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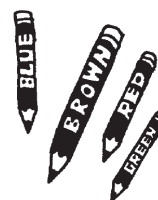
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Pastor Dan included this invitation in his book titled *Manna and Mercy*. You are welcome to do the same throughout the pages of this Director Guide!



A suggestion: If we were to return to Bible times, we would meet people whose color would be beautiful shades of brown. Why not buy a colored pencil and fill in the faces and hands and feet of the people in this booklet? If you have to buy a whole set of pencils, use the others to color in clothing, animals, plants, earth, water, and sky. Celebrate!



OVERVIEW



Welcome to Operation Restoration!

This 5-day Vacation Bible School (VBS) program is designed for everyone—participants, leaders, volunteer helpers—to grow in faith, build relationships, and have fun together. Throughout this VBS, the creative work of Pastor Daniel Erlander is used to inspire and illustrate the daily themes that will guide your time together. From Small Group Time and Large Group Openings to the activity centers you choose, Pastor Dan’s illustrations, writings, and ideas set the foundation.

Kids, youth, and adults are all part of Operation Restoration as they explore many ways to be menders in God’s world. Through moments of wonder and exploration, your group will make connections between Bible stories and mending actions to discover how they can live out faith in daily life. You’ll equip these menders with language and practices to become part of Operation Restoration.

Features

Operation Restoration includes these features that will help you create this VBS experience:

- * An overarching theme of **restoration** that invites and inspires everyone to be a mender in God’s world
- * **Daily themes** kids can understand and relate to: Feed, Heal, Forgive, Pray and Rest
- * Five **activity centers** that are engaging, multisensory, and fun: Art, Music, Science and Nature, Service Learning, and Storytelling
- * Captivating, playful **visuals and text** created by Pastor Daniel Erlander
- * **Flexible content** you can adjust for your context

Keep reading to learn more about each of these features.

Restoration Theme

In his well-loved book *Manna and Mercy: A Brief History of God’s Unfolding Promise to Mend the Entire Universe*, Pastor Daniel Erlander writes this of God’s dream:

God poured out manna day after day, dreaming of a universal manna society – a world where all receive, thank, and share. Yahweh dreamed of a world where there are no big deals and little deals, no rich and poor, no oppressors and oppressed – where humans live in harmony with all creation, each part living for the good of the whole. Yahweh dreamed of SHALOM, a mended universe.

This VBS invites all participants to share in this dream of restoration through exploring all the ways they can help mend God's world.

Daily Themes

Each day features a theme that is rooted in a Bible story. Every theme helps kids focus on a specific way to mend God's world. Themes are introduced during Small Group Time as kids arrive. Then the Large Group Opening includes a Bible story retelling that weaves in the theme and its connection to mending and restoration. These themes also inspire the activities at each center. Here are the themes and their corresponding Bible stories.

Day 1 Feed: You'll explore the story of God feeding the Hebrew people with manna during their time in the wilderness.

Day 2 Heal: You'll tell stories of Jesus healing others, including the bent-over woman.

Day 3 Forgive: You'll present the story of Jesus telling his disciples to forgive seventy-seven times.

Day 4 Pray: You'll help kids learn the Lord's Prayer from the Gospel of Luke.

Day 5 Rest: You'll welcome everyone to learn more about sabbath and how rest is how we are called into friendship with God, others, and nature.

For a chart listing all five themes, Bible stories, and other content, go to page 10.

Activity Centers

Operation Restoration includes five centers with activities that reinforce daily themes and our role as menders of God's world. Centers include options for four different age groups each day: lower elementary, upper elementary, all kids, and intergenerational. You'll recruit leaders and helpers for these centers and choose activities for your Operation Restoration VBS.

- * The **Art** Center includes plenty of creative visual art activities.
- * The **Music** Center gets kids singing, playing instruments, and moving.
- * The **Science and Nature** Center invites kids to see connections between daily themes and science concepts, including ways to be outdoors in the natural world.
- * The **Service Learning** Center provides daily options for ways to serve others.
- * The **Storytelling** Center offers interactive ways to explore the day's Bible story and other Bible texts connected to the theme.

The Operation Restoration Starter Kit includes all five Activity Guides. Order additional guides if you have more than one leader at a center. You can preview each guide's daily activities on a chart near the beginning of each guide.

