



# ZOOKEEPERS

## LEADER GUIDE

**Unit 12:** Zookeepers  
**Lesson 1:** Fill the Zoo

# OVERVIEW

## UNIT OVERVIEW

### Lesson 1: Fill the Zoo

**DISCIPLINE:** Filling imaginations with God-honoring thoughts

**KEY VERSES:** Genesis 1:27-31; Philippians 4:8; Psalm 139:14

### Lesson 3: Train the Animals

**DISCIPLINE:** Using imaginations during worship

**KEY VERSES:** Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 12:1-2; Isaiah 55:12

### Lesson 2: Capture Wild Animals

**DISCIPLINE:** Taking every thought captive

**KEY VERSES:** 2 Corin 10:5; Proverbs 4:23; 1 John 1:9

### Lesson 4: Visit Other Zoos

**DISCIPLINE:** Evaluating influences on our imaginations

**KEY VERSES:** Philippians 4:8; Proverbs 13:20; Psalm 1:1-3

## LESSON 1 OVERVIEW

### Preteens have BIG imaginations.

This lesson launches the Zookeepers series, where preteens learn how to manage their big imaginations in a way that honors God. Using the analogy of a zoo, preteens will explore how their minds, like zoos, can be filled with thoughts, like animals. Just as a zookeeper is responsible for caring for and managing animals, they'll discover that God calls us Christians to be caretakers of the thoughts we allow in our imaginations.

This first lesson introduces God as the ultimate Creator—the original Zookeeper—who filled the world with beauty, purpose, and goodness. Preteens will reflect on how they, too, are created in God's image and can use their imaginations to express creativity that glorifies him.

By focusing on Genesis 1:27-31, preteens will learn that what they allow into their minds shapes what comes out. They'll be challenged to fill their imaginations with thoughts that are pure, lovely, and God-honoring (Philippians 4:8) and to create and express those thoughts in ways that reflect God's glory.

## LESSON 1 LEADER DEVO

**Read:** Genesis 1:27-31; Philippians 4:8

As leaders, we often think of imagination as something kids have and adults outgrow. But the Bible reveals that imagination is a gift from God—one he used when creating the world. God imagined light, oceans, animals, and people before speaking them into existence. He filled his Creation with beauty, purpose, and order, reflecting his holiness through what he made.

Being made in God's image means we also have the ability to imagine and create. The question is: what are we filling our imaginations with? Philippians 4:8 reminds us to think about things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. These are the kinds of thoughts God wants us to focus on.

Take 10 minutes today to sit quietly with God and ask him to reveal areas where your thoughts need realignment. Invite him to help you fill your mind with what honors him.



# SCHEDULE

## Lesson 1: Fill the Zoo



### 01 WARM-UP

10 min

*Preteens will play an Opening Game and get a brief overview of today's lesson topic.*

**Today's Opening Game:** Filling the Zoo



### 02 M.A.P.

10 min

*Preteens will read through a passage of Scripture on their own. They'll consider what stands out to them from the passage and why it stands out to them. They'll also be given time to talk with God about the passage.*

**Today's Passage:** Genesis 1:27-31



### 03 DISCOVER

20 min

*Preteens will learn about spiritual disciplines that will help them draw closer to God. They'll discover the Biblical basis for these disciplines, the purpose and benefit of these disciplines, and the reasons why Christians have practiced these discipline throughout history.*

**Today's Discovery:** We are made in God's image, to imagine and create like him.



### 04 QUEST

10 min

*Preteens will move into action as they practice different ways that they can grow in their own personal relationship with Jesus.*

**Today's Quest:** Filling imaginations with God-honoring thoughts



All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1995, 1996, 1998, 2014 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Biblica. All rights reserved worldwide. The "NIV" and "New International Reader's Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Notated Scripture quotations are from the The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, ESV®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



**NOTE:** Highlighted words indicate supplies to prepare. These are also listed in the ADMIN GUIDE.

[Slide 01 Zookeepers]

[Slide 02 Filling the Zoo]

[AUDIO 01 Opening Game]

1. Divide preteens into small teams of 3-5 kids. Explain that each team's task is to create an animal for the [Ministry Name] Zoo. Tell them it can be a real animal, an imaginary one, or a mix of both—it just needs to represent their team and be creative!
2. Each team should huddle up and brainstorm what their animal looks like and what their animal is named. Don't give them too much time—encourage quick decisions.
3. Once every team has an idea for their animal, announce that one representative from each team will be chosen to build the animal. Build anticipation by saying, "And now, here's the surprise—you won't choose your representative. I will!" Then reveal that the person with the longest hair in each team will be the representative.
4. Give each representative a large sheet of aluminum foil and explain that they will have 3 minutes to create their team's animal. Remind them to try their best and have fun with it.

