

VBS 2026 ILLUMINATING THE GOSPEL FOR KIDS CONFERENCE PLAN (45 MINUTES)

Purpose Statement

This 45-minute conference plan is designed to encourage and equip church leaders to deliver an effective gospel presentation and engage in appropriate follow-up conversations.

Needed Resources

- VBS 2026 Visual Pack (005853615)
- VBS 2026 String Flags (005853579)
- VBS 2026 Tablecloths (005853575)
- VBS 2026 Gospel Guide (005853630)
- VBS 2026 Parent Guide (005853631)
- *The Gospel: God's Plan for Me (CSB)* (005567177)
- *Illumination Station Devotional: Shining a Light on Jesus* (005854728)
- VBS 2026 Illumination Station VBS Music for Kids CD (005853488)
- VBS 2026 Administrative Guide (005853431) — Print the following from the digital downloads (redemption instructions at front of guide):
 - “Teaching Others to Share the Gospel”
 - “Response Cards” — Copy 1 per every four conferees; cut as directed.
- VBS 2026 Gospel Wristbands (005853582)
- VBS 2026 Bookmarks (005853583) (1 individual bookmark per conferee)
- *CSB Explorer Bible for Kids* (005836549) — Mark verses that will be read aloud ahead of time with sticky notes.
- *Life as a Christian: A Primer for New Believers* (005835478)
- VBS 2026 Catalog (included in the Directors Kit)
- Giant Inflatable Game Cube (005841133)
- Item 1. “Handout” — Print 1 copy double-sided per conferee.
- Item 2. “Game Cube Inserts” — Print 1 copy of each icon and insert into Giant Inflatable Game Cube.
- Posterboard (or PowerPoint® slide) — Write the following questions and display as a visual prompt as conferees enter:
 - When did you become a Christian?
 - What do you remember about that?
 - Who was there?
 - How old were you?
 - Where did it happen?
- 1 paper plate (any size/color)
- (1) Small tub of playdough
- (1) Chenille stem
- (3) Plain children's T-shirts — Across one shirt, write *Righteous* in green. Across another, write *Sinful* in red. Leave the third shirt blank.
- A small box of Lego (approx. \$10 size)
- Whiteboard marker
- Mauvalus® or painter's tape for hanging posters
- CD player or Bluetooth speaker

Room Setup

Arrange chairs in a semi-circle facing the front of the room. Set a table off to the side and cover with a *VBS 2026 Tablecloth*. Place the resources to be referenced during the session on this table. Decorate the focal area with *VBS 2026 Wall Art* and *VBS 2026 String Flags*.

Teaching Steps

1. Opening (3 minutes)

- Play VBS songs as conferees enter.
- Invite conferees to consider the questions on the posterboard or PowerPoint as they wait for the session to begin:
 - When did you become a Christian?
 - What do you remember about that?
 - Who was there?
 - How old were you?
 - Where did it happen?
- Ask: “How many of you became a Christian when you were 12 or younger? How many of you became a Christian at VBS or another church event?” Lead conferees to raise their hands if applicable to them.
- Remind conferees of the impact of VBS as 25% of baptisms within the SBC each year can be traced to a decision made at VBS.
- Say: “Today we are going to talk about illuminating the gospel for kids. Sometimes we feel anxious about having gospel conversations with kids. Why? Because it’s a big deal! In this session, we’ll talk about how to maximize the opportunities VBS provides to share the gospel—whether in Bible Study, crafts, or while eating a snack!”
- Continue: “We’ll begin with some foundational understandings, move on to sharing the gospel, and then spend most of our time discussing things we need to consider when counseling a child.”
- Lead conferees in prayer.

2. The Starting Spark: Essential Truths Before Sharing (3 minutes)

- Say: “Before we dive into strategy, let’s look at what we know to be true based on what God’s Word says.”
- Read Matthew 18:1-5 from the Bible.
- Say: “Children matter to Jesus. Jesus equated welcoming a child as welcoming him. God desires children to be saved from the punishment for their sin and come into a restored relationship with him. God sent Christ to save sinners—children included.”
- Remind conferees that this is a spiritual endeavor. Say: “We’re going to talk strategy and practical tips today, but we must remember that a child coming to Christ is not dependent on how well we perform, but on the Holy Spirit moving. We need to be faithful, but trust God to do the work!”
- Explain that the most important we can do is to pray. Being prepared is important, being equipped is helpful, but the priority should always be on prayer.

