

Olympic Hopeful's Vacation Bible School

Jesus Loves the Little

Children...Running for the Prize!



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Introductory Notes

On your mark, get set....GO!!! Whether or not it is a year of Olympics, athletic analogies and fitness focus are always great themes to use when implementing Bible programs for kids. We as a culture honor sports stars and their endeavors quite a bit...what would it look like to give Biblical efforts the same attention? This Vacation Bible School curriculum uses the Olympics as a spring board for a dual emphasis...on one end of the journey, it looks to the body and sports as a comparison to spiritual strength. But with the Olympics topic, we will also highlight countries around the world in celebration of the international element. With this in mind, Bible stories will center on the Apostle Paul, as original church missionary. Paul also made particular use of physical metaphors. With this program, kids will travel with Paul, work on some verse memorization, play games, make crafts, and more!

As you embark on this journey, please take a moment to pray for your program. Ask that God would use the stories, activities, and songs to make lasting impressions on the lives of participants. Even more so, ask that the people leading and participating would demonstrate the love of God and be vessels of it. VBS has powerful potential to impact the lives of our children.

Outlined here are several suggested possibilities to make your Vacation Bible School terrific. The schedule lay-out is based on a week-long (five-day) program with roughly three hours of Vacation Bible School each day. Of course, these are all mere ideas. All are highly adaptable to suit the individual characteristics and needs of your groups and programs, so please feel free to adjust and alter as much as needed. This is hopefully a great springboard from which to launch with your own creative ideas and activities. Lace up!



Vacation Bible School: Jesus Loves The Little Children...Running for the Prize!

Daily Overview

Day 1: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” -1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Story: Salvation of Paul; blinding conversion on the road to Damascus and healing by Ananias (changing from Saul to Paul).

Acts 9:1-19

Verse focus (epistle): Running for the prize: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (training and purpose)

Craft: Giant sunglasses to decorate (for Paul’s “eyes”); shoelaces (spread gospel)

Games: Blindfolded obstacle course (listen while another person leads)

Foot race with adjustments and challenges (work with partners; three-legged, backwards, hopping, etc)

Music: Introduce “Running for the Prize” and “I will Fight this Fight” (Mary Rice Hopkins/Jana Alayra) theme songs; also “Jesus Loves the Little Children” and “Jesus Loves Me”

Snack: Carrots (good for eye health!); “eyes” with Ritz cracker, cream cheese, and raisins

Extras (“sillies”): N/A (first day; wear sunglasses after decoration)

Day Two: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...” -Hebrews 12:1

Story: “Paul’s Basket Case Adventure:” Paul is forced to sneak out of Jerusalem by lowering in a basket over the city walls (theme of God’s protection).

Acts 9:20-31

Verse focus (epistle): Running the race of faith without hindrance (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Craft: Younger: “Paul in a basket” small cup with “Paul” built in; Older: decorate baskets; paper basket “weave”

Games: “protect a neighbor” (students stand one in front of another and block beach balls/balloons). “Basket case relay” (carrying things in baskets)

Music: Continue theme songs introduced previous day; add hand motions and practice singing (continue traditional songs, as well)

Snack: fruits with “protective” skin (apples, oranges, grapes); granola bar “fuel”

Extras (“sillies”): Head gear (helmets, hats, hair dos)

Day Three: “but those who wait for the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” –Isaiah 40:31

Story: Paul’s missionary journeys and helpers; salvation by an earthquake when he was in prison with Silas (and witness to jailer).

Acts 16:16-31

Verse focus (epistle): Doing everything through Christ’s power (Philippians 4:13)

Craft: “Shackles” bead bracelets; Music maker (plates with beans)

Games: “Jail break” (similar to capture the flag); encouragement freeze tag (say kind word to un-freeze)

Music: Continue theme songs; add “Jump jump jump!” And “Hip, hip Hooray” for older groups

Snack: Trail mix type (energy mix)

Extras (“sillies”): Inside out/backwards shirts; jerseys or sports shirts

Day Four: “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” --1 Timothy 4:8

Story: Shipwreck during the end of Paul’s travels; miracles of being protected and then surviving snake bite on the island of Malta.

Acts 27:13-38; 28:1-10

Verse focus (epistle): Encouragement for spiritual training (1 Timothy 4:8-10)

Craft: “Piggy bank” out of coffee can; “Prayer passport” books (like Paul traveled).

Games: **Wet day!** “leaky cup/sponge relay;” “sink, sink, swim!” (like duck, duck goose with sponge)

Music: Continue previous songs; finalize motions for older groups with all songs; younger groups add decorations (hippo masks)

Snack: “Snake eyes” things in round shapes (grapes, cheese balls, etc); gold fish “overboard”

Extras (“sillies”): Mismatch shoes/socks; cleats

Day Five: “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” (Acts 20:24)

Story: Paul on house arrest; providing encouragement to others through letters to the churches.

Verse focus (epistle): 2 Timothy 4:7 (finish the race, keep the faith); Ecclesiastes 9:11 (“race is not to the swift..”); Galatians 2:2; Psalm 147: 10 (pleasure is in those who fear the Lord)

Craft: Making special stationery for letters; writing letters; special pens/pencil “batons.”

Games: “Picto-phone” (like telephone game with drawing); Toss it in! with bean bags

Music: Final practice of all songs and preparation for performance.

Snack: graham cracker “cards” and fruit roll up “letters”; pretzel rod “batons.”

Extras (“sillies”): Wear the color of your group/Olympic ring

Vacation Bible School:
Jesus Loves The Little Children...Running for the Prize!
Wish List for Vacation Bible School

We need YOU! Each year VBS is made possible by generous time, talents, and donations from the congregation of Trinity. If you are interested in making a contribution, here are some items we could use:

Snacks

- Graham crackers
- Sliced fruit (apples, oranges, bananas)
- String cheese/cheese cubes
- Raisins
- Pretzel sticks
- Chex cereal
- Marshmallows (miniature)
- Nilla Wafers
- Marshmallows (full-sized)
- Animal crackers
- Chocolate chips
- Popcorn
- Carrot sticks
- Fruit roll-ups
- Cream cheese
- Ritz crackers
- Granola Bars
- Powdered lemonade
- Styrofoam cups
- Plastic cups (5 oz and 7 oz variety)
- Plates (small and larger sized)
- Napkins
-

Crafts

- Glue
- Large card stock or foam
- Large paper bags
- Decorative material: jewels, puffy paint, googly eyes, pens, etc.
- Stickers
- Tissue paper (colorful)
- Yarn
- Beads
- Coffee cans
- Note books

Vacation Bible School:
Jesus Loves The Little Children...Running for the Prize!
Volunteers Needed

Registration: Have someone manning table with “floater” to help.

Welcome/opening:

Attendance/Counting Offering

Newsletter

Opening/Closing – announcements/Skit

Story Time: need volunteers daily...

Snack

Games/Activities

Crafts

Music

Decorations

Group Leaders (group split???)

These helpers are responsible for taking the VBS kids to the different stations throughout the week.

