

# The Devotionals of Cactusville

## Dear Director...

**You must be busy planning, recruiting, shopping, and hot gluing!** You probably have notebooks full of to-do lists and a backseat full of Western decorations!

**In the hustle and bustle of planning for the children to have an exciting time in Cactusville,** it's important you take a quiet moment to focus on your own spiritual preparation and the spiritual preparation of your team.

**The following pages are thoughts for you to ponder** that go hand-in-hand with the Cactusville theme for each day. Prepare your heart to hear God's word as you prepare your children's hearts to hear God's call.

***In order to maximize the effectiveness of these devotionals, we recommend three options...***

- 1 Use the devotionals for staff worship during your training events
- 2 Distribute the devotionals to your staff for use at home during the week of your VBX program
- 3 Use the devotionals for staff worship during your Cactusville VBX program



DEVOTIONAL 1

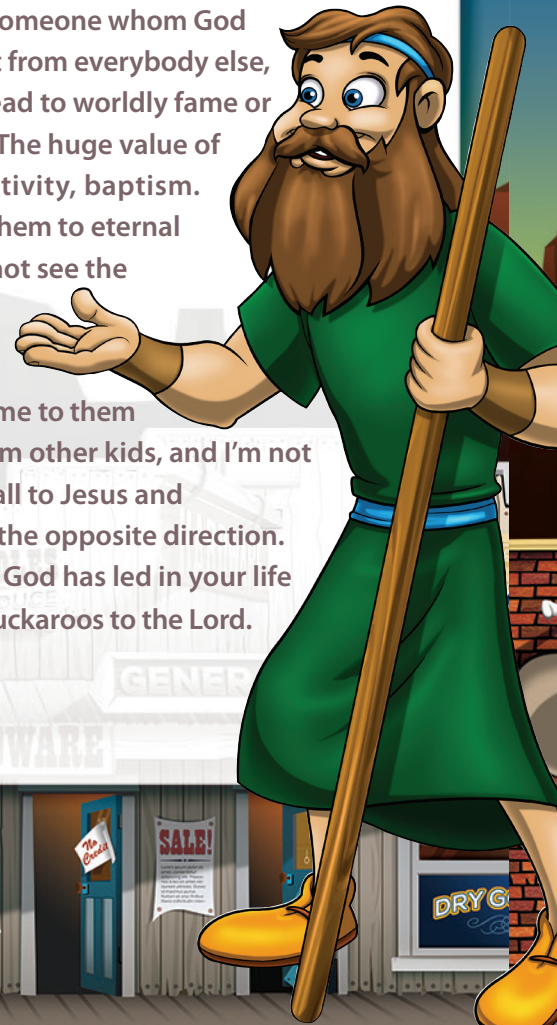
# Be Ready to Lead!

**W**elcome to Cactusville VBX! This week we will help boys and girls become Li'l Cowpokes and Buckaroos who hear the call to follow Jesus. Each of the Bible stories for this week has been carefully chosen to teach a key element of God's call. They will be easily remembered because they are told while the children gather around a campfire in the desert — a setting sure to make a lasting impression.

**Cactusville VBX helps you teach about ways God calls us** without having to use abstract ideas that kids won't retain. The people of the Bible were a lot like us, ordinary people facing challenges and struggles in their lives. Telling their stories is the best way to show kids that God called them, just like He calls us today. Teach them how to accept God's call and to act on it. You are possibly making the first call to follow Jesus that some of the children have ever heard.

**In today's session, you are starting out with a challenging idea:** being different for God's sake. John the Baptist was perhaps the ultimate example of someone whom God asked to take on a unique role. One that would make him stand out from everybody else, and not necessarily in a flattering way. It wasn't a call that would lead to worldly fame or fortune. Rather, it was a call to serve God with no gain for himself. The huge value of his contribution can be seen in his message and his ministry activity, baptism. He drew people's attention to the kingdom of heaven and pointed them to eternal life in Jesus. These were people who had lost their way and could not see the kingdom anymore. John saved their lives by answering God's call to help them.

**The lesson for today prepares kids for a feeling** that will come to them sometime in their lives as they get to know God. "I am different from other kids, and I'm not sure I like it." It begins the process of preparing them to give their all to Jesus and dedicate themselves to His call, even when the world is rushing in the opposite direction. Take some time to review your own sense of being called and how God has led in your life to this point. Then you'll be ready to lead some Li'l Cowpokes and Buckaroos to the Lord.



DEVOTIONAL 2

# You're Going to be Okay... Really!

**O**n Day Two at Cactusville VBX, we try to help children understand what it means to be faithful. For the very youngest this may be an idea they may understand very well, but they can at least comprehend the idea of taking care of something faithfully. As they sit around the campfire, we want them to know that they can trust God's leading, and that doing so is what makes them faithful.

**Abraham lived a life of rich faith.** Like John the Baptist, he did not shy away from God's call to be different. He accepted divine instructions without question at every stage of his life. If he had stayed in his hometown, Abraham would probably have become rich and powerful. He was a natural leader and showed great ranching and business talent; he could have used those talents for his own gratification. Instead, he agreed to God's command to go into the unknown. He became a faithful nomad, living in a big tent and growing his business in the wilderness.

