



A Perplexing Puzzle

Bible Point: Jesus' power helps us do hard things.
(*Trust Jesus!*)

Bible Story: Ananias helps Saul. (Acts 9:1-19)

Bible Verse: "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)

If you have a large staff, it may help to sort the toothpicks into stacks of 12 ahead of time, and secure each stack with a rubber band.

Draw the "before" and "after" toothpick configurations on the board or on a large sheet of paper.

Say: **Welcome to Rocky Railway! Each day before we embark on our journey, we'll take a few minutes to focus on what kids will be exploring. This time will help us prepare our hearts to make every minute count as we help kids grow in their friendship with Jesus.**

Today I have a perplexing puzzle for you to power through!

Hand each person 12 toothpicks. Reveal the two toothpick configurations.

Say: **First, set out your toothpicks like this.** Point to the first design.

Pause while everyone sets out their toothpicks to match the first design. When everyone is ready, continue.

Say: **Your challenge is to change the layout to *this* configuration (point to the second design), by moving only three toothpicks.**

Say: **You can't break or modify a toothpick, and you can't put two toothpicks side by side and count that as one side. All squares have to be the same size. You have one minute. Go!**

Play the Sing & Play Express Music CD for one minute while people work on a solution. If anyone solves the puzzle, it's okay if they help others, but they don't have to. And it's okay if no one gets it! After a minute, turn off the music and sound your Train Whistle. Celebrate any successes. Ask:

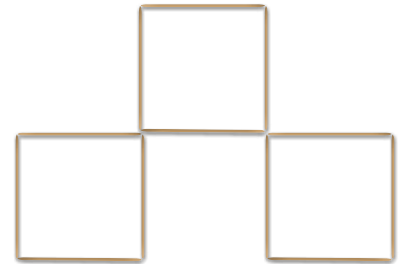
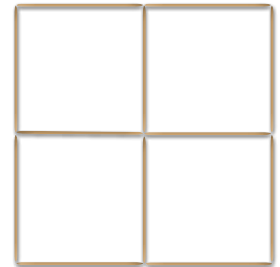
? **How did you feel during this challenge?**

? **Let's think about the kids coming to our VBS. What puzzling or challenging things are they facing every day?**

SUPPLIES:

- ▶ toothpicks (12 per person)
- ▶ large sheet of paper and marker, or whiteboard and dry-erase marker
- ▶ Bible
- ▶ Train Whistle*
- ▶ Sing & Play Express Music CD*
- ▶ CD player

*available from Group Publishing or your Group VBS supplier



Say: Kids today are told they can do anything, be anything. Parents, teachers, and society tell them that if they just try harder, work harder, dream bigger, they can achieve anything. But all that pressure isn't creating more successful kids; it's creating more stressed kids. Kids who feel like *they* have to have all the answers. Let's see what Scripture tells us.

Read aloud Philippians 4:13. Ask:

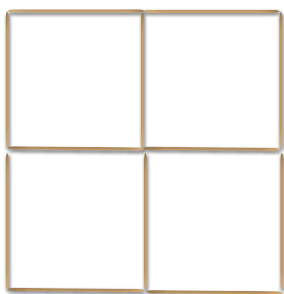
? How is God's message different from the message kids get from society?

Say: **JESUS' POWER HELPS US DO HARD THINGS!** Today we'll help kids discover that the freeing, no-stress solution is Jesus' power—not ours!

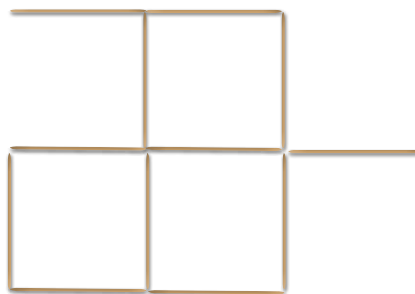
Lead staff in praying for kids. Ask God to help your VBS team listen for the hard things kids are facing and to encourage them that Jesus' power—not ours—can get them through.

If staff are going crazy needing the solution to the puzzle, guide them in the following steps:

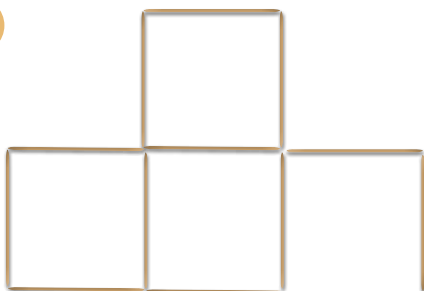
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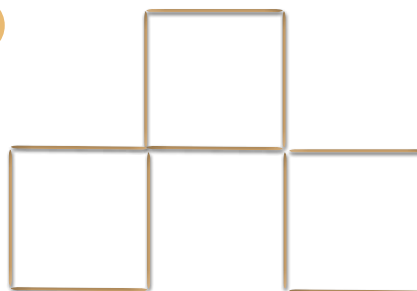
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Hope Full

Bible Point: Jesus' power gives us hope. (*Trust Jesus!*)

Bible Story: Paul encourages others in a storm and shipwreck. (Acts 27)

Bible Verse: "So be strong and courageous, all you who put your hope in the Lord!" (Psalm 31:24)

Say: **Welcome back to another full-steam-ahead day at Rocky Railway. I'm glad you're here! In fact, I'm so glad that I thought we'd have a celebration!**

Toss out some uninflated balloons, turn on the Sing & Play Express Music CD, and have everyone toss the uninflated balloons around in celebration. After a minute, turn off the music and sound your Train Whistle. Ask:

? What words describe that celebration?