Split groups as needed based on numbers and ages of participants

Memory Verse Training Camp

Fuel up wisely to Run for the Prize! Vacation Bible School Snack Supplies

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” -1 Cor. 10:31



Monday: Carrots (good for eye health!); “eyes” with Ritz cracker, cream cheese, and raisins

Tuesday: fruits with “protective” skin (apples, oranges, grapes); granola “fuel”

Wednesday: Trail mix type (energy mix): use pretzel sticks, teddy grahams, mini marshmallows, raisins, maybe M&M’s/chocolate chips

Thursday: “Snake eyes:” things in round shapes (grapes, cheese balls, etc.); gold fish “overboard”

Friday: graham cracker “cards” and fruit roll up “letters”; pretzel rod “batons.”

Non-perishable items needed:

- ✓ Ritz crackers (Day One)
- ✓ Pretzel sticks (at least 4-5 bags since they are featured in Day three and Four)
- ✓ Granola bars (we can probably cut in half if they are large; boxes usually contain 6-8 so probably 4-5 boxes at least?) (Day 2)
- ✓ Raisins (2-3 boxes; Day 1 and 3)
- ✓ Fruit roll-ups or fruit by the foot (Day 5) (probably one per 2 children, so similar numbers to the granola bar count)
- ✓ Graham crackers (3-4 boxes)
- ✓ Gold fish (2 large boxes would probably suffice) (Day 4)
- ✓ Cheese puffs (round shape; 1-2 bags or boxes depending on size)
- ✓ Teddy grahams (for trail mix so only need 2-3 boxes probably) (Day 3)
- ✓ Mini marshmallows (trail mix; 1-2 bags) (Day 3)
- ✓ Chocolate chips? (for trail mix)

Perishable items (purchase day or two ahead):

- ✓ Cream cheese (Day 1; maybe 4 x 8 oz. container? Or larger containers)
- ✓ Carrots (in coins, chips, or baby carrots...depends on pricing?) Day 1
- ✓ Fruit: Apples, oranges, grapes (needed for Day 2 and 4)
- ✓ Real cheese slices/cubes? (if not too pricey)

Hands Ready for Service... Vacation Bible School Crafts

Note: This is a basic listing of how to approach craft time. There are always elements subject to adjustment or modification. Some crafts already have modified versions for younger groups, and can be further altered if needed. In addition, many things have a component to be worked on during story time. If time runs out, students can take extra materials to story. If there is time left over after students finish, there will be coloring materials and sheets to work on during remaining time (most things should take the whole period).

Day One: Paul's Sunglasses and gospel-spreading shoelaces Focus word: Salvation

Materials: Large sunglasses (cardboard, from Oriental Trading Company or pre-cut); coloring materials; stickers; foam pieces; glitter glue; shoelaces

Directions: provide each child with a set of “sunglasses” and set out decorating materials. Remind students that in today’s story, Paul lost his eyesight and had to have faith to get it back. We will remember Paul by coloring our own glasses. Allow time for students to decorate.

When finished, provide shoelaces (or yarn/strings) for students to decorate and mold into “laced up” shoelaces.

Day Two: Paul in a Basket paper weave and decoration Focus Word: Protection

Materials: Paper (various colors- construction paper and scrapbook style paper); scissors, paper cups, yarn, baskets (Easter style), hole punch, pipe cleaners

Directions: In today’s story, Paul was rescued and protected from people who wanted to hurt him. Paul’s friends helped him by lowering him down over the city walls in a basket. So today we will be making baskets of our own. *Note: there are several possibilities for this craft. Use judgment to decide which will work best...

Option 1: Paper baskets. Weave paper strips through with various types of construction paper and scrapbooking paper (Sally’s activity idea).

Option 2: Decorating wicker baskets (donated by dollar store). Use streamers, yarn, etc to decorate Easter-style baskets (larger).

Option 3: Paul in a basket (can be done in story time, too). Use hole punch to punch holes on each side of a paper cup. Attach pipe cleaners on each side, and use yarn through the pipe cleaner handle to act as a “Paul pulley.” Cut out small figures and decorate as Paul to place in “baskets.”

Day Three: Paul and Silas “Shackles” and Music Makers
Focus Word: Witnessing, contentment

Materials: Paper plates (two per child), elbow macaroni noodles, coloring materials, stapler/staples, pipe cleaners, beads (various colors), streamers

Directions: Today we hear about Paul and Silas in prison. They did not get upset, but sang songs and continued telling about Jesus. We can celebrate this by making our own bead bracelets (prison “shackles”) and music makers! For the bracelets, have students select colors of pipe cleaner for the base, and put beads in small paper cups to keep them from rolling (colors can correspond to the color of groups, if desired, or just be colors of the student’s choosing). Place the beads on the pipe cleaners and bend to fit the child’s wrist, twisting at the end to secure.

For the music makers, provide each child with two paper plates. Allow some time for students to decorate the outside of the plates. Then help pour elbow macaroni noodles (just a handful in each) onto one of the plates, and staple together. Students may attach additional stickers and streamers, if desired. Then shake it up and make some joyful noise!

*Younger students may need extra help with the stapling/securing process.

Day Four: Paul’s Prayer Passports and Shipwrecked Coin jars
Focus word: Miracles

Materials: “Passport” booklets, foam pieces, glitter puffy paint, coffee cans, wrapping paper/construction paper, tape, markers, modeling clay, google eyes; streamers

Directions: Today’s story features Paul traveling on an important journey to tell others about Christ. When people travel, they must take along a passport to show where they have gone. So today we will make our own passport booklets. As we remember our “travels” in VBS, we can use the booklets to write down lists or prayers that we want to remember for God.

Allow students to select a color of “passport” and give time and materials to decorate. If desired, they can write or draw inside the books when they finish.

For the “banks,” students will decorate coffee cans to serve as “ship banks” for saving up change. Help students attach paper, foam, or other materials to the cans and cut slits in the top for coins (some might be pre-cut for best results).

*Alternate activity (might be better for younger students): provide a small piece of air-drying modeling clay, and help students roll/shape them into “snakes.” Students can attach wiggle eyes, if desired. Time may allow for some coloring, but will probably need to wait until snakes are completely dry.

Day Five: Stationery and Letters; Pencil “batons” to write and use
Focus: Encouragement

Materials: Special construction and stationery style papers, scrapbooking materials/stickers, markers, streamers/string, pencils, envelopes.

Directions: Today we are focusing on how Paul helped his friends and followers by encouraging them. He wrote many letters from prison, and we still read those letters in the Bible today! Receiving cards or mail can be a great way to feel special. So we will be making special cards for people.

Distribute paper and coloring materials for students. Allow time to create their special papers for writing letters (or cards). If time and desire allow, students can select a person to write to and make a letter of encouragement.

When the stationery is finished, give students a pencil for writing. They may choose to decorate with beads, names, etc, or just leave the pencils blank.

Memory Verse Training Camp

Hiding Away in My Heart!

Note to leaders: This station is to focus on portions of the epistles that Paul wrote and what they mean. Each day has a different verse with some element of athleticism in its theme, because Paul used a great deal of sports-like imagery in his letters to churches. The purpose of memory verse training camp is to familiarize students with Bible memorization and recitation. The goal is that at the end of each day, students will be able to recite the verse to their adult guide. There will be various versions (simplifications) for younger students. Students have charts to keep track of the verses they have memorized (as well as other things at VBS) and try to earn stars and prizes.