3. Spotlight on the Savior: Guiding Kids to the Good News (15 minutes)

- Explain that the tips shared here about sharing the gospel with kids will be applicable, no matter the presentation method—whether sharing from the stage, in a classroom, or in a 1-on-1 conversation.

- Say: “Here's the main point: pick a method, practice it, and stick with it. I'm not suggesting a monotone reading of a gospel tract (though God can still use that), but become familiar with a way of sharing the gospel so that sharing it becomes natural.”
- Briefly list examples of a gospel presentation such as the Roman Road, Bridge illustration, ABCs, 3 Circles, and The Gospel: God's Plan for Me.
- Say: “Sometimes we might think variety could help us engage different kids, but the reality is choosing one method and sticking with it will be beneficial to both you and the listener. This is especially true with VBS. We need to use the same method as is presented in the leader guides so that kids benefit from the repetition of hearing the same thing, the same way, throughout the entire week.
- Recommend using “The Gospel: God's Plan for Me” since it is utilized within Lifeway's VBS curriculum. Say: “This method of sharing the gospel contains all of the important elements of the gospel (God's holiness, our sinfulness, Jesus as the only way, a call to respond) and it is one that is really easy to remember—for you and a child! Five pictures, ten words! It does not take long for children to learn the framework. They can learn the words and pictures so that, at the right time, as the Holy Spirit moves, they can understand it.”
- Show the paper plates, playdough, chenille stem, t-shirts, Legos, inflatable cube, and whiteboard marker. Explain that each of these items can be used in creative ways while sharing the gospel.
- Say: “You can use this framework with or without visual aids. You can draw out just the pictures, or write just the words, or even just walk through it verbally. Let's shine the spotlight on the Savior and see what this gospel plan says.”
- Walk through each of the five points of The Gospel: God's Plan for Me, beginning with:
 - “God Rules.”
 - Hold up *The Gospel: God's Plan for Me (CSB)* booklet and reference the Scripture that supports each point. Though this booklet provides anywhere from 1–5 verse references per point (which is perfect for a child to work through), encourage conferees to land on one verse per point that they truly know.
 - Open the Bible and read Revelation 4:11: “Our Lord and God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because you have created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.”
 - Say: “God created everything. He is in charge of everything. God has a plan for every area of life—family, how we treat others, church, everything we do! When we follow that plan, the Bible says that life will bring blessing.”
 - Hold up the small box of Legos. Ask conferees to think about building a Lego set. Say: “When we follow the instructions closely, step-by-step, it works as it should! If we are impatient or skip some steps it doesn't always work right. If you just have the bricks and no instruction manual, or even no picture, it won't turn out right.”
 - Relate that to following God's plan. If we follow God's plan, everything will work the way it should. But unfortunately, that's not the way the story unfolded in the Garden of Eden.
 - “We Sinned.”
 - Explain that sin is when we think, say, or do something that goes against God's commands ... or sometimes even when we don't think, say, or do something! It's when we disobey and do the opposite of His design or

- plans. Say: "It's when we think we know best! It's as if we are saying to God, 'I want to do things my way!'"
- Open Bible and read Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
 - Say: "Everyone sins—or disobeys—God. Our sin separates us from God."
 - Ask: "What does that leave us feeling?" Allow responses. Continue: "We feel empty, sad, shame because of our sin. We feel broken! The way we are living our lives does not leave us feeling right! We often try to fix it in our own ways but that still doesn't work. Kids try to escape their brokenness by trying to be better or getting new friends or new hobbies or switching to a new sport. But it just doesn't work. Brokenness feels terrible, but it is good because it helps us see that we need change."
- "God Provided."
 - Point out that the Bible tells us exactly the change we need to make. VBS is all about this—the Good News, the story of God's Son who never departed from God's plan or design. He always obeyed, never once sinned. God worked an amazing miracle where Jesus took on the penalty our sin deserved and paid it for us with His death on the cross.
 - Open Bible and read John 3:16: "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."
 - Say: "God is fair, just, and holy and must punish sin. God sent His Son, Jesus, to take the punishment we deserve. Kids like things to be fair and understand the concept of fairness (especially when someone wrongs them, maybe not so much when they wrong someone else)."
 - Mention that sometimes using the illustration of a judge can be helpful when talking about God having to punish sin, since He is the perfect judge. The judge in a courtroom must discipline/punish the person who has broken the law/done something wrong. He or she has to face the consequence of their actions.
 - "Jesus Gives."
 - Explain that Jesus did not deserve to die. He did not deserve to be punished, but He willingly accepted the punishment from God that you and I deserve for our sins.
 - Say: "But that wasn't the end of the story! Jesus was raised from the dead to prove that He is God's Son and has power over all things. Jesus provides exactly the change that we need."
 - Mention that Romans 5:8 is a great verse to use here, and may be better for a younger audience, but 2 Corinthians 5:21 also provides a great illustration for kids to see."
 - Open Bible and read 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
 - Show the prepared t-shirts. Ask two volunteers to come up and hold a shirt facing the group. Designate one volunteer to represent Christ, holding the shirt of righteousness. Designate another to hold the shirt of sinfulness, representing humanity. Talk about how Jesus willingly swapped shirts—He took on our sinfulness so that God sees repenting Christians as righteous!