Visuals and Text by Pastor Daniel Erlander

Many VBS programs are set in an environment using settings like vacation destinations, vehicles, or fantastical scenarios. Operation Restoration is different. Instead of decorating your space to look like another place, you will use the illustrations of Pastor Dan Erlander to liven up your environment, with participants adding their own work to your location during VBS. Pastor Dan's work appears during Small Group Time, Large Group Openings, and Activity Centers. You'll also find his illustrations in the Interactive Book for Kids.


Learn more about Pastor Dan by reading his biography starting on the next page. You can also go to augzburgfortress.org to view his books on baptism, communion, and more.

Flexible Content

No VBS program is one-size-fits-all, so VBS teams need to adjust content to fit their specific context. Operation Restoration can be used in a range of settings: large and small congregations, half-day and full day programs, evening offerings, intergenerational gatherings, and more.

For specific scheduling options, check out pages 17-19.

Your VBS planning team can choose the activity centers, age-specific activities, and schedules that fit your context. To find out what works best for your setting, review the content in this Director Guide along with the Activity Guides and Interactive Book for Kids. Then plan for a successful VBS program with your fellow members of God's world.

Your purchase of this Operation Restoration Director Guide includes dozens of digital downloads. You can access additional content for training, decorating files, Large Group Opening storytelling presentations, colorful photos of completed projects, and more! Look for this  throughout this Director Guide for more information about digital downloads.

GETTING READY



Planning Basics

As You Begin

As the director of VBS, you join a tradition of leaders who have designed a week of fun, meaningful, and faith-filled experiences for kids, youth, and adults in your church and community. Whether you've served in this role before or are a first-time director, you'll find the theologically sound, kid-focused VBS content you need in this Director Guide. Operation Restoration: Mending God's World is designed to be streamlined and straightforward so you can focus on what matters most—inviting kids, youth, and adults into mending God's world.

This Getting Ready section will guide you through the process of planning Operation Restoration. Here are some initial recommendations to get started. Take what works, adjust as needed, and incorporate your own know-how and experiences for a successful—and well-planned—Operation Restoration VBS!

Organization Matters: Decide on your strategy for collecting, documenting, and communicating information: digital, paper, or a hybrid approach. If possible, use the digital platform used by your church to ensure easy communication with staff, volunteers, and families.

Choose the Age-Level Format: Operation Restoration offers options for how kids are grouped. You may choose to divide kids into Lower and Upper Elementary groups. Multiage kid groupings are the focus of the All Kids option. You may wish to offer an Intergenerational VBS, inviting everyone in your church community to participate. Read page 16 for more information about age levels.

Save the Date: Once you decide on the date and location, put VBS on the church calendar early and reserve all needed spaces. Check with schools, community programs, and other summer camps to select a week that avoids as many conflicts as possible. Announce the date early and often using digital tools and print materials like posters, postcards, and other visuals.

Go Ecumenical: Consider hosting a VBS with a neighboring congregation. This type of collaboration requires more planning and communication, but great things can happen when churches share resources, ideas, space—and kids!

Go Social: Decide how/whether you want to use your church's social media platforms to promote VBS, recruit volunteers, provide reminders, use hashtags, and post photos and videos of VBS in action. If you decide to post images of kids, make sure you have parental consent forms on file and that you ask kids for their consent to photograph/record them.

Begin Volunteer Recruitment: Start a list of potential volunteers for VBS, both up-front leaders and behind-the-scenes folks. Read more about the specific roles for volunteers on pages 14-15 of this Director Guide. Make sure all potential volunteers know about your church safety policy regarding background checks and other ways to protect all children and vulnerable adults.

Plan Your Budget: Develop a budget that covers the cost of published resources, supplies for activity centers and the preschool program, snacks, honorariums for artists or speakers, and other costs. Work with your children's ministry team, pastor, or other staff members to determine the best way to fund VBS. Options may include a per-participant fee, a line item in the church budget, child sponsorships, or fundraising.

Track Your Costs: Plan how you will track costs by saving and submitting receipts and documenting online purchases. Consider delegating the purchase of supplies so you can focus on other parts of VBS planning. Make sure all parties who purchase VBS items know the process for submitting expenses.



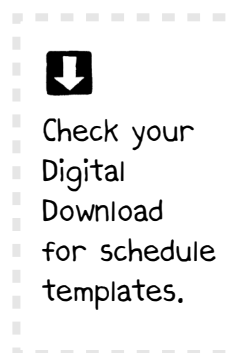
Sample Schedules

Operation Restoration VBS provides content for five sessions labeled as Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, Day 4, and Day 5. Planning a consistent daily schedule helps leaders and participants know what to expect each day.

