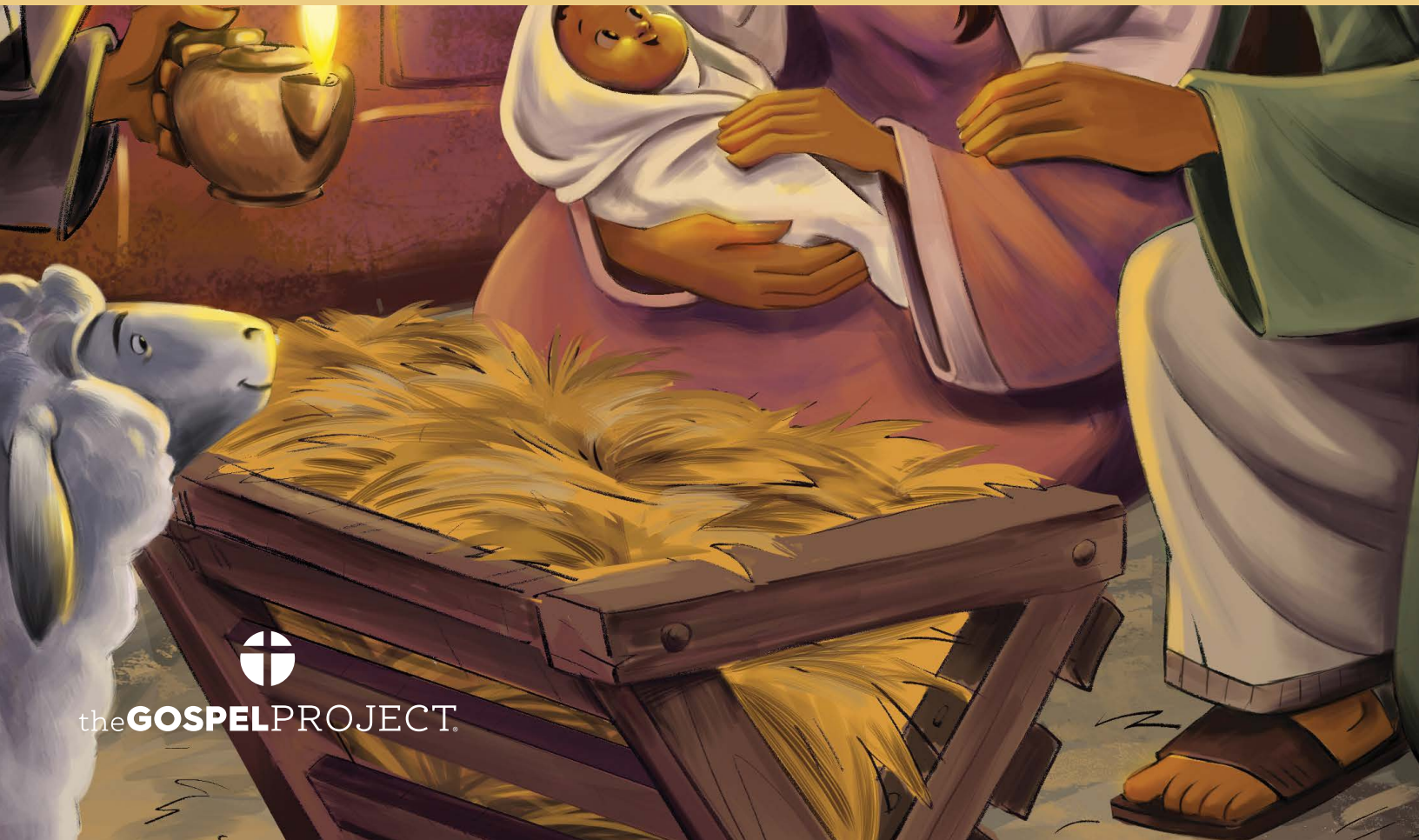


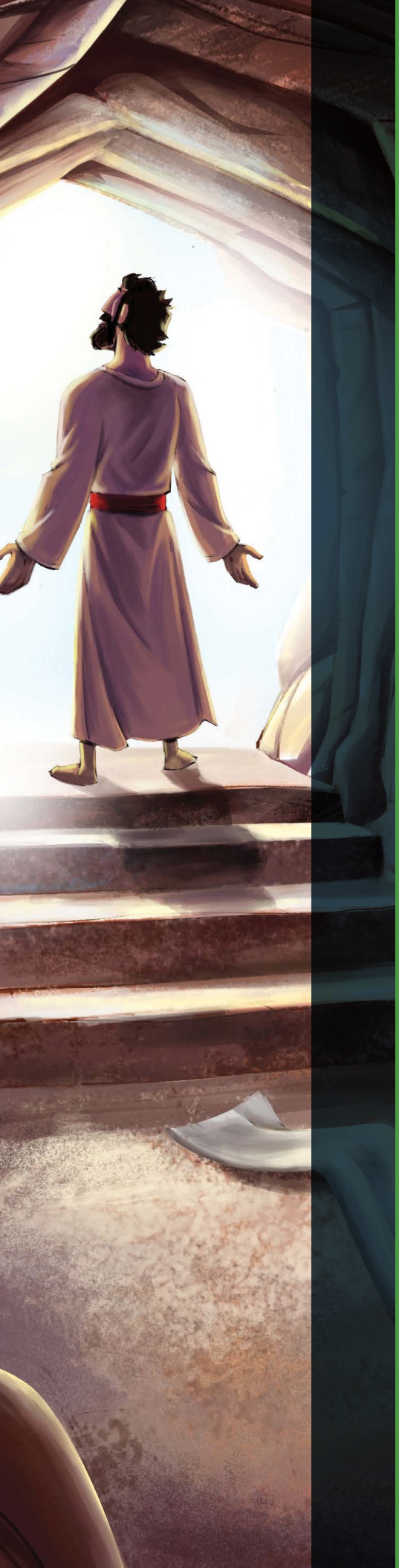
CHRISTMAS BONUS SESSION

KIDS

MIDWEEK GUIDE



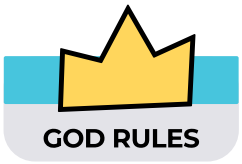
theGOSPELPROJECT



THE GOSPEL

God's Plan for Us

The gospel is the good news—the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use these prompts to share the gospel with your kids.



Ask: "Who is in charge at home?" Explain that because God created everything, He is in charge of everything. Read Revelation 4:11.



Ask: "Have you ever done something wrong?" Tell kids that everyone sins, or disobeys God. Our sin separates us from God. Read Romans 3:23.



Explain that God is holy and must punish sin. God sent His Son, Jesus, to take the punishment we deserve. Read John 3:16.



Ask: "What is the best gift you've ever received?" Say that Jesus took our punishment for sin by giving His life, and He gives us His righteousness. God sees us as if we lived the perfect life Jesus lived. This is the best gift ever! Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.



Explain that everyone has a choice to make. Ask: "Will you trust Jesus as your Savior and Lord? You can turn from self and sin and turn to Jesus." Read Romans 10:9-10.

CHRISTMAS BONUS SESSION

JESUS IS OUR SUBSTITUTE

LUKE 2



SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: Prayer

CHRIST CONNECTION: Jesus has always been and always will be God, but He also became a human and was born as a baby to save people from sin. As Jesus grew up, He lived a perfect life and took the punishment for our sins so that if we believe in Him, we will be forgiven and have a right relationship with God.

KEY PASSAGE: Romans 8:31b-32a

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: *What did Jesus do to save us? Jesus lived a sinless life, died on the cross, and rose from the dead.*



FOR THE SESSION

PLAN the Session

- Pray, asking God to prepare your heart to teach and the hearts of kids to receive His Word.
- Read the *Leader Bible Study* and review the session plan.
- Decide which *Welcome* activities to prepare for the session.
- Familiarize yourself with the *Learn* section enough to teach naturally.
- Organize discipleship groups, including a plan for new kids.
- Print a copy of the *Live* section for each discipleship group leader.

