Day 1: Know Your Guide

Bible Story: Galatians 4:4-5; Luke 2:8-11; Matthew 4:23-25; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

Today’s Point: Jesus is our guide. Our journey begins with Him when we trust Jesus as our Savior.

Teacher Devotion

I'm not really much of an adventurer, but there I was, strapping on a life vest and helmet alongside a small band of other daredevils. We moved outside to be introduced to our guide. As he motioned for us to gather around, it was obvious he was well suited for his role. He gave us his name and a quick rundown of his experience, including how many times he had traveled this particular river and how many years he had been doing it. I felt myself shifting from apprehension to excited expectation. This guy knew what he was doing! If I followed his lead, this would be a lot of fun. Before long, we were calling each other by first names. Jake was in charge and I knew he was looking out for me.

Life can be quite an adventure. But we are not expected to navigate life without a Guide. Jesus is our Guide, our Friend, and the ultimate example we should follow. Best of all, He is with us every step of the way! This week of VBS will be no different. The Holy Spirit already knows every child who will cross your path and He knows exactly what each one needs. He’s got it all under control, so relax. This is going to be fun!

On this first day of VBS, you may encounter kids who have never heard of Jesus. Be prepared to give “a quick rundown” of who Jesus is and why He came as an introduction for these kids. Then they can spend the rest of VBS discovering why following Jesus is so important. You can help kids discover that they can know Jesus as their Guide and trust Him with their lives.
Bible Story: Daniel 1

Today’s Point: Daniel chose to obey God no matter what. God wants us to follow our Guide, Jesus.

TEACHER DEVOTION

The Babylonian army conquered Jerusalem and took most of the Israelites back to Babylon as captives. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered the best and the brightest young men of Israel to be brought to serve in the king’s palace. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were among those chosen. On the surface this might seem like a pretty sweet deal. After all, these young men would be taught the language and literature of the Babylonians, receive preferential treatment (food and wine from the king’s table), and then at the end of three years get a nice job serving in the king’s court. But when considered from the perspective of the captives, the situation looks radically different. Young men were ripped from their homes, torn from their families, and thrown into a training program designed to be a kind of “reprogramming” to completely change their identities and worldviews to match those of their Babylonian captors.

Have you ever found yourself in the minority because of your identity as a Christian? Have you ever been ridiculed for your beliefs? Have you ever felt as though everything around you (media, popular culture, etc.) was shouting at you to be this way, think this way, love this but hate that – to the point that it seemed virtually impossible to stand your ground and hold to biblical principles? That’s exactly the world in which most kids are living today. And it’s the same situation in which Daniel and his friends found themselves. They had a choice to make – would they obey God or the king? Take a stand or not make waves?

To Daniel and his friends the choice was clear. They would obey God – every single time. They resolved to follow God in everything and not compromise. As the week of VBS progresses, you will study other instances in which Daniel and his friends faced the same choice to obey God or obey the king. Because they had made up their minds early on in their lives to follow God, the choice was always clear, no matter how it was presented. You will have the opportunity today to help kids make up their minds once and for all to follow and be obedient to God. Help them see, through Daniel’s example, how they can choose to obey God and have the courage to live by holy standards in a world that is not holy.
Day 3: Trust Your Guide

Bible Story: Daniel 3

Today’s Point: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted that God’s way was the best way regardless of their circumstances. Jesus wants us to trust Him, just as these three men trusted God.

Teacher Devotion

Few people have felt the heat of trusting God as literally as Daniel’s friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These were the same friends who chose to obey God with their diet as young men in Nebuchadnezzar’s palace. By chapter 3, the trio had been appointed as provincial leaders in the kingdom and were once again faced with the choice to obey God or the king. But this time the stakes were higher. If they chose to disobey the king’s decree to bow down and worship the golden statue, they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. That’s a pretty serious threat!

Do you think they would have been justified in placating the king with a half-hearted adherence to his decree? Was the punishment of a blazing furnace sufficient reason to abandon their beliefs? Peer pressure can be a powerful motivator. So can the desire to be “in the know,” to be popular, or to see how far one can bend the rules without actually breaking them. Any one of these urges can be enough reason for a person to “go with the flow” and go against what they know is right and pleasing to God. And every one of them is something kids (and adults) encounter every single day. Standing for what is right may cost you popularity, jobs, or even friendships. What do you do when faced with challenges to your faith? How can you trust God when the cost seems so high?