[VIDEO 01 3-minute timer]

**LEADER TIP:** As an option, have representatives trade out with a new person from their team every 30 seconds

[Slide 03 Filling the Zoo]

5. When time is up, have the representatives bring their completed animals to a designated spot in the room to form the [Ministry Name] Zoo. You'll leave this zoo up during this entire series, and you could even have the preteens add to it. This zoo will serve as a visual illustration of some of the points that are in the lessons.
6. Ask each team to share the name of their animal, what it is, and one fun or unique fact about it.





**[Slide 04 Zookeepers]**

Wow, look at the amazing zoo we've built together! Each animal is so creative and unique, but none of them just happened on their own. You had to come up with an idea, make a plan, and put it all together.

Today we're starting a new series called "Zookeepers." All month, we'll be talking about how our imaginations are a bit like zoos. Zoos are full of animals, and our imaginations are full of thoughts. Just like a zookeeper is responsible for caring for and managing the animals in their zoo, you and I are responsible for the thoughts that fill our imaginations. This month we'll be learning from God's Word how to manage our zoos...I mean...our imaginations.

Think of this month as Zookeeper training – and YOU'RE the zookeepers.

Today, Zookeepers, we're going to learn what it means to fill the zoos of our imaginations and how to make them something that honors God.

**[Slide 05 How to Fill]**

Our finest example is God, of course. He is the original Zookeeper, and he carefully created everything that exists. From God's imagination, he produced a world that is good, beautiful, and full of purpose.

Let's look at what God has to say about the world he created from his imagination. You're going to have a chance to read about it for yourself, straight from the Bible. Let's get started.



**[Slide 06 MAP]**

This is your chance to dig into God's Word on your own. Today, we're going all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, to the very first chapter of Genesis. Genesis 1.

**[Slide 07 MAP Genesis 1:27-31]**

In this passage, God has just finished creating the entire world—everything from light and oceans to animals and people.

Now watch the video for your instructions, and then take some time to read Genesis 1:27-31 on your own and see what stands out to you as you read.

**[VIDEO 02 MAP 1]****[Slide 08 MAP James 1:19-25]****[AUDIO 02 MAP Time]**

*(After the video/instructions, hand out MAP Cards to preteens who didn't bring a Bible. Also, give each preteen a pen/pencil and a highlighter.)*

*Give preteens time to complete M.A.P. as explained in the video. When it looks like most preteens are done, you can have preteens describe what they highlighted and wrote in their Bibles – or on the M.A.P. Cards– either in Small Groups or with the whole group.)*



**[Slide 09 Zookeepers]**

*(Walk over to the zoo created during the Opening Game, pointing to the animals while you teach.)*

Look at the animals we created together for the [Ministry Name] Zoo! Each one is so creative and unique. But none of these animals just appeared out of nowhere. People had to brainstorm an idea, imagine what the animal would look like, and then actually do the work of creating it.

This zoo is a lot like our imaginations. Our imaginations are filled with thoughts, just like this zoo is filled with animals. Some thoughts are creative, some are wild, and some are purposeful. Here's the thing—just like we chose which animals filled our zoo, we get to choose what thoughts fill our imaginations.

Let's take a quick poll. If you could choose, would you rather be the one who comes up with the idea for an animal, or would you rather be the one who creates an animal. Think about that for a moment. *(Pause for thought.)* Raise your hand if your favorite part would be coming up with the idea for an animal. Now, raise your hand if you would rather be the one who gets to build it out of aluminum foil.

Awesome—both steps are important because first you have to imagine something, and then you have to express it.

Today, we're going to learn about how God, the original zookeeper, imagined beauty, purpose, and good things, and then expressed what was in his imagination through Creation. Because we're created in God's image, we can do the same thing: We can imagine....and then express our imaginations by creating what's *(point to your head)* in here.

Let's talk about how God created the Universe. When God said, "Let there be light," do you think he just blurted it out without knowing what light was? Or, do you think he had already imagined what light would be—something beautiful, something with purpose, something that would bring goodness into the world? What do you think? *(Take some responses.)*

This is actually an amazing thing about God—he's able to create things that have never existed anywhere before—except they existed in his imagination.

**Here's a challenge:** Close your eyes for 10 seconds. Try to imagine a brand-new color that's never been seen before. Ready? Go.





