Jedi*, storm troopers and the *Millennium Falcon* made appearances on Malin Head, a rugged peninsula in County Donegal.
 - One of the longest free-hanging stalactites in the world is in Ireland, measuring 23 feet long!
 - During Ireland's Great Famine of 1845–1852, it's estimated that nearly a quarter of Ireland's population emigrated to flee disease and starvation. Many immigrants ended up in America. Today, nearly 10% of the American population claims to be of Irish descent!
 - If you're traveling to Ireland, make sure to pack for all kinds of weather! Though Ireland has a temperate climate, it's common to have rain, then sunshine, then rain again within the same day or even the same hour.
 - Lambay Island, a privately owned island that lies four miles off the coast of Dublin, is believed to be an early destination of Viking raiders. Today, it is home to an entire colony of—wait for it—Bennett's wallabies.
 - St. Patrick is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland, but did you know St. Patrick wasn't actually Irish? He came to Ireland under force after being kidnapped at the age of 16.
 - Party time! St. Patrick's Day is a public holiday in Ireland, meaning that schools and most businesses are closed in celebration of this special day. Festivities include enjoying parades, feasting with friends and family, and (for some) watching Irish sports.
 - Do you like languages? Irish and English are the two official languages of Ireland, though English is much more commonly spoken.
 - Did you know Irish is one of the world's oldest languages?

Its beginning extends back long before Jesus' birth, but after the event at Babel.

- Want to greet someone in Irish? Try saying this common greeting: *Dia duit* (pronounced "dee-uh-gwit"). It means "God be with you."
- Did you know that Ireland is home to one of the oldest tourist destinations in the world? Newgrange Tomb is a grave that was built thousands of years before Jesus was born!
- The most beautiful book in the world? One of Ireland's greatest cultural treasures is the Book of Kells, a manuscript of the four Gospels that was copied by monks over 1,200 years ago. It has been preserved so well that vivid colors can still be seen in the illustrations drawn on its pages!
- Guess how old the oldest company is in Ireland? Rathbornes, a candle-making company, was started in 1488—over 500 years ago—and is still operating today!

Part 2: Irish Animal Information

- Sssssss! There are no snakes in Ireland. They do have an animal called a slow worm that resembles a snake but is actually a type of legless lizard.
- One of the European badger's favorite meals is worms. In fact, these badgers are capable of eating several hundred worms a day. Yum?
- The Connemara pony is the only horse breed native to Ireland. It's known for its gentle, hard-working ways and for being the largest breed of pony in the world. Giddyup!
- Did you know that hedgehogs, despite their adorable appearance, are actually fierce predators? Their diet includes worms, bugs, small birds, and even snakes.
- Small, but mighty: The Irish stoat, an animal similar to a weasel, is a fierce hunter, often taking down animals up to 10 times its size! It aims for a quick kill by biting its prey's neck.
- Watch out! A grown hedgehog has around 5,000 spines on its back.
- Irish wolfhounds are known as the tallest dogs in the world, measuring up to seven feet tall when standing upright on two legs. Despite their size, they are gentle creatures that typically don't make good guard dogs due to their love of people—whether strangers or long-time owners.
- Giant Bambi? It's believed that the Irish elk was the largest deer to ever exist. Its fossilized remains were discovered in Ireland. At its shoulders, it could be over seven feet tall, and its antlers could grow over 12 feet across!
- One of the smallest mammals in Ireland is the Eurasian pygmy shrew, which grows to be about two inches long and has a one-and-a-half-inch long tail. It lives a fast-paced life with a heart that beats up to 1,200 times a minute and a body that needs to eat 125% of its weight each day to survive. The pygmy shrew is almost constantly hunting to keep up with its hunger!
- Open wide and say ahhh! The basking shark is the second-largest shark in the world. To get food, basking sharks keep their mouths wide open as they swim, allowing

thousands of gallons of water to filter into their mouths and through their gills. God gave them special gill structures that look like combs. These help catch plankton, krill, and fish to eat, while letting the rest of the water pass through.

- Sheep have rectangular pupils that give them a wide field of vision, even while their heads are down during grazing. This helps alert them to any predators that may be lurking nearby.
- Smelly signals: Sheep have special scent glands in front of their eyes and between their toes that release scents, allowing them to communicate with each other.
- Border collies are known to gaze intensely at stock, such as sheep, to get them to do various actions during herding. Would you be intimidated?
- Dog or cat? Border collies' bodies are designed to move quickly and easily in a crouched-down position, similar to how a cat stalks its prey.

This allows them to herd groups of animals efficiently and effectively.

- A group of ravens is called an “unkindness of ravens.” Do you think they live up to their name?
- Ravens have a nictitating membrane which is a translucent inner eyelid that acts like a windshield. It protects the eye from dust and debris as the raven flies, while still allowing the raven to see. God thought of everything!
- Flying fuzz balls: The “wool” on a woolly aphid is actually wax that makes it resemble a little ball of fuzz.
- Short-lived: The typical lifespan for a woolly aphid is 30 days. Unlike most insects which produce eggs, most woolly aphids give birth to live young.
- Watch out! Highland cows occasionally use their horns to defend themselves but mostly use them to forage for food on the ground.
- A cute lawn mower: Highland cows eat about 150 pounds of grass each day!