Today it will be important for you to share with kids what God did for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego because they chose to ignore all the “costs” and follow Him. Kids also need to hear that these men trusted God and were willing to obey, even if God chose not to intervene. That’s a pretty radical trust! But then again, God calls us to a radical set of standards. Help kids understand that a lifestyle of obedience begins now. The “little” choices they make each day to follow God will develop in them a pattern of obedience that will carry them through the major “hot spots” they will encounter in life. No matter what, God will be right there with them!
Day 4: Stay on Track

Bible Story: Daniel 6

Today’s Point: No matter what changed around Daniel, he kept his focus on God who never changes. Jesus wants us to focus on Him by daily following Him.

TEACHER DEVOTION
You probably weren’t around 70 years ago, but think about how things have changed since then. How many presidents have been in office? How have lifestyles and morals changed? Chapters 1 through 6 of Daniel can be read rather quickly but they cover a time frame of more than 70 years. Daniel had seen a lot of changes. The Persians had overtaken the Babylonians, but the Israelites were still held as captives. Through it all, Daniel remained faithful and God blessed his faithfulness with wisdom and insight.

King Darius planned to make Daniel chief administrator of the whole realm. The other administrators were filled with jealousy, but could find nothing wrong to make a charge against Daniel. What can people around you observe about your life? What evidence exists that your walk with the Lord is more than surface actions?

The jealous administrators noticed Daniel’s habit of praying three times a day. They tricked King Darius into issuing an edict that no one could pray to anyone except the king for 30 days. The conniving crew preyed on the king’s ego and he signed the document, which according to the law of the Medes and Persians, made it irrevocable.

The decree went out, but Daniel continued his daily prayers. Notice in verse 11 that the complainers were traveling as a group. Daniel, on the other hand, had gone straight to his source of strength in earnest prayer. Some translations use words like ‘petitioning’ and “imploring.”

The accusers made their case to the king and, though the king resisted, he was trapped by his own decree. Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den. The king endured a sleepless night. The next morning the king hurried to the lion’s den and called out to Daniel. Imagine the rush of relief as Daniel’s voice was clearly heard, "My God sent His angel ...." 

Daniel knew that, regardless of who was king, God was in control. Daniel’s confidence came from a daily relationship with God. Jesus wants us to have that same kind of relationship with Him.

Kids can be encouraged to stay on track as they follow Jesus. The world may change around them, but the investment you are making in kids lives today can impact them for decades to come.
Day 5: Keep Watching

Bible Story: Daniel 10:7-12; 12:13; John 14:1-4; Revelation 22:7

Today’s Point: Just like Daniel, our journey is part of a much bigger story. God gave Daniel a promise of things to come. God has promised to complete our journey with Him through His Son, Jesus.

Teacher Devotion

Toward the end of his life, Daniel experienced an amazing, unexpected vision. The glowing brilliance of the man in the vision caused Daniel to lose his strength. But the man placed his hand on Daniel and helped him up. The man spoke, “Daniel you are a man treasured by God.” What a statement! The story could have stopped there, but it didn’t. The messenger continued, “Don’t be afraid, Daniel. From the first day you determined to understand and humble yourself before God, your prayers were heard.” What affirmation! Think about the challenges, difficulties, and dangers Daniel had already faced. Daniel knew God was with him, but God sent a messenger to tell him that every prayer had been heard. The messenger told Daniel many other details about things that were to come.

Hundreds of years later Jesus told His disciples about things to come. Jesus told about preparations for our eternal home, a home with room for everyone who has trusted Jesus as Savior.

The message God gave to Daniel and His promise to take care of people forever is the same promise God gave to us through Jesus. God is in charge. He always has been and He always will be in charge.

Sometimes it seems life gets so crazy that it takes total concentration to put one foot in front of the other – like the last day of VBS. On days like this an unexpected nudge from God is such a blessing; an amazing sunset, a note from a friend, a hug from a child. When that happens, it feels like God is reminding us that He is never lost in the details or overwhelmed by our lists of “important things to do.” And better yet, He has eternal plans that are beyond imagination! We just need to keep watching!