In addition, this station is also an opportunity to learn about other countries. Paul traveled all around the world telling people about Jesus. In the Olympics, people come from all over the globe to compete in sports games. It is important to recognize that America is just one of many countries! Each of the five Olympic rings represents a different continent that participated in the original Olympics, and each group of VBS participants has a color for one of those rings/country for one of the continents. Each of the five days of VBS, students will “travel” to a different continent during memory verse training, and will learn a bit about the culture, people, and practices of that place.

The set-up each day is fairly simple. Students will come in and be introduced to the day’s verse. The leader(s) will explain what it means and what Paul is saying. Then they will walk through various activities to learn the verse. The activities and tips provided here are merely suggestions, of course. Leaders can feel free to adjust based on what seems to work well with different groups of children.

After practicing the verse a bit, the groups will then be introduced to the day’s continent, and provided with information and pictures about it. Then if time allows, students can make (or take prepared) flashcards for the verse with words or pictures to remind them of it. They can practice reciting the verse and/or wait until later to share it with their leader.

Day One: Salvation of Paul
Verse focus: Run for the prize!

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” -1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Adaptations:

Oldest group may use the verse as it is.

Simplification for middle (1st-2nd graders):

Don't you know that only one person can win a race? In your life, do your best so that you can live for God. All sports stars have to train their bodies just to win points. You train yourself so that you can have eternal life with Jesus!

Youngest groups (TLC)

Famous sports stars train their bodies very hard just to win a trophy. Your job is to train your heart so that you can do great things for God.

Explanation: In these verses, Paul is explaining how being a Christian is sort of like being an athlete. Someone who does sports has to work very hard and practice every day to get their body in shape. Discuss what athletes have to do; if any students participate in sports talk about practices and routines; how do people get in shape? Paul said that these athletes work hard and treat their bodies right just to win a race or get a crown. But as Christians, our job is to live for God. How do we train our spiritual bodies? (Read the Bible, pray, go to church, etc). When we do these things, we are practicing how to serve God and do our best for Him. The trophy we earn is not one we see, though. The “prize” that we run for is eternal life in Heaven!

Activities: Word scramble. Have the words (or phrases) of the verse written on various cards. Shuffle the cards and try to put them back in the proper order to re-create the verse. Then, line up all of the cards in the correct order, and start practicing reciting the verse. Take a card or two at a time away and try to remember the verse with some words missing! Keep doing this until all of the words are gone.

*What's that number? Explain how the reference (1 Corinthians 9:24-25) at the end of the verse is important because it helps us to find where that is in the Bible. In this case, Paul was writing a special letter to people who lived in the city of Corinth. He wrote the letter to help them understand how to be better Christians.

Continent browsing...North America! We will start with a familiar (and close to home) place, North America. However, the United States is not the only part of this continent. Did you know that in Canada, people do some things differently than we do? People who live there have some different phrases and routines than we do. For example, instead of going to the “restroom” or “bathroom,” in Canada you visit the *washroom*.

In North America, we like to be patriotic. We fly our red, white, and blue flags, enjoy our barbecues and celebrations, and sing songs. What kinds of things represent our country? Do you think that every country does things just like this? Every day at Vacation Bible School, we will explore a bit of a different continent, and learn a little of how people do things in other places all around the world!

Pictures: symbols (Statue of Liberty, flag, etc); celebrations and customs; display flag

Day Two: Paul's protection in a Basket

Verse focus: Running the race of Faith

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...” -Hebrews 12:1

Adaptations: (younger, 1st-2nd grade):

Take away any kind of sin or bad habit that might keep you from following God, and do your best to serve him as he asks.

Youngest (pre-K): *Make sure you take away anything bad and evil, and do your best for God.*

Explanation: A “hindrance” means something that makes it hard to do your best. It is like a road block. This verse reminds us that people are watching how we act. We want to show a good witness for God, and we do that by focusing on him instead of the bad things that might be more tempting. Discuss distractions students might encounter (wanting more stuff and toys, playing video games, etc.) and how those things keep us from the important work God wants us to do. We need to focus on God first and foremost so that we can do what will make our lives great. This is how we keep our eyes on the prize!

Activity: One word at a time and motions. This is sort of like how we often sing the “Deep and Wide” or “Row, Row, Row your Boat” song. Demonstrate motions to help children remember the words (taking something away action, shaking the head for evil, giving the best for God). Then start reciting the verse one word at a time, with each student saying a word. Take one word at a time away, starting from the back end and gradually adding back on. Then practice the whole verse again, with the hand motions.

Continent move: South America. Today we move on to our next stop on the round-the-world tour, South America. There are many small countries in this place, and each one has unique cultures and customs of its own. Show a map of South America. Most countries in this continent speak Spanish. Do you know any Spanish words?

If students are not already familiar, teach a few basics: *Hola, Gracias, por favor*, and also *Dios (God)*. Also discuss some favorite South American style foods (show pictures). Maybe a sample?? (chips/candy possibly). If possible, demonstrate a traditional clothing or blanket article.

Also explain that many children in these countries are quite poor. They do not have all the resources we do, so it is important to pray for them and ask God to help them.

Day 3: Paul and Silas Jail house Rock!
Focus verse: Anything is Possible with God

“I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” **-Philippians 4:13**

Adaptations: Both younger groups (1st - 5th) should be able to recite verse as it is.

For the youngest group, it may be adapted: *I can do all things because of Jesus.*

Explanation: This verse is rather simple, and in fact might already be known. The actual meaning is pretty self-explanatory, but some background of surrounding verses might be helpful. Before this verse, Paul described how he had learned how to be “content in every situation.” *Content* means that he was able to feel okay no matter what happened, because he knew God was in control. He knew how to have joy even if he was in jail or sick, because God took care of him. He also knew that Jesus would give him the *strength* and power to do anything he had to do, if he did his best for God.

Activity: Word scramble. Words are written on notecards (or with pictures). Line them up in the correct order to practice. Then mix up the order and practice reciting again.

Then write the verse on white board and begin erasing one word at a time. As each word is erased, continue saying the verse until it can be recited without any words on the board.

“Memory verse echo:” divide the group (boys and girls or just color of shirt, etc.) and practice echoing the verse. Have the first group recite and the second echo, then vary it by whispering, using goofy voices, etc.

Continent Travel: Europe

Show a globe (or map of the world) and explain that we are now going across the ocean to visit the continent of Europe. There are many countries in Europe that we may be familiar with, and they speak different languages and have different customs in each one. For example, in **Spain** people speak Spanish like in South America, but they use a different accent, just like in **England** and **Scotland** people speak English like we do, but use different accents. Europe also has **France**, where people speak French, and **Germany** (German). Each country has its own special things. If possible, show currencies of different places. Show various pictures of different country landscapes, foods, and dress. These countries practice hard and often win lots of medals in the Olympics.

Day 4: Paul's Shipwreck and Snake Bite
Verse Focus: Encouragement for Spiritual Training

“For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” –1 Timothy 4:8

Adaptations: Oldest group can recite the verse as written here...

Middle group (Kinder, first and second):

Having a healthy body is good for now, but being a good Christian will save your life forever.

Youngest:

It is important to have a healthy body, but even more important to love God.