- Mention that since this illustration involves symbolism, it may not be understood by younger children. But it can work well with older children who are developmentally capable of abstract thought.
- Thank volunteers and give them a *VBS 2026 Gospel Wristband* as a thank-you for participating.
- Say: “Jesus swapped his righteousness for our punishment. God sees us as if we lived the perfect life Jesus lived. This is the best gift ever!”
- Ask: “When does a gift become yours? When you take it! Kids love gifts, and gifts are awesome because someone else paid for it—in this case, Jesus! So how do we get this gift? We respond.”
- “We Respond.”
 - Open Bible and read Romans 10:9-10: “If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.”
 - Remind conferees that everyone has a choice to make. It is important that a gospel presentation ends with a question such as: “Will you trust Jesus as your Savior and Lord? You can turn from self and sin and turn to Jesus.”
 - Mention that the ABCs of Becoming a Christian is a simple way to help kids know how to respond to the gospel. And Lifeway’s VBS year-after-year includes the ABCs during the Day 3 song. Say: “Kids have the framework of a gospel response even before they realize!”
 - Review the ABCs using the lyrics from the Day 3 song, “Shine:”
 - A — Admit to God that you’re a sinner and repent.
 - B — Believe that Jesus is the Son of God and then
 - C — Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
 - Mention that kids need to know this decision is once for all time. Say: “When Jesus went back up to heaven he promised to send a helper, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us be more like Jesus as we follow Him as our Boss. We will still sin, but over time God will change us to help us follow His plan, the way we always should have. We are a new creation!”
 - Read 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!”
- Encourage conferees to practice sharing the gospel using this 5-step method while driving their car or heading to lunch with a friend.
- Remind them that any method of sharing the gospel should include:
 - God—His holiness
 - Man—rebellion/sin
 - The problem as a result
 - Christ as the solution
 - A call to respond
- Say: “The more we practice, the more comfortable we feel and the more casual the conversation feels when we are having it with a child. And there is absolutely no better conversation to be prepared for than this!”

4. Lamp-in-Hand: Helping Kids Take Their Next Step (20 minutes)

- Explain that the next part of the conversation today is incredibly important. This is likely where most people have the greatest apprehension. Say: “We desperately want kids to