? What things were missing?

Say: **Our balloons were definitely missing something!** Hand each person a fresh, uninflated balloon. **Today we're exploring how JESUS' POWER GIVES US HOPE. (*Trust Jesus!*) Think about the things that give you hope in life. It may be a God Sighting or just something beautiful and joyful. Share something that brings you hope, such as a room full of amazing volunteers or the sight of kids praying.**

Say: **Turn to a friend nearby and take turns sharing things that give you hope. Each time you share, add a breath of air to your balloon.**

Play the Sing & Play Express Music CD while partners share and blow up their balloons. After one song, let everyone tie off their balloons. Ask:

? How did your balloon change?

? How does hope change us?

Say: **Think about the kids who are coming to VBS today. Some of them are in hopeless situations at home. Some of them hear the news and think our future is hopeless. Some of them are watching a loved one die. Hold up an uninflated balloon. Life can seem flat and hopeless. But here's what God promises:**

SUPPLIES:

- ▶ balloons (1 per person, plus a few extra)
- ▶ permanent markers (1 per person)
- ▶ Bible
- ▶ Train Whistle*
- ▶ Sing & Play Express Music CD*
- ▶ CD player

*available from Group Publishing or your Group VBS supplier

Read aloud Psalm 31:24. Ask:

 **What does this verse tell you about hope?**

Say: Hope from Jesus is solid and life-changing! It's empowering! Let's think of the kids at our VBS. On your balloon, write the names of as many of those kids as you can think of. If you're a Crew Leader, be sure to write the names of kids in your Crew! Play the Sing & Play Express Music for one minute while people write. Then turn off the music and sound your Train Whistle.

Say: Let's gently move these balloons around overhead, as we pray for the names we touch. When you touch a balloon, whisper the names you see on it. Allow about a minute for the "balloon-passing prayer." Then ask people to each hold the balloon that's closest to them.

Pray: God, you know each child by name—even the ones not written. You know exactly where they need hope today. Help us be your hands and your voice, speaking your words of hope to each child. In Jesus' name, amen.



Would You Rather...?

Bible Point: Jesus' power helps us be bold. (*Trust Jesus!*)

Bible Story: Peter and John teach about Jesus.
(Acts 3:1–4:31)

Key Verse: "He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless." (Isaiah 40:29)

SUPPLIES:

- ▶ Bible
- ▶ Sing & Play Express Music CD*
- ▶ CD player

*available from Group Publishing
or your Group VBS supplier

Gather everyone in the center of the room.

Say: **Today we'll be exploring how JESUS' POWER HELPS US BE BOLD. (*Trust Jesus!*) Let's get to know each other a little better as we see how bold you are.**

As you ask the following questions, motion to one side of the room for one of the answers, and the opposite side for the other answer. Have staff members move to the side of the room that matches their answer.

- ❓ **Would you rather...skydive or scuba dive?**
- ❓ **Would you rather...speak in front of the Senate or dance in the Superbowl?**
- ❓ **Would you rather...eat spicy jalapeño peppers or slimy snails?**
- ❓ **Would you rather...run for president or run a marathon?**
- ❓ **Would you rather...preach a sermon or pray in public?**

After asking each question, when participants have moved, have them form trios and share why they answered the way they did. When you've asked all the questions, gather everyone back in the middle of the room.

Say: **Some things take boldness. Ask:**

- ❓ **Call out words or images that come to mind when you hear the word *bold*.**
- ❓ **What keeps kids from being [repeat some of the words people shared]?**
- ❓ **How about when it comes to being bold in their faith? Why is it hard for adults *and* kids?**

Say: As we explore how **JESUS' POWER HELPS US BE BOLD** (*Trust Jesus!*), we have some encouragement from Scripture. Read aloud Isaiah 40:29. Ask:

? How might this promise encourage kids to step out with a bold faith?

Say: It can be hard for all of us to be bold Christians. Let's lift up our kids, asking God to grow *his* courage in their lives.

Point to different corners of the room, and identify a place or situation where kids can show boldness. Have one corner represent boldness at school, another corner boldness with friends, another corner boldness with family members, and the last corner boldness in trusting God.

Quietly play "The Old Rugged Cross" from the Sing & Play Express Music CD, and allow staff members to move to the different corners at their own pace. Allow about five minutes for prayer.



Life Forever

Bible Point: Jesus' power lets us live forever. (*Trust Jesus!*)

Bible Story: Jesus' death and resurrection.
(Matthew 26:17–28:10)

Bible Verse: “The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you.” (Romans 8:11)

For today's devotion, you need to have tables where small groups can gather.