Explanation: In this verse, Paul is talking to one of his friends named Timothy. Timothy was a young pastor who was working to help people become better Christians. Paul explains that it is more important to be “spiritually trained” than physically. Many people think that being a good athlete and working hard to keep your body strong is the best thing. It is important to treat your body right and have healthy habits. But it is more important to have a mind that wants to serve God and do your best for Him. This verse says that there is good in training your body. But the body goes away. Training your soul means working for something that stays forever.

How can we be spiritually trained? One way is by memorizing Bible verses! We can also show God that we are serious about serving Him: we pray, read and study our Bibles, and help others. We can share our faith with friends and help other people understand God more.

Activities: Which word is missing? Have the verse displayed on a large sign or white board. One student at a time sits at the front of the group with his/her back to the verse. The teacher points to a specific word and then leads the group in reading off the verse. When the students come to the pre-appointed word, clap instead of saying it. The volunteer in the chair tries to figure out which word is missing. Then all say the verse together. Repeat this, choosing different children and words.

For younger groups, prompt students with pictures to help them recall parts of the verses. Also offer hand motions: show a muscle for strong body, cross arms over heart and point to the sky for loving God, etc. (use personal discretion).

Continent Travel: Today we move on to visiting the continent of Asia. Just like we saw in South America and Europe, there are several countries that make up Asia and many kinds of people who live in these countries. Sometimes we make mistakes and think that everyone who looks (stereotypically) “Asian” is the same, but they are very different! Their language is very different, too. Show examples of Japanese and Chinese writing, and how even the letters they use are much different from ours. There is also Thailand, Viet Nam, Korea (north and South), and even Russia (tricky because it’s culturally considered European...) that are all part of that continent.

Also discuss how there are many different customs that go along with this continent. Some things people do are different than us, like bowing or even how they eat and show their teeth! Show pictures and maps of different parts of Asia and how diverse it is.

Day 5: Paul's letters of encouragement to churches

Verse Focus: Finish the race strong!

“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” (Acts 20:24)

Adaptations: Oldest group attempts verse as it is (this is a longer one, but doable!)

Middle group:

My physical life is not as important to me as finishing the job God has given me by telling everyone about the gospel and truth of Jesus.

Youngest group:

Keeping my own body is not as important as telling other people about God and living for Him.

Explanation: In today's story, we hear about Paul living in prison in his own house. He was in trouble for telling other people about Jesus, but he never let that stop him! He used every chance he got to tell other people about God and helped many understand Jesus. Paul also wrote many special letters to the churches he worked with to help people live even better lives for God.

In this verse, Paul talks about his own life. Some people wondered how he did so much and if he would rather take care of his own life. But he said that his own life was not the most important thing to him.

Discuss what it means to be selfish and how we can put other people above ourselves by trying to help them first. Paul said that the most important thing for him was “finishing the race.” That meant doing what God had told him to do as well as he could do it. God wanted Paul to help other people and tell them about his love. Paul didn't want to rest or stop until his mission was complete.

Activity: “Not so musical” chairs. Have chairs arranged in a circle, one less than the number of students. Have students walk around the outside of the chair circle, reciting one word of the verse with each step. When they come to the end (last word), each student takes a chair, and the last person without a seat says the word that was landed on. Then try this using words in the middle of the verse and giving students a signal to let them know what the word is.

Allow children to help pick their favorite activities from the week (word scramble, missing words, pictures/motions, etc.) and do one or two to help with the verse. Discuss once again why it is important to memorize scripture and “hide God's word in our hearts” by doing so.

Continent Travels: We will finish off our tour with the largest continent (though it does not have the most people!): Africa. Africa also has many countries, and some of these are the poorest in the world. We often think of large open spaces and wild animals or jungles when we think of Africa, but there are places where people live and work, too. In addition to people, though, there are elephants and zebras and giraffes and deserts...people in Africa have culture and customs of their own, and many types of traditional and modern clothing that they wear. (Show pictures)

Also, if time allows, touch on the fact that there are two other continents in the world. Australia did not compete in the original games, but now has many athletes that come to compete. There is also a place called Antarctica, but it is mostly taken up by ice and penguins!

Going for the Gold!

Vacation Bible School Games

Note: Games are likely to change, according to weather, availability of materials, preference of kids, etc...Feel free to use discretion, as long as kids have fun!

Day 1: Teamwork Help! Races with a twist...

Materials/set up: Set out obstacle course items: pool noodles, buckets, cones (in area outside church—grass area); also (optional) set up chairs and small prizes for post-discussion if desired. Also need **blindfolds** (scarves) and **yarn** (for three-legged race).

Explanation: Explain that we are going to start out our Olympic exploration with some exciting races. But these races have a couple of twists to them...

Blindfolded Obstacle guidance: Set up on the lawn is a small “obstacle course” of things to navigate around/through. Have children pair up and choose one person to be blindfolded. Explain that in today’s story, Paul was blinded by God, and after he was saved his eyesight returned. So we will have to make it through the obstacle course without eyesight! Fortunately, there is a partner to help and guide. Have non-blindfolded partner help students through.

*Variation for older: Partners can only guide with **voice** and not touch (discuss trust)

*Younger variation: Just go through course without blindfold

Goofy Relays: Line students up in two teams (lines on either side; might be tougher with small groups) and remind them of how a relay race works. We will do some relays, but in our races, there will be a few twists. Vary how the relays run...possibilities:

- Three-legged race (tie to partners together)
- Backwards walk/run
- Hopping on one (or two) feet
- Leap frog
- Eyes closed
- Walk like a...duck/frog/rabbit/turtle, etc.

Close with discussion (if desired); chalk/bubbles, etc...

Day 2: Protect me!

Materials: Various things (balls, plastic eggs, toys, etc.); beach balls/balloons; baskets; buckets

Explanation: today we are discussing being protected by God, and how we can be saved. We are saved by God from sin, and protected against bad things by prayer and following God!

Basket case relay: Students will use buckets or baskets to carry items. Various items will be set up on one end of the field, and students form lines on the other end. One at a time, student (with basket) walks to other end and picks up an item. After placing the item in basket, walk back and pass off basket to the next student. Each must take a turn, and not let anything fall out of the basket! If need be, hands can help hold things inside. Discuss challenges.

Protect a neighbor: Students will be assigned a partner and will stand in twos with one in front of the other, facing another pair. Each pair has a balloon/ball. The front person is to toss the ball and try to tag the other back person, while the opposite front person must try to protect his/her partner and deflect the ball. They must then pass it back and try to tag the opposite neighbor. If this is too easy, try two balls at a time. If it is too difficult, take a few steps forward.

Close with discussion of game elements, bubbles/chalk, prizes/verses...

Day 3: Help one another

Materials: Hula hoops, boundary markers, balls

Explanation: Today's story involves a miraculous jail break! We also learn about how to help others and tell them about God. These games will remind us of those things.

Jail break! Divide the field into two parts (use noodles or cones), and divide children into two teams. On each side, a hula hoop is full of balls/items to grab. Distinguish with color or material so it is discernible which team is which. Upon instruction, students must break their items out of "jail" and try to retrieve the opposite side's hula hoop imprisoned things. However, each team can have up to two people guarding the hula hoop. If a jail breaker is tagged, they must stay on that side until another team member unfreezes them. (This may be too complicated for little ones...)

Encouragement Freeze tag: this game is played very much like traditional freeze tag. Begin with one (or two, depending on group size) child to be "it." That person/persons tags other students who are then "frozen." However, to unfreeze, a student must not only tag the neighbor but also say something kind and encouraging ("you're a nice friend." "I like the way you sing." Etc...)