*(Wait 10 seconds while preteens try to imagine this.)* OK, for some of you, that felt impossible, but I'm not even to the challenging part yet. The challenging part would be for you to now create that new color that's never existed before! That's crazy difficult! Impossible even.

But guess what? That's what God did—he imagined things that never existed before. Then he spoke them into existence.

Check out Genesis 1:31 again. We read it during MAP time.

#### [Slide 10 Genesis 1:31]

Genesis 1:31 says, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Creation was God expressing what was already in his imagination, and what was in God's imagination was good. What was in his imagination was beautiful and purposeful, and then he created things to express that beauty and purposefulness.

Think about it: God didn't just create mountains and oceans because they were useful. He made them breathtakingly beautiful because beauty is part of his imagination, too.

When I say go, stand up and find someone sitting across the room from you. Sit next to them so that everybody has a partner. Then take turns sharing something you think is the most beautiful part of Creation—anything from a sunset to animals to the stars in the sky. Take about 30 seconds each. Go!

#### [Slide 11 What's the most beautiful]

#### [AUDIO 03 Thinking Music]

*(Give preteens a few moments to complete this; then call them back.)*

Those beautiful things you just shared? They all started in God's imagination. Now, here's the amazing part: because we're created in God's image, we can imagine beauty, purpose, and good things, too—and then we can express those thoughts through what we create.

So how do we do this? How do we fill our imaginations—our zoos—with thoughts that glorify God, and then express those thoughts in a way that honors him?

#### [Slide 12 How do we glorify God]

Let's think of this in two steps.





First, let's talk about what we're letting into our imaginations. If a zoo is filled with wild, dangerous animals, it's not a fun or safe place to visit. The same is true for our imaginations. If we fill them with harmful or negative thoughts, it's hard for anything good to come out of them.

Philippians 4:8 says to think about things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Those are the kinds of thoughts that glorify God. So the first thing we need to do is fill our imaginations with the right kind of thoughts: thoughts that glorify God.

### [Slide 13 Step 1]

Once your imagination is filled with good thoughts, you can express them in ways that honor God. For example, God imagined the beauty of the ocean, but he didn't just leave it in his imagination. He spoke, and the ocean came to life. Step 2 for us is also to express our God-honoring thoughts through creating.

### [Slide 14 Step 2]

Think about some of the ways God expressed his imagination through the Creation.

Who loves the colors of a sunset? What if God had just imagined breathtaking colors, but never actually created them? God could have just made the sky go dark, but instead, he filled it with colors because beauty is part of his imagination and because he expresses what's in his imagination.

How about animals? Raise your hand if you can think of a funny or interesting animal. *(Call on a few preteens to share.)* Exactly! God could have made all animals the same, and just kept any other creative ideas in his head. But instead, he made everything from the tiniest bug to enormous whales. Each one is an expression of God's creativity.

Now think about yourself. God imagined you and created you with purpose. The Bible says you are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Just like God created the world to reflect his imagination, you were created to reflect God to the world, too. One cool thing about being human, and being made in God's image, is that we can use our imaginations and express them. Creating God-honoring things is one of the greatest ways that we can reflect God's glory.

### [Slide 15 We can reflect God's glory]

Your imagination is like a zoo—it's filled with thoughts. But here's the important part: you get to decide what kinds of thoughts fill your zoo. Will you fill it with good and beautiful thoughts that glorify God, or will you let wild and harmful thoughts take over?





We have the ability to imagine beauty, purpose, and good things, and we can express those thoughts in ways that honor him. As Christians, we realize that this is an important and holy and amazing thing that we are able to do. This is what we're going to practice during our Quest time. We'll use our imaginations to create something that glorifies God. Then, we'll express those things so others can see what's in our zoos...I mean, imaginations.

OK, Zookeepers, let's do this. I can't wait to see what you come up with! First, let's pray and thank God for the gifts of imagination and creation.



**[Slide 23 Quest Fill Your Zoo]****Part 1: Filling Your Imagination**

Before you can create something that glorifies God, you need to fill your imagination with thoughts that reflect his goodness, beauty, and purpose. Think of this as stocking your zoo with the best animals—thoughts that honor God and inspire you.

Here's how we're going to do that: First, close your eyes and take a deep breath. For the next couple of moments, I want you to think about something specific that reflects God's greatness. Maybe it's something from Creation, like the stars, a mountain, or the ocean. Maybe it's a truth about God, like how much he loves you or how he's always with you. You might even think about a story you've heard from the Bible that inspires you. Whatever you choose, focus your imagination on that good and beautiful thought and let it fill your mind.