Say: **Today we get the joy of sharing the best news ever with kids—that God loves them enough to send his Son, Jesus, to pay for our wrongdoings! Wow! This is a great day! That makes me wonder something.** Ask:

? Who first told you about Jesus?

Briefly share your own faith story. Then have staff members each turn to a partner and take about a minute each to share their faith stories. After two minutes, sound the Train Whistle.

Say: **One of the most exciting things about life with Jesus is that it doesn't end. Let's see what that's like. Gather around a table with about four other people.**

While staff members are forming groups, hand each group two clear glasses (one empty and one with water in it), a sticky note, and a pen.

Say: **First, figure out whose birthday is closest to today.** Pause. **Have that person set the cup on top of the sticky note and trace around the bottom of the cup.** Pause.

Say: **Now have each person write his or her name inside that circle.** Pause. **Next, set the empty cup on top of the circle.** Pause. Hold up a full cup of water. **Let's imagine the empty cup is like life. It's full of amazing experiences! Pass the cup of water around your group. Take turns pouring a little water into the empty cup. As you do, say something that happens to most people in life. For example, you have a birthday. You graduate from high school. You get married. Each time someone shares, he or she will add a little water to the empty cup. Got it?**

SUPPLIES:

- ▶ tables and chairs
- ▶ clear plastic cups (2 for every group of about 5)
- ▶ water (enough to fill half of the cups)
- ▶ pens (1 for every 5 people)
- ▶ sticky notes (1 for every 5 people)
- ▶ Bible
- ▶ Train Whistle*

*available from Group Publishing or your Group VBS supplier

TIP

Plastic cups will work for this activity, but taller glasses or jars work best.

Pause while groups share and pour water. Be sure they're sitting around the cup, rather than standing over it or setting the cup on the floor. When all groups have emptied one cup into the other, continue. Ask:

❓ **Look through the side of the cup at your names. What happened?**

❓ **How is this like what happens when life here on earth ends?**

Say: **No matter how rich or full or wonderful our lives are, every life on earth ends. But listen to what happens when we're friends of Jesus.**

Read aloud Romans 8:11.

Say: **Lift your cup off the sticky note.** Ask:

❓ **What happened?**

Say: **We think death is the end. But the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead *lives in us!* Wow! That Spirit gives us life and power and promise! Because of Jesus, we can have life forever! **JESUS' POWER LETS US LIVE FOREVER!** (*Trust Jesus!*) Today we'll give kids the hope that life with Jesus can go on forever. Let's take a minute to listen to our friend God, allowing him to speak the names of kids who may not know this amazing news.**

Set a timer for one minute. Have complete silence for one full minute, allowing God to speak. Then close in prayer, asking God to give your staff boldness, wisdom, and *his* words today.



Building Friendships

Bible Point: Jesus' power helps us be good friends.
(*Trust Jesus!*)

Bible Story: The church is united. (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35)

Bible Verse: "Love each other in the same way I have loved you." (John 15:12)

Hand each person a toothpick.

Say: We've seen a lot of new friendships develop this week—some of them pretty unlikely! Kids who don't go to the same school, maybe aren't in the same grade, or don't have similar interests have become friends.

Share your own story of an unlikely friendship in your life.

Say: Hold your toothpick, and turn to someone nearby. Take turns telling about an unlikely friendship in your life and how it came about. You'll each have about a minute.

Play the Sing & Play Express Music CD for two minutes while partners share. Then turn off the music and sound your Train Whistle.

Say: Friendships are so important...more now than ever! Today's kids are lonely. They're hungry for relationship! But sometimes they don't know how to reach out and be a good friend. Today we'll help kids discover that **JESUS' POWER HELPS US BE GOOD FRIENDS.** (*Trust Jesus!*) Jesus even gave us the perfect example of being a friend. Listen.

Read aloud John 15:12. Ask:

? What would friendships look like if people lived out this verse?

Say: Jesus' love reminds me of these. Bring out mini marshmallows, and let everyone sample a few. Ask:

? How is Jesus' love like the marshmallow?

Say: Without Jesus' love, we're alone. Hold up your single toothpick. But Jesus' sweet love gives us the power to reach out (connect two toothpicks with a marshmallow) and build friendships with people around us. Let's see what that can be like!

SUPPLIES:

- ▶ toothpicks (about 10 per person)
- ▶ mini marshmallows
- ▶ Sing & Play Express Music CD*
- ▶ CD player
- ▶ Bible
- ▶ Train Whistle

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Set out more toothpicks and mini marshmallows, and give your staff about five minutes to see how big a structure they can make with marshmallows and toothpicks. Play the Sing & Play Express Music CD while people craft and create. Then turn off the music and sound your Train Whistle. Gather around the structure and join hands.

Pray: **God, we're so grateful for your love and friendship. Sometimes we need your strength to reach out and be a friend to someone who's not like us. To someone who's hard to love. But Jesus' power is stronger than our discomfort. Help us use his power to show your love and friendship to others around us. Help us guide kids today, so they can be empowered to reach out with your love. In Jesus' name, amen.**