Close with discussion, prizes, etc...

Day 4: A wet recovery...

Materials: Buckets, sponges, cups with holes punched in, hose, cups without holes

Explanation: Since today's story features Paul getting shipwrecked, our games feature a little bit of water fun! We will work together to play them and have fun.

Leaky cup and sponge relay: Again, we will have a relay race with two teams lined up. At one end of the line is a bucket full of water. At the other end, have a cup (somewhat large) with a line drawn on it. The object of the relay is to be the first line to have the cup filled all the way to the line mark. However, there are twists...for the first, fill the sponge and then pass the sponge from person to person, squeezing it out at the end to fill cup. *Variation: for extra wetting, pass the sponge over heads and under legs (gets more drippy).

For the next relay, the water must make its way from one end to the other via a simple cup. However, this cup has holes in it and will leak! So pass fast and fill faster!

Sink, sink, swim! This game is much like "Duck, duck, goose." However, instead of simple tapping of heads, the "it" marching around the circle has a cup of water. Drop a little flick of water on each head as students sit in a circle. As the small drips go, recite "sink, sink..." then when the final selection is reached, student shouts "swim!" and gives student a bigger splash. Student then jumps up and chases tagger around the circle, a la duck, duck goose.

If more time allows (or you prefer) play **Poop deck** (also done in story time):

Play "poop deck." Designate 3-4 areas of the field (or just two for younger group) and explain nautical terms of "forward," "aft," "Port," "Starboard" (Or just simplify for younger). Have students move to various spots of the room when you call which area. Additionally (option), have an action to perform at that area, like "forward deck sweep!" and mime a sweeping action; or "port side overboard!" and jump...

Close with discussion/prizes/chalk and bubbles...

Day 5: Communication Encouragement

Materials: Notecards (3x5 index), bean bags and targets

Explanation: today we talk about Paul writing letters of encouragement to the churches. We'll recall that by playing an interesting game of writing/drawing, and then play an aim and toss with bean bags!

*Note: The first game might be too challenging for youngest groups. Often on Friday (since time is slightly shorter), children wind up selecting and re-visiting their favorite games from the week, or having more of a free play time. This is up to students and leader discretion.

"Picto-phone" this game combines elements of the "telephone" game and "Pictionary." Each student begins with a stack of small paper slips (note cards). Children sit in a circle with their cards and pencils. Have students start with a word or phrase (for greater ease select a topic like "animal," "school supplies,"

etc.). They are to write that word/phrase on the first card and pass the whole stack to the next person. That person is to draw a picture on the next card that represents the word they have just read. Then, the stack moves to the next person, who looks at the drawing and writes a word they think it is displaying. This continues until the stack goes all the way around the circle and gets back to the original person. See how much it changed! Why?

Bean bag challenge: Have students line up with bean bags and toss various bags at targets/target board. While one student tosses, the next in line offers words of encouragement. Continue to encourage and toss as desired...

“Singing for the Prize!”

Musical Overview for VBS

This year’s dual theme of “Jesus Loves the Little Children” (Missions/around the world emphasis) and “Running for the Prize” (athletic/Olympics focus) is represented by two sets of songs. Some of the songs being used and sung, particularly by the younger students, are older and more familiar. We will use songs most kids know that also lend themselves to the theme. These include:

- Jesus Loves the Little Children
- Jesus Loves Me
- The B-I-B-L-E
- This Little Light of Mine
- He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands

We are also going to introduce a few new (most likely) songs that match our Olympic theme. One of our main songs will be “Running for the Prize” by Mary Rice Hopkins. This song discusses focusing on Jesus as the prize and helper to finish the race. All students will learn motions and words to this song. Another tune by Hopkins will be “Hip Hip Hooray,” a song about a hippo and God’s creativity. This song reminds us that God made every individual unique and special. In order to focus on learning the other featured songs, the TLC and preschool groups will not be singing this one, but will make hippo masks to act out motions while the older students sing.

Our other featured artist is Jana Alayra, from whom we are borrowing a couple athletically-inclined titles. One of these is “Jump, Jump, Jump!” about serving God with energy and enthusiasm. The other is “I Will Fight this Fight,” a song taken directly from the words of the Apostle Paul to promise a strong fight and effort in the race of life. Both of these songs are fun and sing-able, but most likely “Jump, Jump, Jump” will be the one used by all groups, because its lyrics are a bit simpler. Students can break from practicing song lyrics to jump into the motions and perhaps play a jumping game.

The break-down is quite flexible, according to how things are going with students and which areas seem to need the most effort. Rotations will be about twenty-five minutes (slightly less when moving to and from stations is factored in), and five groups will rotate through. However, there are six rotations per day, so one rotation will be empty and have a “prep period” each time. A suggested daily plan might look as follows:

- 1.) Students come in and stand near the altar. Warm up bodies and voices with some small arm stretches and vocal exercises (blow bubbles with your mouth, sing a scale, etc.).
- 2.) Start with one or two of the familiar classics, and sing with hand motions
- 3.) Move to Mary Rice Hopkins and introduce/practice one (or both) songs
- 4.) Add Jana Alayra, working up to motions and lyrics
- 5.) Finish with another familiar song
- 6.) If time allows (for younger groups), design decoration/craft to accompany songs

A possible break-down of the daily progression has been woven into the daily overview, and appears somewhat like this:

Day One: Introduce “Running for the Prize” and “Jump, Jump, Jump!” (or “Fight this Fight”); also sing “Jesus Loves Me,” “Jesus Loves the Little Children”

Day Two: Continue songs from the previous day, with students starting to sing along with lyrics and also adding hand motions; continue familiar also.

Day 3: Older students begin Hippo song and second Jana Alayra; all continue other theme songs and familiar tunes; younger students make hippo masks

Day 4: Continue working through theme songs and motions; younger finish decorations

Day 5: Final practice for afternoon program, with all words and motions

Again, this is merely a suggested breakdown and by no means how you *have* to run music! Focus on what works best for you and systems that you have had success with in the past. This just gives an idea of what we are doing and what might work well.

Lace up for...Story time!

Basic Lessons for VBS

Note: Our hero of this year's stories is the apostle Paul, who embodies both the missionary aspect of our theme (since he travelled and taught extensively) and the athletic element (with his many references to sports and the body in his epistles). Each day shares a portion of Paul's life, and we will travel with his faith journey to explore what shaped him. Here is a basic possibility of plans for how to interpret stories, but feel free to use your own rendering/embellishments/details/creativity! If you are stuck I can provide more detail, but if you want to go with it, please feel free!!!

Day 1: Paul's Conversion on the road to Damascus

Found in Acts 9:1-19 *Focus: Salvation

Possible materials: high power flashlight(s), glitter/sequin "scales," costumes (sunglasses); blind folds (scarves or just close eyes)

Opening Activity: "Lead the blind:" Depending on size of the group, can be done inside or outside. Each student has a partner and mini "course" that they must walk through. One person must be "blind" and the other gives directions to lead them through.