**We are told the awkward nature of Abraham's stumbles** in great detail. These are an important part of his faith journey also. Somehow he couldn't fathom that God would be faithful in the matter of protecting his beautiful wife, so he fell for the temptation to lie about her twice—near the beginning of his journey and near the end of it. Also, he ended up producing an heir the wrong way the first time around, before finding out how to do it the faithful way.

**Of course, in general Abraham was a man of worthy character.** He treated Lot kindly in spite of Lot's selfishness. He was willing to rescue Lot and the entire city he lived in when they ran into trouble. Perhaps his compassionate character is most evident in his request to God that the city of Sodom be spared if just a few righteous people were found living in it.

**In VBX we won't be telling the story of Abraham almost taking the life** of his son. Imagine, though, what a demanding career of faith-building Abraham must have gone through to reach the point where he would obey this command without question. We want our kids to understand that wearing a bandana and being guided by others they trust is the perfect illustration of how we go through life faithfully with God. He takes us where we can't see or know, and we come out just fine.



DEVOTIONAL 3

# The Nature of True Love

**F**orgiveness is a beautiful concept, but it does not come naturally to us. Today in Cactusville, we set before the children the example of Joseph, who was able to forgive several huge misdeeds with the help of the Holy Spirit and his personal faith and obedience.

We tend to focus on the reunion of Joseph and his brothers and his forgiving spirit toward their betrayed. However we would do well to review the other times Joseph suffered unjust treatment when he was just a teenager. After the indignity of being sold as a slave, he was falsely accused of sexual harassment. Later he was cast as untrustworthy and unfaithful. How do you react when your reputation is ruined by someone who gives a false impression to others that you are untrustworthy? Isn't that the kind of situation that eats away at your peace of mind and almost demands you speak up loudly in your own defense?

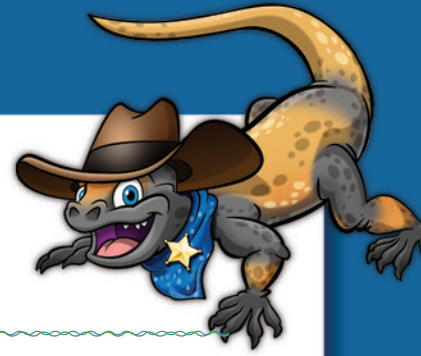
Joseph accepted this severe setback in silence. We don't know his thoughts, but his behavior in prison strongly suggests that he went into incarceration with his faith in the same state as when he managed Potiphar's household. Imagine being so prepared to forgive that you make a godly impression on a prison warden as soon as you arrive!

Prison would test anyone's patience, but Joseph continued faithfully serving while he waited for the king's cupbearer to speak in his favor. We don't get the sense that he thought, "Oh well, God's favor has gone away and everyone has forgotten me." Rather, we see that Joseph held his peace and did not waver in his commitment to God.

This young man's unwavering faith is all the more remarkable in the face of his childhood. He himself thought he was a special child, marked by God for great things. He might have been justifiably confused and angry that instead of special treatment, he was on the receiving end of a series of abuses.

Wouldn't it be awfully tempting to heap retribution on his brothers? They were completely at his mercy. We could call this poetic justice. Instead, Joseph set a high bar for us. He displayed Christ-like forgiveness in the face of awful mistreatment from his own brothers. What was the result? Joseph completed the conversion of his brothers. As they received forgiveness, they saw the nature of true love.





DEVOTIONAL 4

# Simply Serve

**T**oday in Cactusville, we will introduce kids to the idea of serving, even when the call to service is challenging. We're not talking about some community service hours, important as they are, but a whole life of devotion to God's purposes.