- choose Jesus, but we want it to be a real and authentic decision. There's a weight to this that can bring about doubt or anxiety in us."
- Mention that there are a few things we can do to practice responsible evangelism with children. (That is, presenting the gospel and counseling children in ways that do not manipulate them into making a decision.)
 - Lead conferees to repeat after you: "The environment of counseling matters!"
 - Say: "Find a place that is not distracting to talk, but where you can still be seen. Not a busy hallway. Not in the middle of recreation rotation. Not in a secluded closet."
 - Lead conferees to repeat after you: "Always counsel one-on-one!"
 - Note that one-on-one is easier on the leader, better for the child, and gives proper value to them and the conversation.
 - If multiple children respond to the gospel presentation, plan to have multiple people ready to counsel or schedule a time to talk one-on-one later. Each child deserves to have your full attention.
 - Lead conferees to repeat after you: "Get on the child's level when talking."
 - Avoid symbolism and analogies. Instead, stick to Scripture. It is fully sufficient and does not require "dressing up."
 - Encourage leaders to always use a physical Bible—or even better, the child's!
 - If the child can read, consider having them read a key verse such as John 3:16 or Romans 3:23.
 - Lead conferees to repeat after you: "Use child-friendly language!"
 - Remind conferees that you aren't saying to dumb down the truths of the Bible because children can't understand them but instead are acknowledging the fact that children are very concrete in their thinking. When wrestling with a fairly abstract concept, we don't want to make it any harder.
 - Review the following words and phrases that are often used that may be tricky for kids to understand:
 - "Give your heart to Jesus"
 - Adults Understand: Trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior.
 - Kids Think: Physically take my heart and give it away?
 - "Ask Jesus into your heart"
 - Adults Understand: Repent and become a Christian.
 - Kids Think: A tiny man will live in my heart?
 - "Take Jesus as Savior"
 - Adults Understand: Respond to the gospel.
 - Kids Think: Where are we going?
 - "Washed in the blood of Jesus"
 - Adults Understand: Righteous in God's eyes.
 - Kids Think: Eww! Washed in someone's blood.
 - "Lost"
 - Adults Understand: An unbeliever.
 - Kids Think: Something was taken, is gone, or misplaced.
 - "Be baptized"
 - Adults Understand: Show others you are a disciple.
 - Kids Think: Let the pastor put you under water.
 - "God is Holy"
 - Adults Understand: God is set apart, righteous.
 - Kids Think: God has holes in Him?
 - "We need to be born again"

- Adults Understand: Start a new life in Christ.
 - Kids Think: How do I become a baby?
 - “God has you in the palm of His hand”
 - Adults Understand: God is in control.
 - Kids Think: How big is God's hand? How am I in His hand? I don't see it.
 - “Accepting Christ will change your life—you will have a new one!”
 - Kids Think: I don't want a new life! I like my life!
 - “God will talk to your heart”
 - Kids Wonder: Why can't I hear Him?
- Say: “None of these phrases are wrong or unbiblical—many of them are using language of Scripture. But we must understand that we are talking with children who may not think that way.”
- Remind conferees that it takes practice to not say these things, and they may still catch themselves using these phrases. It's OK. Just be sure to follow up with clarification.
- Mention that sometimes kids may use these phrases, but it doesn't necessarily mean they understand them. It might just mean they heard them from grandma. Leaders should follow up and ask questions to discern understanding such as, “What do you mean by...? Can you tell me more about...?”
- Lead conferees to repeat after you: “Use appropriate questions!”
 - Explain that the goal of questions is to engage in discussion and to discern a child's understanding (and possible misunderstandings).
 - Encourage conferees to avoid using closed questions (that only require yes/no as an answer or limited questions with a defined answer). Don't use questions such as: “Do you want to go to heaven? Do you believe in Jesus? Are you a sinner?”
 - SAY: “These aren't bad questions, but if that is all you are using, you could ‘lead a child to Christ’ without ever really understanding if they're ready!”
 - Suggest that if leaders catch themselves using one of those kinds of questions, they should be sure to follow up with a “Can you tell me more about...?” or “Why do you think that...?”
 - Mention that open-ended questions are best because they spark conversation and reveal a child's thoughts. These are questions such as “Why did you come forward today?” or, if using a response card, “Why did you check this box?” Other good questions include: “When did you start thinking about this?” or “How long have you been wondering...?”
 - Open-ended questions also help leaders understand a child's intent.
 - Genuine—Ready to proceed.
 - Not genuine—“Because Sally wanted to” or “Because Mr. Bill brings donuts to class the week after somebody made a decision. I want donuts.”
 - Encourage leaders to use open-ended questions to discern understanding about what it means to become a Christian. These may include:
 - “Who is Jesus? What did He do for us? Why did Jesus choose to do that? What is a Christian? How does someone become a Christian? What is sin? Can you tell me about a time you sinned? How did that make you feel? (Seeing remorse/conviction, with a solid understanding of the consequences in relation to God, is often a good green light to move forward.)