Dublin over with Laughter

Animal Pal Jokes and Riddles

Day 1 Animal Pal Jokes—Sheep

- What did the sheep want to be when she grew up? **A ewe-tube influencer.**
- How did the sheep get injured? **By falling off a shear cliff.**
- Why was the sheep embarrassed? **Because he didn't make it to the baaa-throom in time.**
- What do you call 3.14 sheep? **Shepherd's pi.**

Day 2 Animal Pal Jokes—Border Collie

- What did the gluten-free border collie eat for dinner? **Pizza with a collie-flower crust.**
- Why do border collies make good counselors? **Because they make you feel herd.**
- Why are border collies good at math? **Because they excel at rounding things up.**
- Why was the border collie crying? **Because he was feeling a little melan-collie.**

Day 3 Animal Pal Jokes—Raven

- What's a raven's favorite drink? **Caw-fee.**
- Why did the raven stop working out? **Because it made him soar.**
- What's a raven's favorite food? **Wings.**
- Why did the bird family go to the new restaurant? **Because everyone was raven about it.**

Day 4 Animal Pal Jokes—Woolly Aphid

- Why did the woolly aphids get in a fight? **Because they kept bugging each other.**

- What did the woolly aphid do before testifying in court? **He signed an aphid-davit.**
- How did the woolly aphids welcome their new neighbor? **They threw her a house-swarmer party.**
- Where did the woolly aphid's train stop? **At the infest-station.**
- Why was the woolly aphid a great detective? **Because no one could pull the wool over his eyes!**

Day 5 Animal Pal Jokes—Highland Cow

- Why are Highland cows bad at remembering details? **Because everything goes in one ear and out the udder.**
- Why did the Highland cow want to be an astronaut? **Because she wanted to explore the Milky Way.**
- Why did the Highland cow get all dressed up? **Because she was going to the Meat Ball.**
- Why did the Highland cow drop out of the high diving competition? **Because the steaks were too high.**

Miscellaneous Jokes and Riddles

- Why did the potato go to the nurse's office? **Because he wasn't peeling well.**
- Why did the clover dance? **Someone asked him to do the shamrock shake.**
- Why did the Irish chef win the cooking award? **Because her food was stew-pendous.**
- What's an Irish castle's favorite video game? **Fort Knight.**
- What do you call an Irishman who's good at skipping rocks? **Rick O'Shea.**
- How did the Irishwoman get so rich? **Because her money was always Dublin.**
- What's an Irish step dancer's favorite hobby? **Doing jig-saw puzzles.**

- What do you call an Irishwoman who can't stand up straight? **Eileen.**

Knock-Knock Jokes

- Knock knock. **Who's there?**
Irish. **Irish who?**
Irish you a great day at VBS!
- Knock knock. **Who's there?**
Thistle. **Thistle who?**
Thistle be the best VBS ever!
- Knock knock. **Who's there?**
Wool. **Wool who?**
Wool you come with me to Emerald Crossing?
- Knock knock. **Who's there?**
Accordion. **Accordion who?**
Accordion to the calendar,
it's VBS week!

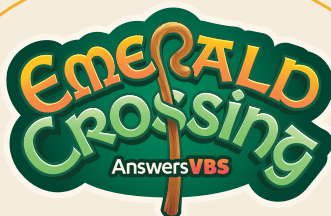
Tongue Twisters

- Shepherds shear their sheep short.
- Dublin dancers dive for donuts daily.
- Granny's green grass grows grandly from the ground.
- Cliffs climb clear to the clouds.
- Flynn flies flights flawlessly.
- Bitter better butter.

Two-Minute Tips

VBS comes only once a year, so make every minute count and use any downtime to build relationships. Try any of the following ideas if you find yourself with two minutes (or three or four), such as when kids are waiting for VBS to begin, while they're eating snacks, or when they're waiting to be picked up.

- Practice and recite memory verses.
- Have children update their attendance charts.
- Quietly practice cheers together.
- Color or work on activity sheets.
- Share trivia or jokes found in the *Helper Handbook*.
- Get to know each other with conversation starters, such as the following:
 - » Would you like to visit Ireland some day?
 - » What's one animal you'd want to see if you went to Ireland? What's one you wouldn't want to see?
 - » Would you rather hike deep into a cave or hike to the top of a cliff?
 - » What's your favorite way to eat a potato?
 - » Would you rather live in the city or in the countryside?
- Play a quick game like the following:
 - » Trip to Ireland: The first person says he's going on a trip to Ireland and he's going to take ___. He fills in the blank with something that starts with the letter A. The next person repeats that sentence and adds something that starts with the letter B. Continue on, adding letters with each new person.
 - » Add to the Story: The first child says four words to get it started—once upon a time. The next child adds four more words, the next child after that adds four more words, and so on.
 - » Rock, Paper, Scissors: Play this fun game in pairs. Check online for directions.
 - » I Spy: Play I Spy, picking Irish-themed objects or colors around the room as the item to spy.



At *Emerald Crossing*, children will journey through Ireland's lush landscapes, exploring the powerful words of Psalm 23. Along the way, they'll meet the shepherd-king David and the ultimate Shepherd-King, Jesus Christ. In a world filled with worry and confusion, kids will learn how to cross from anxiety to peace, from fear to faith, and from uncertainty to a firm foundation in God's Word through a relationship with the Good Shepherd. They'll discover there is a God who cares for them!

This handbook contains what every VBS helper needs to know to make your VBS program successful: an overview of *Emerald Crossing*, daily devotionals, tips for working with children, memory verse reference sheets, and more!