Story: Explain that today we are going to learn about a very important person in the history of the church. Part of his story involves not being able to see for a little while, and he was only healed by putting his faith in Jesus. Paul was actually a very evil man who was against Christians and wanted to get rid of them. Before he met Jesus, his name was Saul. One day he was traveling from one city to another on a mission to get rid of Christians, and then out of nowhere... **FLASH!!!** (shine bright lights or flash lights in the room) A huge light shone down from the sky and struck Saul. Immediately he was blinded and couldn't see anything. A voice came out of Heaven and told him it was Jesus, who he was trying to hurt. Saul was guided to the house of a man God had planned, and while he was there another man named Ananias came and told him about Jesus. Ananias touched Saul and weird scales came out of his eyes. Saul could see again! He realized that the way he had been living was wrong and decided to help Christians instead of hurting them. From then on, he chose to go by the name "Paul" (Greek version of Saul...) and he became extremely important!

Activity: Act out the story!

Have students volunteer to play the part of Saul, Ananias, the man on Straight Street, and even the voice of God (donkey, too, if kids really want to get into it!). Narrate the story and have students mime/speak the action with props (glitter "scales," flashlight, costumes, etc.). Discuss again the significance of what is happening.

Extra activity: If there is leftover time, ask extra questions for comprehension; then work on coloring page (if children come after craft time and have leftover craft to wrap up, they can do that)

Day 2: “Paul’s Basket Case Adventure”

Paul escapes Jerusalem

Acts 9:20-31 *Focus: Protection

Materials: Large laundry baskets (2), string, blocks or Legos, beach balls (or balloons), doll, yarn/rope, “Jenga” game

Opening Activity: *Two possibilities. Younger audience might do better to stick with just the basket relay, but might enjoy a simplified version of “protect a neighbor.”

Protect a neighbor: Students will be assigned a partner and will stand in twos with one in front of the other, facing another pair. Each pair has a balloon/ball. The front person is to toss the ball and try to tag the other back person, while the opposite front person must try to protect his/her partner and deflect the ball. They must then pass it back and try to tag the opposite neighbor. If this is too easy, try two balls at a time. If it is too difficult, take a few steps forward.

Basket relay: divide students into two teams (probably best outside, depending on spacing). Students will race two at a time in a relay style, with one child sitting in the laundry basket (or large cardboard box, if that works better) and the other pulling by the rope. When all students on the side have gone, sit down (more or less competitive, depending on age).

Story: After Saul/Paul became a Christian, he wanted to tell other people about his experience. He went back to Jerusalem (where he was from) and tried to explain how God changed his life. However, a lot of the important people in the church were not happy about how he had changed. They were upset and confused because they wanted Paul to help them hurt Christians and thought he was on their side. So in secret, these people decided to get rid of Paul. They wanted to hurt him and drive him out of the city.

But Paul had friends, fortunately, and his friends heard about the plans to hurt Paul. They made a plan of their own to help protect their friend. Back in those days, cities had special walls all around them (like big fences) to keep enemies away. The walls were guarded and Paul knew he wouldn’t be able to leave the city without being caught. So his friends put him in a big basket! They carefully attached the basket to some rope and used it to lower their friend outside of the walls of the city to safety. God used these people to help Paul and protect his life.

Over the wall: After the story, have students construct a “city wall” out of blocks or Legos. Using a basket (or bucket), place the doll inside and have teams take turns using the yarn to lower the basket over the block wall. Try not to knock any over, or the doll will be in danger!

If there is time left over, older students may play “Jenga” and younger may complete coloring page. Also discuss how we can be good friends to others and how God protects us and uses people to protect us.

Day 3: Paul and Silas Jailhouse Rock!
Missionary Journey and adventures
Acts 16:16-31 Focus: witnessing to others

Materials needed: Copy of the VBS CD (or other fun music) and CD player, toy handcuffs (or picture, if none available), picture of fallen buildings/earthquake rubble, musical instruments (shaker eggs, rattles, toy harmonicas, etc), candies (small).

Opening: Musical chairs! Have chairs set up in a circle with small candy on each one. Play “Musical chairs” with CD, stopping after a minute or two of walking. Student who does not get a chair may eat the candy while waiting for others to play (if too sensitive for younger audiences, skip to next game).

“Can I get a witness?” Memory game. Have several items that have to do with today’s story: handcuffs, pictures of earthquake rubble, musical elements, etc. Display these elements for exactly ONE MINUTE, and then have students describe to a partner, as best they can, what they witnessed. Discuss what it means to “witness” (see something), and how it is also a term we use to describe how we tell others about Jesus.

Story: Catch up on the character of Paul and what we have learned about him so far this week (his salvation on the road to Damascus and protection from Jerusalem antagonists by lowering in a basket over the city walls). Paul traveled to many places, with different friends, and told people about God and how important Jesus was.

In one place, Paul was with a friend named Silas. They healed a woman who had been controlled by an evil spirit, and the woman’s owners got very upset because they couldn’t make money off of her anymore. So they arrested Paul and Silas and threw them into jail. But that didn’t discourage them. The two friends chose to give praise to God even from the jail. They sang songs and prayed the whole time. The other people in the jail thought they were very strange.

One night, as they were praying and singing, a huge earthquake shook the jail! The ground rocked and rolled, and the doors of the jail cells popped right open. It was a miracle! But the guard in charge of watching the prisoners didn’t notice at first because he was asleep. When he woke up, he panicked, thinking people would escape. If he had let people escape, he could get killed as punishment. But Paul and Silas came and showed him that everyone was still there, safe and sound. That’s when the guard realized there was something different and special about these guys. He asked them why they could be so joyful, even in prison, and they shared with him all about Jesus. That night the jailer and his whole family became Christians.

Extra activity: Make a joyful noise! Pass out noisemakers and practice dancing/playing around with them. Students will each take one with them for the day (guides can carry). If extra time allows, color activity page and discuss witness...also play “I spy.”

Day 4: Saved from Storms and a Snake

Paul travels and is shipwrecked on Malta, then recovers miraculously from a snake bite

Acts 27:13-38; 28:1-10 *Focus: Miracles

Materials: “Snake” page (coloring), scissors, glue

Opening: Play “poop deck.” Designate 3-4 areas of the room (or just two for younger group) and explain nautical terms of “forward,” “aft,” “Port,” “Starboard” (Or just simplify for younger). Have students move to various spots of the room when you call which area. Additionally (option), have an action to perform at that area, like “forward deck sweep!” and mime a sweeping action; or “port side overboard!” and jump...

*Note: This will also be played during games, so children may have already done it, or it may be the first introduction, depending on timing.

Story: In today’s story, Paul experienced a couple of events that can only be described as *miraculous*. A miracle is something that happens out of the ordinary and is given by God only. Well, Paul was sent by God with a special mission, so he was often guarded and guided in special ways. In the first part of today’s story, Paul was traveling over the sea in a boat to tell people about Jesus. Actually, though, he was traveling as a prisoner, because he wanted to tell people high in control about his faith. He was sailing with some other prisoners and people. As they were sailing, a huge storm came up. Many of the sailors were worried that they wouldn’t make it, and they tried to have the prisoners thrown off the ship! But Paul convinced them that things would be okay, and not one person was lost. It was a risky journey, but through Paul’s prayer and blessing everyone made it. It was a miracle!