- Mention that asking questions like, “Can you tell me more about that?” or “What do you mean by?” is helping children express what they know in their own words.
- Say: “The more we let the child talk, the more clearly we see where they are—and that helps us avoid creating false decisions.”
- Lead conferees to repeat after you: “Let the child lead!”
 - Explain that the child should dictate the pace, direction, and duration of the conversation. Don't jump deeper than they are ready to go (their answers to your questions will give you a good idea of this).
 - Say: “This is hard. We want the child to choose Jesus, but we know kids can be eager to please and so we want to make sure they are making a decision not out of fear or to make us happy.”
 - Acknowledge that a child may lose interest—especially if he is a boy. That is OK. Each conversation brings him one step closer.
 - Caution that it may be time to stop the conversation if:
 - The child is extremely emotional (that can be a good sign, or a bad sign).
 - The child senses pressure. (Ex: "Mom wants me to do this.")
 - The child changes subject.
 - The child getting squirmy—they're done sitting and talking.
 - The child is demonstrating head knowledge or familiarity with some concepts but doesn't seem to have grasped a core element of the gospel such as:
 - Sin—other people are sinners but not them, not understanding consequences of sin.
 - Jesus—God, sinless, the only way.
 - The child has more questions about baptism than salvation. (There is often confusion between baptism, salvation, and joining the church.)
- Lead conferees to repeat after you: “Possible decisions!”
 - Mention that a child should always have the opportunity to respond to the gospel individually. Group appeals can lead to peer pressure to respond. Utilizing an individual method such as a response card is a good idea.
 - Mention that the Administrative Guide and the VBS website as well as many of the elementary age-group leader packs include response cards.
 - Have copies of the “Response Card” printable from the Administrative Guide (cut along the dashed lines) available for conferees to take if desired.
 - Say: “Here's why this can be helpful. Everyone is responding to the gospel in some way, and when we can put everyone's response into one of four categories, it makes it easier to counsel them effectively and responsibly.”
 - Response 1: “I have already trusted Jesus as my Savior and Lord.”
 - A child may need affirmation/assurance of a previous decision or may have questions or doubts. Encourage them, answer their questions, pray for them!
 - Response 2: “I'm ready right now! Please help me pray to repent of my sin and trust Jesus as my Savior and Lord.” If a child seems ready to respond to the gospel after one-on-one counseling, guide them to pray, in their own words, about these four things:
 - Their sinfulness
 - Their need for salvation, through Jesus alone
 - Their request for God to forgive their sins
 - Their thankfulness for God's grace!”

- Response 3: “I have some questions about what trusting Jesus to be my Savior and Lord means.” Awesome! This child has taken steps towards God! Pray for him/her!
- Response 4: “I’m not ready to trust Jesus as my Savior and Lord today.” If a child is not ready yet and doesn’t want to proceed and you have the appropriate opportunity—pray for her! Every conversation should be a positive experience for the child and end with prayer.
- Lead conferees to repeat after you: “Follow Up!”
 - Explain that it is important after counseling a child to always follow up with that child’s family. Let them know you had a conversation. Encourage them to ask the child about it. Send a "praying for you as you guys talk more" text. Ask again later about how it went when they talked with their child.
 - Explain that it’s also important to follow up with the child. If they chose you to talk to there was a reason for it. Keep the door open for next time they have questions!

5. Closing (4 minutes)

- Highlight other helpful resources from Lifeway:
 - *VBS 2026 Administrative Guide* printables—“Teaching Others to Share the Gospel” and “Response Cards”
 - *VBS 2026 Gospel Wristbands*
 - *VBS 2026 Bookmarks*
 - *The Gospel: God’s Plan for Me (CSB)*
 - *VBS 2026 Gospel Guide*
 - *Illumination Station Devotional: Shining a Light on Jesus*
 - *Life as a Christian: A Primer for New Believers*
 - “Resources for New Believers” on pages 70–71 of the VBS 2026 catalog
- Remind conferees that kids matter to Jesus. He longs for them to return to Him. We need to be faithful, and trust God to do the work. The best thing we can do is go to the Lord in prayer.
- Guide conferees to find a partner and pray for the Lord to equip them with confidence to share the gospel with kids and give wisdom as they counsel.
- Hand out *VBS 2026 Bookmarks* as conferees leave, highlighting “The Gospel: God’s Plan for Us” located on the back.