Let's take a few moments of quiet to do this. Close your eyes, and when you're ready, start filling your imagination zoo with God-honoring animal thoughts. Ready...Set...Go.

*(Wait quietly for about 2 minutes. Keep an eye on the time and use a calm, encouraging tone if needed: "Keep focusing on God's goodness. Picture it clearly in your mind.")*

Okay, open your eyes.

That was the first step—filling our imaginations with God-honoring thoughts. When we focus on his goodness, it inspires us to think of things that reflects his glory.

**Part 2: Expressing Your Imagination**

Now that we've filled our imaginations with thoughts about God, it's time to take the next step—expressing what's in our imagination. Just like God didn't keep his thoughts about Creation to himself, we can use our creativity to bring our thoughts to life in a way that glorifies him.

Here's the challenge: Take what you imagined in Part 1 and express it. You can do this through drawing, writing a short poem or story, or even building something with **the materials we have here**. *(Explain the materials you have set up for this portion of the Quest.)*

Your goal is to create something that reflects what you imagined about God's goodness, beauty, or purpose. You'll have about 10 minutes to work on this. Take your time, and don't worry about being perfect. This is about using your creativity to honor God. At the end, we'll have time for anyone who wants to share their creation with the group.





*(Play worship music in the background. Walk around to encourage and support them as they create.)*

Time's up! Let's take a few minutes to share. If you'd like, you can tell us what you created and how it reflects God's goodness, beauty, or purpose. I'd love to see the incredible things you've imagined and expressed.

*(Invite volunteers to share their creations. Encourage and affirm their ideas.)*

Great job, Zookeepers. Remember, your imagination is like a zoo. When you fill it with thoughts that honor God, you can express those thoughts in ways that glorify him and reflect his goodness to others.

Let's pray and thank God for the amazing abilities that he gave us: to imagine things and to express them for his glory.







# ZOOKEEPERS

## ADMIN GUIDE

**Unit 12:** Zookeepers  
**Lesson 1:** Fill the Zoo

# SUPPLIES

## Lesson 1: Fill the Zoo



### 01 WARM-UP

10 min

- Your Ministry Zoo (*see details below*)
- Large sheet of aluminum foil for each group



### 02 M.A.P.

10 min

- Highlighters for each preteen
- Pens for each preteen
- **MAP Card** for each preteen (*copy on cardstock*)



### 03 DISCOVER

20 min

- Bible



### 04 QUEST

10 min

- Materials that the preteens can use to create things with. This can include crafting materials, clay, paper, markers, pens, colored pencils, paints, posterboard paper, etc.

**NOTE:** Within the leader guide, supplies are **highlighted** so you can understand how they'll be used and prepare accordingly.

**NOTE:** Supplies on this page that are written in a **bold font** can be found in the *Printables* Section.

## Your Ministry Zoo

**The Ministry Zoo** is a visual tool that helps preteens connect with the *Zookeepers* series by representing their imaginations—filled with thoughts, ideas, and influences that need care, just like animals in a real zoo. It makes abstract concepts more concrete and memorable, providing a fun, hands-on way to engage with the lessons.

### Setup:

Set aside a designated area, like a table or shelf, where preteens can add animals throughout the series. You could create a small sign for the zoo or start with other decor. **In Lesson 1**, the preteens will build animals out of aluminum foil as part of the opening activity. **Starting in Lesson 3**, you could let preteens add new animals or other decor to the zoo each week before service. You'll use the zoo throughout the series to reinforce key ideas, like capturing wild thoughts and filling imaginations with truth that honors God.



All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1995, 1996, 1998, 2014 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Biblica. All rights reserved worldwide. The "NIV" and "New International Reader's Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Notated Scripture quotations are from the The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, ESV®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## Lesson 1: Fill the Zoo

[illegible]

**1** Highlight what stands out for **Me.**

## Genesis 1:27-31

**2** How does what I highlighted **Affect** me?

So God created human beings in his own likeness.  
He created them to be like himself.  
He created them as male and female.

God blessed them. He said to them, "Have children so that there will be many of you. Fill the earth and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the seas and the birds in the sky. Rule over every living creature that moves along the ground."

Then God said, "I am giving you every plant on the face of the whole earth that produces its own seeds. I am giving you every tree that has fruit with seeds in it. All of them will be given to you for food. I am giving every green plant as food for all the land animals and for all the birds in the sky. I am also giving the plants to all the creatures that move along the ground. I am giving them to every living thing that breathes." And that's exactly what happened.

God saw everything he had made. And it was very good.  
There was evening, and there was morning. It was day six.

**M.A.P.**

**3** **Pray** about what you highlighted.