These sample schedules show how churches can adapt content to fit their time, space, and VBS traditions.

3-hour VBS Program, four activity centers, no snack

9:00–9:30	Small Group Time and Large Group Opening
9:30–9:35	Transition time to Activity Center 1
9:35–10:10	Activity Center 1 and transition time
10:10–10:45	Activity Center 2 and transition time
10:45–11:20	Activity Center 3 and transition time
11:20–11:55	Activity Center 4
11:55–12:00	Kid pick-up



3-hour VBS Program, three activity centers, snack

9:00–9:30	Small Group Time and Large Group Opening
9:30–9:35	Transition time to Activity Center
9:35–10:10	Activity Center and transition time, 1/3 of group enjoys Snack
10:10–10:45	Activity Center and transition time, 1/3 of group enjoys Snack
10:45–11:20	Activity Center and transition time, 1/3 of group enjoys Snack
11:20–11:55	Activity Center
11:55–12:00	Kid pick-up

SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE



Getting Ready for VBS

So many people help plan and carry out VBS, and all of these roles are important! As a Small Group Leader, you play an essential role—accompanying kids through VBS each day, building relationships with kids, helping kids form friendships with each other, and living out the role of a mender of the universe!

Follow these tips to prepare for your role and have a great VBS!

Prepare your mind and heart. To get ready for leading kids, spend time with the stories and themes of VBS. Your VBS Director will provide a Theological Background for each day. Set aside some time to read through the day's story from your Bible, and then read the background. Answer the questions, ponder the theme, and pray that God will prepare you for a meaningful week with kids.

Get to know the Interactive Book. This 16-page booklet gives kids a way to express themselves and dive deeper into daily themes. Read through each day's content to get familiar with the activities. Choose the Mender Moments to use during Small Group Time. Keep the On the Go activities handy. Pick a Mender Sender or two to highlight each day. Remember, you don't have to do everything!

Plan for effective arrivals and Small Group Time. Operation Restoration VBS is designed to give kids a longer on-ramp to the excitement and activity of Large Group Openings. This approach supports kids who may be more anxious about high-energy gatherings with lots of people. It also gives everyone a chance to build relationships with each other before you dive into higher-energy activities. Gather with them in a way that fits your space: circle up on the floor in a quiet corner, around tables in a classroom, or under a tree outside. Your VBS Director will provide more information about how and where to meet kids. Make sure you can see all faces and that each person is included.

Pack a daily bag. Use a backpack or other easy-to-carry bag to hold each day's essentials: the Interactive Books, colored pencils, extra name tags, your class list, a small first aid kit, a list of any health needs and allergy information, and other useful supplies.

Be fully present during Center Time. Your VBS Director will give you the Daily Activity Chart that names the activities your group will do at each center each day. When you arrive at a center, tune in to how you can help all kids and the Youth Leaders and Center Helpers be successful. You may be tempted to make your own project, but you may be more needed at the side of a kid feeling uncertain or in need of more support. If some of the kids in your group finish the activity early, use an activity in the Interactive Book to reinforce the theme of the day.

Follow all safety procedures. Make sure you know the policies on drop-offs and pick-ups to ensure safe beginnings and endings to each day. Provide name tags, including extras for kids who misplace theirs. Enforce safe-child policies at all times in classroom spaces, during bathroom stops, and at other times. Ask for support from your VBS Director at any time if you need help.

Reinforce the Mending theme. Mending is woven into activities throughout each day of VBS. Find times to talk about this theme by using activities in the Interactive Book for Kids, sharing stories from your own life, and looking for other natural connections. You could even bring in something from your own life in need of mending that kids could help you restore during VBS.

God has called you to this role of Small Group Leader. With some prayer and preparation, you will be ready to guide a group of kids through five days of Operation Restoration and become menders of the universe!

NOTES:

LARGE GROUP OPENINGS



Each Large Group Opening follows this format:

A chart lists the theme, Bible text, and more about the story and mending theme.

Arrival and Welcome describes how to welcome kids and leaders into the space.


Opening Cheer and Song Set repeats the Menders Cheer each day, followed by a few songs.

Opening Prayer invites kids into prayer together.

Intro Skit features the characters of Zoe and Jackson mentioning the theme and setting up the Bible story.

Bible Story Retelling accompanies a PowerPoint from the Digital Download to tell the Bible story in words and illustrations.

Bible Story Debrief is led by Zoe and Jackson.