LEADER Bible Study

Prayer: a conversation with God in which we praise Him, ask Him for help, confess our sins, and listen to Him

Christmas is often filled with noise, excitement, and celebration—but the birth of Jesus began quietly. No palace. No crowds. Just a humble stable and a sleeping baby. Yet in that stillness, God was accomplishing the greatest rescue mission in history. Jesus was born to save us from sin, and His arrival invites us into a life of prayerful dependence on God.

As you prepare to lead kids this week, reflect on these truths from Jesus' birth and how they shape our understanding of prayer as a spiritual discipline.

God invites us to draw near to Him through Jesus. The birth of Jesus shows us that God did not stay distant from sinners. He came near—so near that He took on human flesh and entered our broken world. Immanuel, "God with us," means we are never alone. Prayer flows from this truth. Because God came to us in Jesus, we can come confidently to Him in prayer. We don't pray to a faraway God; we pray to a Savior who understands our weaknesses and meets us with compassion.

Jesus's humble incarnation reminds us to pray with trust, not pride. Jesus was not born into comfort or power. He entered the world dependent, humble, and lowly. This should inform how we think about prayer: God is not impressed by our strength or status. He welcomes hearts that are humble and trusting. Prayer is not about having the right words—it is about trusting God enough to bring Him our needs, fears, and hopes, just as we are.

Jesus came to save us, giving prayer its deepest meaning. The angel announced that Jesus was born as Savior. His birth was an early step toward the cross, where He would take our place and bear the punishment for sin. Because Jesus became our substitute, prayer is no longer a cry for help from a distance—it is a response to God's grace. Christians pray not to earn God's love, but because we have already received it through Jesus.

As you teach this week, pause to remember the gift of Christ's birth. Let prayer flow from gratitude, humility, and trust. Jesus—who was once a baby in a manger—is now the risen Savior who gave His life for us. Because of Him, we can come to God freely, confidently, and continually in prayer.











PREPARE

FOR THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Allergy Alert Poster, Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.

WELCOME

No additional supplies needed.

LEARN

Group activity

- ☐ small smooth stone

LOVE

Option 1: Manger prayers

- ☐ heavyweight paper, 1 per child
- ☐ assorted stickers
- ☐ small gift bows

Option 2: Collect prayers

- ☐ small containers with lid, 1 per child

LIVE

Option 2: Pass and tell

- ☐ unusual object (silly hat, stuffed animal, rubber chicken)
- ☐ upbeat worship music

Option 1: Step and flip

- ☐ upbeat worship music

Option 2: Toss and answer

- ☐ inflatable ball

Option 3: Number grab

- ☐ jar
- ☐ craft sticks, 3



WELCOME Kids

Choose one or all of the included activities to engage kids as they arrive. You may repeat all activities weekly throughout the unit, or highlight a different activity each week.

☐ OPTION 1: HUMAN ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

Invite kids to spread out around the room and pair up. Explain that they will play Human Rock, Paper, Scissors, using their whole bodies to make the shapes: "rock" is a small crouch with arms tucked in, "paper" is standing tall with arms stretched wide, and "scissors" is standing with one leg forward and arms making a cutting motion. When you call "1, 2, 3, SHOOT!" each pair strikes their pose, and the usual rules apply—rock beats scissors, scissors beats paper, paper beats rock. Winners quickly find another winner and keep playing. Continue until one final champion remains.

☐ OPTION 2: FREEZE FRAME FACES

Explain to kids that they will move around the room—walking, hopping, tiptoeing, or dancing—until they hear the leader call out, "Freeze faces in 3 ...2 ...1 ... FREEZE!" On the freeze cue, the leader will call out a silly prompt, and kids must hold that face or pose without moving or laughing. Prompts may include the face you'd make if you bit into a lemon, the face you'd make if you saw your favorite food, the face of a superhero about to blast off!