Everyone landed on a little island called Malta. While they were setting up camp there, a poisonous snake bit Paul on the hand. The people thought he was going to get sick and die, but God proved again he was with Paul, and he was fine! The people of the island were so shocked that they thought Paul was God and tried to worship him, but Paul used the situation to explain who God really was. After that, he healed a man on the island who was very sick, and other people started bringing sick people to be healed. Through Paul, God did amazing things!

Extra Activity: Make and take a snake! Pass out snake templates (long papers) and demonstrate how to fold the “snakes” (after decorating) and tape to make a souvenir. Discuss elements of the story: how God protected Paul, why his safety was a *miracle*, how God still performs little miracles every day for us.

Older group: discuss how even basic things (body function, biology) can display and demonstrate God’s miraculous work in us.

Day 5: Encouragement of the Mighty Pen

Paul writes epistles to churches

Acts 28:11-38; Epistles

*Focus: encouragement

Materials: Envelopes, note cards, encouraging words (older) or pictures (younger); pictures of various places (supermarket, school, etc.); pictures of hard situations or problems

Opening: Find the encouragement! You may need to begin by explaining what *encouragement* means. Briefly go around the circle and give compliments (this may be more simple or complex depending on age range). Then tell children that scattered around the room are special “mail messages” for them to find. Allow a few minutes to find these (they will be hidden around the room). Each envelope will have a phrase or picture that offers an example of a positive statement (“Jesus Loves You!” “You are special!” etc...). Explain to students that mail has a special part in today’s story.

Story: Start by reviewing what we have covered so far about Paul’s life and adventures. Describe how after his shipwreck journey and snake bite on Malta (yesterday’s story), he arrived in Rome. But he was still a prisoner, because he wanted to tell people about Jesus and not everyone wanted to hear. Instead of making him stay in jail, though, Paul got to be a prisoner in a house, with special guards surrounding and protecting him. This might seem like a tough situation, but Paul made the best of it! He tried to take every opportunity God gave him to share with other people all about Jesus. He told his guard and their family, and everyone he came into contact with.

Another way that Paul got through his prison days was by writing special letters of *encouragement* to his friends. After all of his travels and work to make new churches, he had met many people all over the world, and he wanted to give them messages about how he was doing. Have you ever gotten something in the mail? (Discuss fun cards and letters to receive). Well, Paul sent a lot of letters over his years as a prisoner. Those letters helped and encouraged other people. They also became important books in the Bible, and we still read and learn from them today!

Extra Activity: What would you do? In the envelopes, trade out the encouragement pictures/phrases for various situations. These will be tricky dilemmas or hard times that someone might encounter, like facing a bully, running out of a snack, being in a thunderstorm, etc. Have kids talk about what might be hard in these situations, and how they might be able to work through the hard parts. Explain that it was tough for Paul to be stuck in his house all the time, but he found contentment (joy/peace) because he believed in God and knew God had great plans for him. When we trust God, we can feel okay even when things get rough, because we know God is on our side!

Possible Timing Break down: Example Daily Schedule

Vacation Bible School Daily Schedule

	Crafts	Snack/playground	Story time	Music	Games	Frontier Fun
9:15am	TLA Room 3	TLA Pre-K	Prep time	Pre-K-1 st grade	TLA Room 7	2 nd -5 th grade
9:40am	2 nd -5 th grade	TLA Room 3	TLA Pre-K	Prep time	Pre-K-1 st grade	TLA Room 7
10:05am	TLA Room 7	2 nd -5 th grade	TLA Room 3	TLA Pre-K	Prep time	Pre-K-1 st grade
10:30am	Pre-K-1 st grade	TLA Room 7	2 nd -5 th grade	TLA Room 3	TLA Pre-K	Prep time
10:55am	Prep time	Pre-K-1 st grade	TLA Room 7	2 nd -5 th Grade	TLA Room 3	TLA Pre-K
11:20am	TLA Pre-K	Prep time	Pre-K-1 st	TLA Room 7	2 nd -5 th Grade	TLA Room

This schedule is based on a three-hour time slot, beginning and ending with a fifteen-minute gathering time for students and leaders. It is a possible suggestion, but of course the best thing is always to adjust and alter as suits your group's needs.

Travels with Paul...

VBS Opening

Our theme character and “travel guide” as we journey throughout Vacation Bible School’s Olympic Games this year is the apostle Paul. Each day we will focus on a different story about Paul, learning a bit about his life and journey. We will also focus on verses from some of his epistles. In our opening skits, we’ll see “Paul” try to get in shape and figure out what it means to follow some of these verses...

Monday: What does it mean to be Saved???

Start with introduction by **Leader**: Welcome to Vacation Bible School and to the Olympics! Explain a bit of what we will be doing, why we are here, etc. Explain stars and prizes.

Leader: So I hope you are geared up to have a great time! We will learn and play and...

(Enter *Paul*, huffing and puffing)

Leader: Oh, it’s my friend Paul...hi Paul! Why are you so out of breath???

Paul: Well, I have been hearing about how the Olympics are starting soon, and it made me inspired to get more in shape! I really need to start exercising so that my body is strong and healthy. I really think that with a little work, I could be the next Michael Phelps! What do you think?

Leader: Umm...I think you should keep working. Fortunately, the *next* summer Olympics aren’t for a few years.

Paul: (slightly disappointed). Oh, okay...well, what are you doing?

Leader: Oh, I was just telling the kids here about Vacation Bible School, and how we’re going to have all kinds of fun this week! We’ll play games, do crafts, listen to stories, learn about other places, and talk about what it means to be spiritually healthy!

Paul: Wait...what? Spiritually healthy? What on earth is that? I thought healthy meant being slim and muscular and able to run up and down stairs without being (pant, pant) out of breath!

Leader: Well, it is important to have a good body, yes. Our physical bodies are the temples of God and He has blessed us with them, so it’s important to keep them safe and treat them right. But the Bible says that our outside bodies are not the most important thing. After all, sometimes we get sick and can’t help it. And eventually, our bodies are going to go away. But our *faith* in God will never go away, if we don’t let it. There are ways that we can bulk up our faith muscles just like we exercise our outside bodies! It doesn’t do any good to have the best beach bod ever if you don’t have salvation.

Paul: Salvation?

Leader: Yes, salvation! That means believing in God and trusting Him to save you! That's important beyond running a fast mile or lifting heavy weights. Today we are going to learn about what salvation means.

Paul: (wiping sweat away) Well great...that's a relief. I guess I can flex my Bible-flipping and prayer-kneeling muscles now instead...by the way, do you know where there's a Coke machine?

Leader: Uh...we're having crackers and carrots for snack. You can join us later... (Exit Paul)

Wrap up opening by introducing theme song: "Running for the Prize" and explaining stations. Dismiss students for first stations.

Closing: Include review of what we learned, distribution of stars, preview of tomorrow, and songs.

Day 2: Paul's Protection and Basket Adventure

Begin with recap of yesterday's focus word and verse; why salvation is important; and what we learned about Paul.

Leader: Speaking of Paul, let's see what our friend here has been up to. Paul? Paul?

(From behind in the altar room, banging noises are heard, then **Paul** emerges, arms full of books, sunscreen, sports padding, etc...)

Leader: Paul, what is all of that?

Paul: Well, I was trying to be prepared, you see. Yesterday we talked about salvation and having strong faith, and I was so excited that I wanted to read up more about it. But I also wanted to come to VBS prepared to deal with anything, mind or body. See? I'm ready for injury, weather, and knowledge! Except it is kind of tough to move around with all of this stuff.