Skit features Zoe, Jackson, and other characters applying the theme and Bible story to a real-life situation. The Skit is in the Digital Download. 

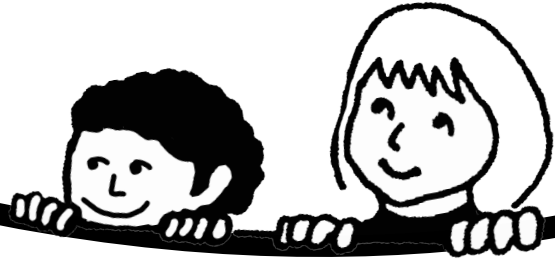
Skit Wrap-up happens after the skit.

Announcements and Updates help leaders let kids know what happens next.

Closing Blessing and Song ends the large group's time together before small groups go to their first activity center.

As with any VBS program, choose the parts that work best for your context, adapt as needed, and cut out what doesn't work.

PRESCHOOL GUIDE



Welcome to Preschool!

Welcome to the wonderful world of preschoolers! There is nothing better than spending time with these littles who are eager to learn, who love to spend time together, and who are so honest with their emotions.

Operation Restoration gives young children the chance to shine at what they do well—notice what needs mending and offer their help. Throughout VBS, give young children opportunities to help fix things. They may be little, but they play a big role in mending God’s world.

Preschoolers will join the big kids during the Large Group Opening each day and then head to their own self-contained space to enjoy a range of activities. Work with your VBS Director to develop a schedule that works for everyone at Operation Restoration.

Classroom Setup

VBS classrooms may not be what we picture as a conventional classroom. You may meet outside for class, or in a large room divided into smaller areas for multiple grades. The preschool group may meet in a room used for another ministry, such as a church nursery. Don’t be dismayed if you initially find it a challenge to create a learning environment in a space that does not have basic classroom components. Sometimes a space that we think will be impossible to use can become the most creative and kid-friendly space of all!

The necessities for a class of preschoolers include a clean carpeted floor space, kid-size low tables and chairs, access to a sink, access to a bathroom, and a wall with a whiteboard, pocket chart, or other surface to display items. Anything extra—such as child-size home center furniture, bookcases and books, and a sensory table—is a bonus!

- * Bring in a colorful floor rug for learners to sit on. Children can sit on a carpet cross-legged, but you may also want to consider small pillows, carpet squares, or Hula-Hoops for preschoolers to sit on or in.
- * Baskets or tubs can hold learning materials, books, and other items used for each session.
- * If you do not have a sink with running water nearby, you can bring in dish tubs for handwashing before snack and after messy art projects: one with warm soapy water and one with clean rinse water. Provide premoistened hand wipes or hand sanitizer.
- * A whiteboard or pocket chart is a great addition to a preschool classroom.
- * Check with the church building manager about taping or pinning items to the walls. If you do need to display signs, artwork, or other paper items, use painter’s tape for easy removal.

Center Ideas

Each day's content includes lots of ideas for daily activities. If you have space and materials, consider adding one or more of these play centers to add more options to each day.

Dramatic Play Area

Preschool kids love to pretend. Set up a dramatic play area in your learning space and place new items there each day that correspond to the theme. When you or the kids need a break, kids will enjoy playing in the dramatic play area.

Day 1: Feed

A child-size kitchen, grocery store, or restaurant with toy food, aprons, and other things used to feed people would be great options for today's story. If kids need a break from the group, they can play in the dramatic play area and still be immersed in the theme for the day—feeding hungry people.

Day 2: Heal

A child-size medical kit, clinic, or veterinary hospital with stuffed animals would be great options for today. If kids need a break from the group, they can play in the dramatic play area and still be immersed in the theme for the day—healing those who are sick or injured in body or mind.

Day 3: Forgive

A play space designated as a tinkering area would be such fun for kids! Provide preschool-appropriate construction toys, play tools, tape, and other supplies for them to use to fix and mend things that are broken, just like how forgiveness mends us when we are broken!

Day 4: Pray

Set up a cozy spot designated as a prayer area with cozy seating, a prayer shawl, a cross to hold, a battery-operated candle, and other items to support prayer. Kids use them when they need a quiet moment, or to take a break. Prayer mends us and others, and we can do it any time!