☐ OPTION 3: SPEED LINE-UP CHALLENGE

Kids will work together to line up in a specific order as fast as they can. For an added challenge, instruct the kids to line up while hopping, only whispering, or within a 30-second time limit. Sample prompts may include birth month (January at one end to December at the other), height (shortest to tallest), shoe size (smallest to largest), alphabetically by first name, alphabetically by favorite animal, or by age (youngest to oldest).

☐ OPTION 4: SAFARI SOUND-OFF

Before kids arrive, write the names of animals on pieces of paper. Make sure each animal is written on at least two or more cards. Invite kids to spread out around the room. Give each child a card with an animal picture or name on it. Explain that each animal is on at least two cards in the room. When you say "Go," kids must walk around and find kids who have the same animal—but they may only make the sound that animal makes. Kids move around mooing, roaring, chirping, squeaking, or making other animal sounds until they locate their matching partners. Once kids find each other, they stand together and keep making their animal sound until everyone has found their matching partner.

LEARN

LEARN about prayer (15–20 minutes)

1 REVIEW SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

> **SAY** *During this time each week, we come together to learn about and practice spiritual disciplines. What is a spiritual discipline?* **[Allow responses.]** *A spiritual discipline is a practice, or a repeated action, Christians do to help them grow in love for God and godliness. Some examples of spiritual disciplines are worship, prayer, celebration, fasting, Bible study, service, rest, and generosity.*

2 INTRODUCE THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

> **SAY** *Today we'll continue our exploration of the spiritual discipline of prayer. What are some things you've learned so far about prayer?* **[Allow responses.]** *Prayer is simply how we talk to God and listen to Him. We can pray anytime and anywhere—when we're happy, scared, thankful, or confused. Because Jesus came to be 'God with us,' we never have to wonder if God hears us. Prayer helps us remember that God is close, loving, and always ready to listen. The Bible story we will hear today is a beautiful reminder that God cares for us and wants to be near to us.*

3 GROUP GAME: PRAYER TAG

LOW PREP

Choose one or two kids to be *It*. When the game begins, the *It* players try to gently tag the other kids as they run around the play area. When someone is tagged, they must call out "Jesus is my substitute!" before they can start running again. Once they say the phrase, they're free to continue playing. The game continues with the *It* players tagging others and everyone shouting the phrase when tagged. Rotate who is *It* every few minutes so everyone gets a turn.

> **SAY** *That was so much fun! Every time you shouted, 'Jesus is my substitute!' we were reminded of something true about Jesus. He lived a perfect, sinless life, died on the cross, and rose from the dead to save us from our sins. And here's the amazing part—because Jesus took our place, we can always talk to God anytime, anywhere. We don't have to worry about doing something perfectly. We don't have to fix our sin ourselves. Jesus already did that for us. Prayer is a way to talk to Him about everything—our worries, our thanks, our excitement—and know He is listening.*
>
> *Prayer doesn't have to mean sitting still or saying big words. Prayer is simply talking to God, and that includes thanking Him, asking Him for help, or remembering what He's done for us. Calling out, 'Jesus is my substitute!' was a bit like a tiny prayer. You were telling God you believe Him, that you trust Jesus, and that you're thankful for what He did.*



4 READ THE BIBLE

Read Luke 2:1-20.

> **SAY** "Luke 2 tells us the true story of Jesus's birth. God sent His Son into the world in a humble way, as a baby born in Bethlehem. The angels announced that Jesus was the Savior, and the shepherds hurried to see Him for themselves.
>
> This reminds us that God did not stay far away from us. He came near. Jesus entered our world because He loves us and came to rescue us from sin. That is why Jesus is called Immanuel, which means 'God with us.' This reminds me of our big picture question: **What did Jesus do to save us? Jesus lived a sinless life, died on the cross, and rose from the dead.**
>
> Because Jesus came to be with us, prayer becomes personal. We are not talking to a distant God. We are talking to a God who knows us, loves us, and came close to us through Jesus. When you pray, how does it help to remember that Jesus came near and understands what it is like to be human? **[Allow responses.]**"

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17.