ILLUMINATING THE GOSPEL FOR KIDS

THE STARTING SPARK: ESSENTIAL TRUTHS BEFORE SHARING

SPOTLIGHT ON THE SAVIOR: GUIDING KIDS TO THE GOOD NEWS

Picture	Words	Scripture Reference(s)

LAMP-IN-HAND: HELPING KIDS TAKE THEIR NEXT STEP

1. _____ of counseling

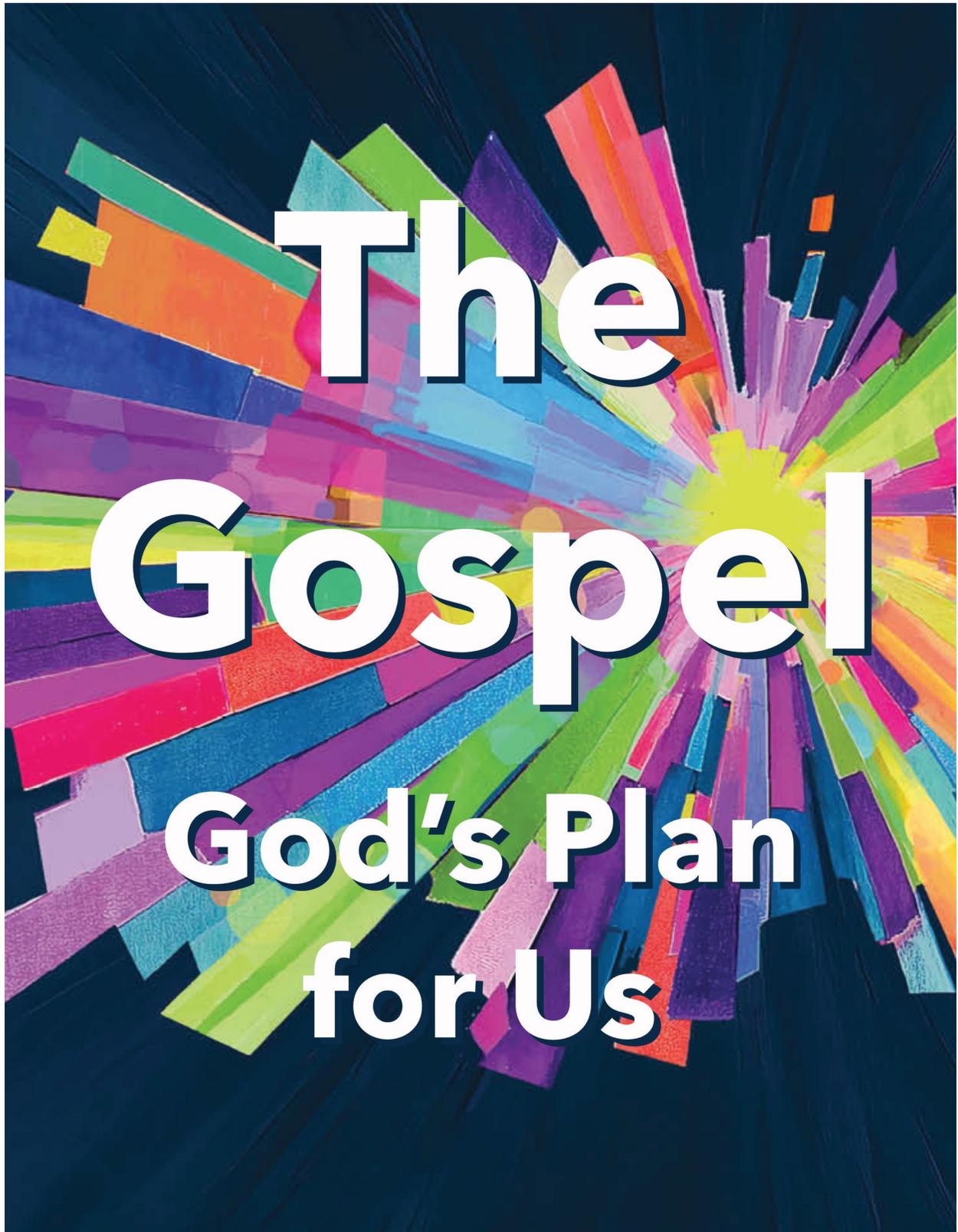
2. Use child-friendly _____

3. Use appropriate _____

4. Let the _____ lead

5. Possible _____

6. _____ up



Item 2. Gospel Icons — Print 1 of each icon and slide into Giant Inflatable Game Cube pockets.



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