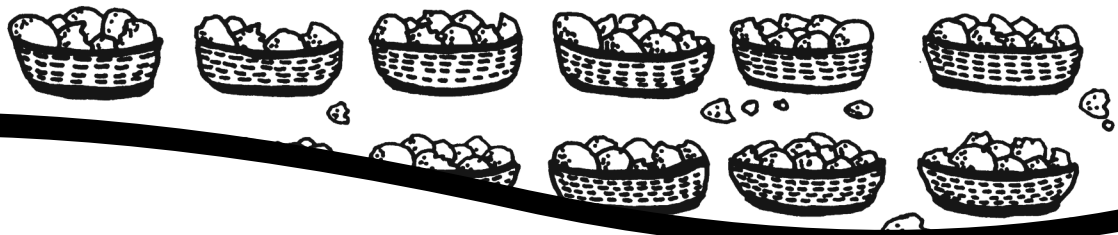
Day 5: Rest

Set up a space where kids can put dolls and animals to bed for a rest today. Provide beds and cradles for dolls and stuffed animals. Add night-lights, bedtime books, and other nighttime items. Helping others take a rest can show us how important it is for us to rest too.

Sensory Table

A sensory table is a wonderful addition to any early childhood classroom. If there are learners who are having a hard time focusing or not sure about spending time in the class, a sensory table can be mesmerizing. Use a floor sensory table or plastic bins to put on a tabletop. Fill with a dried beans-and-corn mixture. Provide plastic funnels, cups, spoons, and containers for the learners to measure and pour with.

SNACK GUIDE



Introduction – Set the Table

Welcome to Snack Time, everyone’s favorite part of Vacation Bible School! Snack Time at Operation Restoration: Mending God’s World is intentionally designed as a community experience. God invites us to the table, welcomes us as we are, and nourishes us, body and soul. When we gather at God’s table, miracles happen!

Goals for Success

As a leader of Snack Time, you have the opportunity to set the scene and set the table. Your goals are to provide a refueling station for the participants, communicate the daily themes and Bible texts, and connect the conversation about our roles as menders in God’s world as you snack together. The guide for each day includes these sections to help you and your team:

- * **Introduction** – a brief overview of the day’s snack and theme and how they connect
- * **Ingredients + Supplies** – a shopping list and items to gather
- * **Before Kids Arrive** – steps for needed recipe preparation
- * **Snack Time** – description of how to set up food and supplies for snack
- * **Connect** – discussion notes and conversation prompts to connect the snack and the day’s story

Guiding Principles

We hope that by the end of their time at Operation Restoration, kids take home language, practices, and enthusiasm for being menders in God’s world around them.

- * Greet the kids by name and with joy as they enter the snack space. Set the tone with a friendly welcome each day.
- * Snacks are designed to connect to each day’s theme and Bible text. Follow the provided conversation prompts to encourage great connections as students eat together.
- * Encourage the kids to play with their food to reinforce each day’s theme. Snack time is fun!
- * Snacks may be easily prepared by a few volunteers and served to kids, or you may lead the kids to do some of the prep work during Snack Time.
- * Consider stewardship as you prepare: use napkins, dishes, and utensils that can be washed or composted rather than thrown away.

- * Stand and say or sing a favorite table prayer together each day before you eat. It can be the same prayer each time.
- * Set up a self-serve beverage station with water pitchers or dispensers and cups.

Safety First

Keep safety at the forefront of your mind as you prepare to host children for Snack Time.

- * Do not leave children unattended in the kitchen.
- * Be aware of all food allergies for your groups.
- * Some kids have strong food preferences and may avoid certain food types and textures. As part of your welcome to enjoy eating together, respect their choices to pass on certain food types.
- * Think from the height of a curious child. Keep sharp utensils and hot pans and dishes out of reach.
- * Always begin Snack Time by washing hands. You may want to incorporate a restroom break before and after Snack Time.
- * Create a hand-sanitizing station in the snack space.
- * For serving, wear gloves when appropriate. Roll up sleeves and pull back hair.
- * Clean up any spills immediately to prevent slips and falling hazards.

Shopping Lists

You'll find a list of ingredients and supplies listed on each day's Snack Guide.

- * The Snack Guide for Operation Restoration uses natural, healthy ingredients meant to refuel the participants for learning.
- * No peanuts or tree nuts are used in the ingredient list. Be sure to address other food allergies on an individual basis and offer alternatives when possible.
- * The daily recipes do not require complex, expensive ingredients.
- * Shop for locally sourced ingredients when possible.

Enjoy your important part in Operation Restoration: Mending God's World this week! May God bless your time as a leader in the kitchen as you share snacks and God's love and hope with the children who are in your care.