> **SAY** "In 1 Timothy 1, Paul shares part of his story. Paul says he used to sin against God and hurt others, but Jesus showed him mercy. Paul is amazed that Jesus would forgive him and use him for God's purposes.
>
> This passage reminds us why Jesus came. Jesus came to save sinners. He didn't come only for people who already seemed good. He came for people who needed forgiveness and grace, which is all of us. Jesus is our substitute because He took the punishment for sin that we deserved. That means we don't have to hide from God or be afraid to talk to Him. Through Jesus, we can come to God with honesty, gratitude, and trust.
>
> Prayer is one way we respond to God's mercy. We can thank Him for saving us and ask Him to help us follow Him. How does knowing that Jesus forgives sinners give you confidence to talk to God in prayer? **[Allow responses.]**"

5 CHRIST CONNECTION

> **SAY** "Jesus didn't stop being God when He was born. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. He came to live among us so He could one day take our place and save us from sin. Because Jesus is our substitute, prayer is possible. We don't pray to earn God's love—we pray because Jesus already made a way for us to be close to Him."



6 GROUP ACTIVITY: PRAYER STONES

Give each child a small smooth stone. Provide permanent markers or paint pens. Invite the kids to decorate their stone with words, symbols, or pictures that remind them of Jesus being their substitute—for example, a cross, a heart, or the words "Jesus is my substitute." Explain that each time they see their stone at home, it can remind them to pray and thank Jesus for taking their place. Leaders can circulate to help kids think of prayer ideas for their stone.

> **SAY** *"Look at the stones you've decorated. Each one is a reminder that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and rose again to save us. Prayer is simply talking to God, and these stones can remind you that you can always talk to Him, no matter where you are. You put care and thought into decorating your stone. In an even greater way, God cares about every detail of your life and wants to hear from you."*

7 FOLLOW UP ON LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE

> **SAY** *"Last week, our challenge was to find a special place in your home to create a 'prayer spot.' How did God use last week's challenge to grow your understanding of Him?* ***[Allow responses.]***"

8 INTRODUCE THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

> **SAY** *"This week our challenge is to thank Jesus for being your substitute. Ask Him to help you remember His love for you each day this week."*

9 CLOSE IN PRAYER

Use the scripted prayer below or pray in your own words.

> **SAY** *"God, thank You for sending Jesus to save us. Thank You that You are with us and that we can talk to You anytime. Help us remember to pray, trust You, and thank You for Your great love. Amen."*



LOVE God by practicing prayer (10–15 minutes)

Choose one of these two options as a way to lead children to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer.

☐ OPTION 1: MANGER PRAYERS

Prior to the session draw a simple manger outline onto heavyweight paper, one per child. Supply crayons, stickers, and small gift bows. Encourage kids to draw or write one prayer for themselves, a friend, or their family inside the manger outline and decorate. Once complete, encourage kids to share their prayers with a partner. Explain that every time we pray, we can remember that Jesus is our substitute. He lived perfectly, died on the cross, and rose from the dead so we can have a relationship with God. Prayer is one way we talk to Him and share what's on our hearts.

☐ OPTION 2: COLLECT PRAYERS

Give each kid a small container with a lid and strips of paper. Invite them to write or draw one prayer on each strip—prayers of thanks, requests, or reminders of Jesus's sacrifice. Kids fold the strips and place them in the jar. Explain that each day they can take a strip out to pray, adding new ones as they think of them. The jar becomes a visual reminder that prayer is ongoing and that Jesus is their substitute.