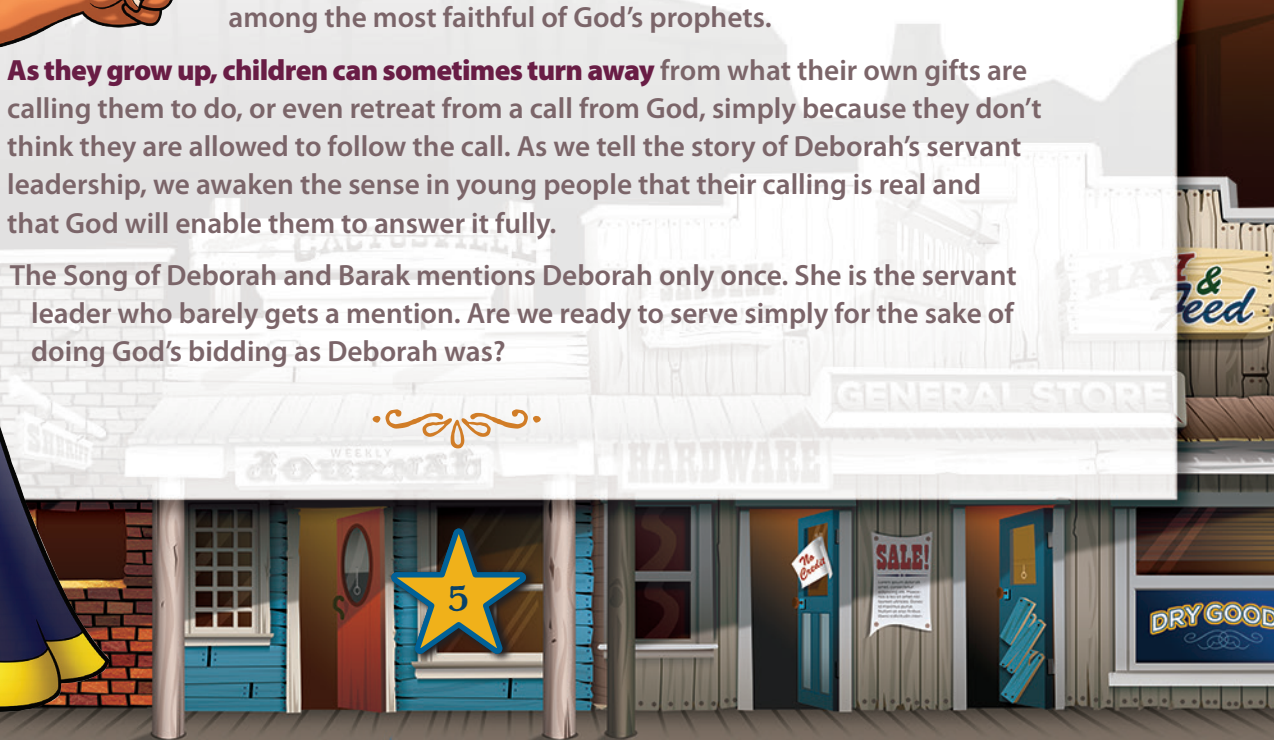
**Deborah is a member of a select group**, not because she was a woman but because she was a faithful leader. She had all the hallmarks of righteous prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah: answering God's call without question, untainted integrity; faithfully speaking messages from God; praising God for His works. She was not self-appointed, and she seems to have been both humble and strong. And she was a wise woman. The "sons of Israel came up to her for judgment" (Judges 4:5).

**The prophetess had to deal with a Gideon-like figure** in Barak. God had given her a message calling him to assemble an army, as though Israel did not have a standing army. And Barak was not yet a military commander. We may be tempted to pass judgment on him when he said to Deborah, "I'm not going to any battle without you going along with us." But Barak saw her as the nation's connection to God and therefore to their success.

**One underlying message of Deborah's story for kids** today is that God does not play gender favorites when He calls people to serve. Judges 4:4 does give a hint of the patriarchal culture of those days, saying that Deborah was a prophetess, the "wife of Lappidoth." Like women who face challenges today, Deborah functioned as a leader in a society that assumed male leadership. (The Bible does not establish Moses' social standing by describing him as "the husband of Zipporah.") But her record is so outstanding, she shines among the most faithful of God's prophets.

**As they grow up, children can sometimes turn away** from what their own gifts are calling them to do, or even retreat from a call from God, simply because they don't think they are allowed to follow the call. As we tell the story of Deborah's servant leadership, we awaken the sense in young people that their calling is real and that God will enable them to answer it fully.

The Song of Deborah and Barak mentions Deborah only once. She is the servant leader who barely gets a mention. Are we ready to serve simply for the sake of doing God's bidding as Deborah was?



DEVOTIONAL 5

# Free Gift

**A**round the Cactusville campfire during the final session, we have the privilege of sharing the good news about Jesus. The Bible characters we have presented this week provide us with worthy examples to follow, but Jesus is the essence of pure goodness, the perfect example, in whom there is no taint or sin. However He thinks, whatever He says and does, we should do likewise.

**We associate some phrases with Jesus...** "Jesus wept"; "Jesus healed"; "Jesus said."

Today we focus on "Jesus gave." John 3:16 is a good place to start. It says that God gave Jesus. How much did it cost God to rescue us when we were doomed to be lost forever? It cost the Father His Son's life. How much did we have to pay for the rescue? Nothing. Jesus gave His life to us for free, as a gift.

**The list of gifts God has given us keeps growing and growing.** He creates a new heaven and a new earth. The cost to us: nothing. He fills it with everything we need—home, food, purpose, life itself. The cost to us: nothing. He gives us His love. The cost to us: nothing. He rids the universe of sin forever. The cost to us: nothing. He gives us a perfect environment that operates according to His perfect commandments. The cost to us: nothing. He gives us eternal life. The cost to us: nothing.

**One might argue that if God can create anything He likes** just by saying a word, and He can put life into anything He wishes, then He is not really paying a price for what He gives us. That might have been one angle the devil took when he was trying to convince angels to side with him. But then God gave His Son to die, which cost Him more than anyone else could ever pay. No one can ever top a gift of such magnitude. And who receives that gift? We do.

**How unfortunate it is that we live in a world** where God's amazing generosity is almost completely ignored. How important it is, then, that every day we focus on what Jesus has given us and share this truth with our children. As we share this amazing gift, we are actually becoming part of the gift. Rejoice in the privilege we have of being gift-bearers to these sons and daughters of God.