Leader: yeah, it looks kind of like a hindrance.

Paul: A what-rance?

Leader: A hindrance. Something that is holding you back. You want to move around and be active and help at VBS, but all of that stuff is going to hold you back. But don't worry! Today at VBS we are going to talk about how to be protected no matter what, even without sunscreen or extra books. We are also going to hear about how Paul was protected in the Bible when people wanted to hurt him. And our memory verse reminds us not to be hindered by any kind of worry, but to let go of everything but faith in God!

Paul: Wow, that sounds great! Trusting in God is sure easier than trying to do everything by myself! (Drops the piles of stuff and runs off).

Leader: Uh, Paul, were you going to pick this up?

Paul: (voice as he runs away) Well, I think God will provide! I have to go get ready!

Wrap up with introduction of daily themes, practice singing “Running for the Prize” and introduce next song (“I will Fight this fight”)

Closing: Discuss protection and story; distribute stars; preview tomorrow and practice song.

Day 3: Witnessing and power in God’s strength

Begin with re-cap of week so far; today’s focus is going to include a really awesome story and some fun crafts! (Also “countries” visited...)

Leader: Well, I wonder how our friend Paul has been doing...I hope he’s not still trying to carry a bunch of heavy stuff...Oh, there you are, Paul!

Paul :(Paul walks on, browsing through various pamphlets for gyms) Oh, how am I going to do it? Maybe I should just give up...

Leader: What are you talking about? I thought things were going better.

Paul: Well, I was doing okay with this spiritual health thing, but it seems like there is always something *more*. I heard somebody say after I get saved I am supposed to tell other people more about Jesus. I don’t know how to do that! And there is just so much to remember and do. So then I decided to try going back to getting my body in shape. But it’s so hard! I think I need a personal trainer. That’s why I’m looking at all these gym brochures. But I don’t know...

Leader: yeah, gyms and trainers can be pretty tough—and expensive. Getting in shape with your body or faith is definitely not easy! I have good news, though.

Paul: You do? Do you have a discount trainer or something? Will YOU coach me?

Leader: Uh, I’m not exactly qualified...the good news is that the Bible tells us we can’t do anything by ourselves. But with God’s help, ANYTHING is possible! Today we’re going to learn a verse that will help remember that. We’re also going to hear an amazing story about how Paul and his friend told other people about Jesus. We can do it, too! It’s not so hard, really...

Paul: Oh, good...I guess I’ll enroll in God’s gym. It’s much cheaper, too!

Day 4: Miracles on Malta

Once again, open with discussion of previous days, Paul's adventures, what we're learning in verses...

Paul enters with a book: Wow...wow...WOW!!! This is amazing!

Leader: What is it, Paul? What's so exciting?

Paul: Well, I was just reading this book of sports hero stories. It's amazing. I mean, the things that have happened, it's like miracles! Like, do you remember when the games were in Atlanta, and the women's gymnastics team pulled off the gold medal on that vault, even when Kerri Strug hurt her ankle? (Mimics the famous one-footed landing pose) That was a miracle, right?

Leader: Well, that was pretty impressive...I guess it did seem like a miracle. But you know; only God can really make miracles happen. Sometimes we think people are responsible for amazing things, but it is important to remember that God is always behind actions, win or lose...even in sports! We can still do our best, but we want to do our best for Him, not just to impress people or show our own glory. We have talked this week about how athletes work hard to win glory, but working hard for God is even better.

Paul: hmm...does that mean that if I work hard for God, he can still work miracles?

Leader: Well, I suppose so...but it's no magic formula. We can pray and do our best, but God still decides what happens.

Paul: (already running off): Great, I'm going to pray extra hard that my donut breakfast will miraculously turn into a rock solid six-pack! Thanks!

Leader: It looks like our friend Paul might still be a little confused...oh well; we are going to talk about some great miracles that happened in the Bible. And we are going to learn about why it's important to have Godly fitness.

Wrap up with explanation, practice of songs (including Hippo and Jump! Jump! Jump!)

Day 5: Encouraging Letters

Start off by welcoming everyone to the final day at Vacation Bible School. Go over what we have learned and done so far; verses and stories. Today is the final day, so we'll wrap it up and bring it all together!

Paul enters with clipboard and pencil, looking a bit frustrated. Hmm...how will this help???

Leader: Hi, Paul, how's it going? What are you up to there?

Paul: Well, I would still like to work on being healthy with my body, and with my faith life. Someone told me it might help to write things down, like how much I exercise or what I pray about. So I am trying to keep a journal of everything. But it's not easy! I have to do it and remember it, and then go to all the trouble of writing it out!

Leader: Yes, it can be tough to keep track of all that...but you know, it is important. It helps to have a record of things, and writing them down is a good way of remembering. Think of all the information about the past we would never have if no one took the time to write it down! And what about letters? Isn't it nice to get things in the mail?

Paul: Yes, I guess so...especially when the mail has coupons or money! Not so much bills...

Leader: Well, did you know that a lot of the Bible we read was originally letters? The apostle Paul wrote letters to the churches and people that he helped, to encourage them to work hard and do their best at things. Encouragement helps others work hard!

Paul: Yeah, well, I don't always feel like writing things...or working hard...or even doing my best.

Leader: Everyone has times when things are rough. Boys and girls, it looks like our friend Paul could use a little encouragement. Can we give him a cheerful round of applause to remind him to do his best? (Gets crowd revved up to encourage Paul).

Paul: Well, thanks, guys! You're great! I have learned so much this week. I sure am glad I came to Vacation Bible School. And you know, even if I'm not the next great Olympian, I guess I can still be a gold medalist for God, right?

Leader: Of course! Everyone can be a winner in God's eyes. Let's practice our songs again to prepare for our final day of VBS.

Practice songs, review final information (remind of closing details, as well).

The Daily Medal Count...

Sample Notes Home...

It is helpful to have newsletters or devotional communication for parents to be aware of what is going on at VBS, especially if you have special events like a water day or crazy hat day. Here are some potential samples of notes and words home...

Welcome to Vacation Bible School! This year we are celebrating all things athletic and international as we participate in a special summer Olympics of our very own. We are also talking about the apostle Paul, who was a global traveler and also used sports analogies a-plenty. Today we learned about Paul's conversion and decision to follow Jesus. **Tomorrow** we will continue with Paul's amazing rescue in a basket over the walls of Jerusalem. This is a great opportunity to discuss trust and following God in all circumstances. Be sure to come ready to learn and grow!

Additional Thoughts to Consider...

Successful programs for Vacation Bible School rely on a lot of things. To direct and implement a quality program, leaders must consider the facilities, audience, timing, volunteers, resources, funds, and so much more. Programs can be longer, shorter, evening, morning...that is all up to you.

The most critical thing to remember, though, is that VBS is a *ministry*. Any program like this exists for the purpose of aiding students and bringing them closer to Christ. The best-planned logistics won't go far if genuine care and concern for the people involved are nonexistent. Make sure your volunteers and leaders engage with the kids. Assign "prayer warriors" to wrap the program in God's love and protection. Above all, do not forget the ultimate purpose and calling of the program. Oh, and make sure to have fun!!! ☺