LIVE for God through discipleship (20–30 minutes)

Form discipleship groups to provide a safe environment for kids to share with one another. Limit groups to ideally no more than five children and one adult leader. Prioritize forming groups according to gender first, then age. Adult leaders should never be alone with children.

1 EMPHASIZE HEALTHY DISCUSSION

Explain that discipleship time is a special time because we share our deep thoughts and feelings with one another. All must work together to create a safe place for sharing. Consider these three guidelines:

1. Listen when someone is talking.
2. Only comment when the person sharing invites you to do so.
3. In general, what is shared in the group should stay in the group. The only exception is talking with a trusted adult if it would help either you or the person who shared.

Note: Be sure to follow local laws and ministry policies concerning any report or suspicion of abuse or neglect.

2 GET EVERYONE TALKING

Choose one of the options below to encourage children to engage with one another.

☐ OPTION 1: THREE CLUE MYSTERIES



Invite kids to pair up or form groups of three. Explain that one person will silently think of something familiar: an animal, a food, a sport, a toy, or a place. Without saying the answer, that child gives the group three clues, one at a time. Encourage clues that get increasingly specific. After each clue, their partner(s) may make one guess. When someone guesses correctly, switch roles and begin a new round. Every few minutes, signal kids to switch partners to mix up conversations.

☐ OPTION 2: PASS AND TELL

Form a circle and choose a fun or unusual object—something that immediately grabs attention, like a stuffed animal, silly hat, or rubber chicken. Play upbeat worship music while kids pass the object around the circle. When the music stops, the child holding the object will answer a fun question that you provide. Sample questions: If you could create any flavor of ice cream, what would it be? What food would you eat every day if you could?

☐ OPTION 3: ZIP, ZAP, ZOP



Tell kids to stand in a circle and face inward so everyone can see each other. Explain that they will pass an imaginary "spark" around the circle using the words "Zip," "Zap," or "Zop." The first player puts their hands together like they are pushing energy toward someone and says "Zip!" The person they point to must immediately pass it to someone else, but this time using the next word: "Zap!" The next person passes it with "Zop!" After "Zop," the pattern starts over with "Zip" again. Kids must keep the rhythm going smoothly and quickly without breaking the sequence. Play continues until one final player remains.



3 DISCUSS LEARN TIME

Choose an option below to engage kids with the following questions.

1. What is something you learned today?
2. How does knowing that Jesus is your substitute change the way you talk to God?
3. Based on what you learned today, what do you think God is asking you to do?

☐ OPTION 1: STEP AND FLIP

Write the numbers 1, 2, or 3 on sheets of paper (enough for each kid.) Place the sheets facedown spread out around the room. Play upbeat music and let the kids walk around. When the music stops, everyone must find a different sheet of paper to stand on. They'll turn it over to discover which question they will answer.

☐ OPTION 2: TOSS AND ANSWER

On a small ball, write the numbers 1, 2, and 3 in random order. Toss the ball to a kid. Whichever number his right thumb lands closest to is the question he will answer. Continue until all kids have had a chance to answer.

☐ OPTION 3: NUMBER GRAB

Write the numbers 1, 2, or 3 on individual wooden craft sticks. Place the sticks in a jar and let each kid pull out a stick to determine which question he or she will answer.

4 WALK IN THE LIGHT

Read 1 John 1:7. Explain that this is a time for honesty with one another as we answer the questions: How has it been hard for you to obey God this week? Where are you struggling? To help kids open up, you might first consider asking them to share one high point and one low point from their week.

Answer the question or confess sin in an age-appropriate way to model confession. Ask a volunteer to pray for you. Choose one of the following ways to lead children to walk in the light. Do not force a child to share or pray:

- Form a circle. Go around the circle, giving each child an opportunity to share a high and low from her week. After each child shares, ask someone else to pray for her.
- Form pairs. Take turns sharing and praying for each other.
- Give each child a sheet of paper. Allow children to write or draw their answers to the questions. Mix up the papers and distribute one to each child to pray for silently.