

Refocus, Restore, Rejoice

Rejoicing in God is not something we often intentionally do. We rejoice with friends and family at different events in our lives: a birthday celebration; an anniversary; the birth of a newborn. Sometimes after the celebration has ended, we take a moment to rejoice in what God has accomplished in our lives. What would be the impact of refocusing our joy?



Focus scripture
Psalm 126

Additional scriptures
Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11
Luke 1:46b–55
1 Thessalonians
5:16–24
John 1:6–8, 19–28

Focus scripture: Psalm 126

Psalm 126 has the tension of both past tense and future tense; the writer remarks on what God has done – restoring the people of Israel from exile – and sheer joy that came from that knowledge. God didn't just use the people Israel in this restorative act. God used another nation to bring it about. As expressed in verse two, God uses others to perform God's purposes, and in so doing spreads the knowledge of God's deeds. As a post-exilic work, this psalm gives way to a new need for restoration. The return of the exiled people had occurred, but the building back of what had been lost was yet to come.

As many know, water often represents life and abundance. Where there is water, there is life; there is agriculture, there is prosperity. The watercourses in the Negev were the constancy of life. The psalmist is aware of the nature and importance of water, and this reference helps the hearers recall God's provision throughout the history of the Hebrew people. The psalmist prudently gives thanks for what God has done, and is certain of the provision that will come, "with shouts of joy."

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11 begins with an introduction of one sent by God to declare a holy word of restoration for the people Israel. The servant's words have power because they do not imply the importance of the servant, rather the work of God through the people to restore what has been destroyed. This news of restoration is for the oppressed, broken-hearted, captives, and prisoners. These categories have a mark on every Israelite of this time, whether exiled by the Babylonians or left in the wake of the destruction that took

place. These first few verses grab the pain with which these people were dealing, and so too the restorative verses that present the very nature of God. Out of brokenness can come restoration and rejoicing.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 Paul gives us a best-of list. They are actions that should be reflected in our everyday lives so that our daily living may glorify God. The section begins with "rejoice always." In everything we do, we should rejoice in God and in that rejoicing all the practices listed will set us on our way to sanctification.

John 1:6–8, 19–28 introduces John the baptizer. The writer of the fourth gospel wants to dispel any notion that John is somehow more important than the Messiah. He is a witness only, one who is preparing the way for the light by pointing to the Light. John draws on the words of Isaiah to refocus misconception of his messiahship and point to the Christ who is to come. In emphasizing the personhood of John, any reader can put themselves in the place of John as the witness to the Light. We can all testify that we are not the Light, and we can all testify to the Light.

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The readings in this third week of Advent live into the joy of God. Rejoicing in the therapeutic nature of God. Refocusing on the one who is to come. While readings from Isaiah and Psalms focus on the idea of restoring and rejoicing. The reading from the letter to the Thessalonians bridges this week's readings from the Hebrew scriptures to the gospel reading, as we look to refocus ourselves and the world around us on the coming Messiah.

God, your coming into the world is not a single moment in time, but a never-ending cascade of moments in which we may participate in the joy of your creation. Grant us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to know the true meaning of rejoicing in you. Amen.

Lecture Connection
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 3–5

Young children often move quickly from joy to sadness, excitement to boredom, but those feelings are nevertheless genuine. A child reacts to experiences spontaneously and honestly, and this can offer a wonderful gift to adults who may be hesitant to express their emotions openly. Notice how a child's presence can lighten a mood or free a group to acknowledge either a joyful or a painful situation.

This week's session offers children a chance to express their joyous and happy emotions. Leaders can affirm the children's

feelings as they are expressed and can remind children that God accepts and affirms their feelings. Leaders can help children realize that they can bring joy to others, both those close to them and those they haven't yet met. Pray that each child in the group will be encouraged to spread the joy of God's love.

Please note that the Nativity story will be explored in the December 20 session. If you will not be meeting together on December 20, plan when you will share this session with the children.

Prepare

Before the session

- ☐ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Psalm 126, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 15).
- ☐ Bring items for worship area: purple or blue cloth, the Advent wreath from last week, offering basket, Bible with a bookmark placed in the book of Psalms.
- ☐ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), resource sheet "[Additional Songs](#)" (p. 76) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Music CD*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available for purchase at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ☐ Bring poster board with stars and construction paper stars (see resource sheet "[Patterns](#)," p. 80), one for each child and extras for visitors.
- ☐ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ☐ Bring resource sheet "[God Loves Us](#)" and a length of coloured streamer for each child.

- ☐ Bring, if possible, songs "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) or "One, Two, Three, Alleluia!" (p. 22 in *Seasons Growing Faith Songbook*, #15 on *Seasons Growing Faith Music CD*).

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ☐ **Activity sheet:** copies of resource sheet "[Follow the Path](#)"
- ☐ **Shakers:** paper plates, self-adhesive stars, pebbles or paperclips, jingle bells (two per child, tied onto loop of yarn)
- ☐ **Sharing songs:** make arrangements to accompany clergy or pastoral care team on visits to facilities for seniors

Bless

- ☐ Bring a bell.
- ☐ Bring, if possible, song "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



Refocus, Restore, Rejoice

Scripture

Psalm 126

FOCUS To discover ways we can spread the joy of God's love

Gather

Welcome children by name and invite them to talk about things they and their families have been doing to get ready for Christmas.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship table. Invite a child to help spread the blue or purple cloth and place the Bible on the table. Explain that we can read stories about God's love in the Bible. Receive the offering.

Advent wreath Point out the first two candles, for hope and peace. Explain that this week we light a third candle for joy. Invite a child to gently pull up the yellow tissue inside the third candle (*for some congregations this will be the pink candle*). This candle reminds us that Jesus' birth brought joy to many people.

Sing "We Are Waiting" (on resource sheet [Additional Songs](#), p. 76)

Pray Dear God,
we are happy to be here with you.
Thank you for your love and care.
Amen.

Poster ritual Invite children to look at the poster board of stars and notice all the stars added during the past two weeks. Distribute more construction paper stars and use a glue stick to help children to add these around the edges of the poster. Explain that there is one more week to add more stars as we wait to celebrate Jesus' birth.

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

☐ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hi everyone! I'm feeling really happy today and when I'm happy I like to sing. I want to sing one of my favourite songs for you. (*Sing first verse of "If You're Happy and You Know It" on the resource sheet "Additional Songs," p. 76*)

Leader: That is a happy song, Priscilla. Do you sing other songs when you are sad or lonely?

Priscilla: Well, sometimes I sing the same song but I change the words. (*Sing several more verses using other feelings.*)

Leader: Songs can help us to talk about our feelings.

Priscilla: What are some of your favourite songs? (*Encourage children's responses and sing together if possible.*)

Leader: There are some songs in the Bible. Long ago, people sang these songs when they were happy or sad. Sometimes their songs were prayers to God. Thanks, Priscilla, for reminding us how songs can help us. (*Say goodbye to Priscilla.*)

☐ **Songs** Explain that songs can help us talk about our feelings. Teach the children all the verses for the song "If You're Happy and You Know It" (see ["Additional Songs," p. 76](#)). Encourage children to share their favourite songs. Explain that in the Bible there are songs that people sang long ago when they wanted to show their feelings and pray to God.

Engage

Before the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Psalms. Explain that this is the part of the Bible that includes many different kinds of songs. Use the resource sheet "[God Loves Us](#)" to present the story.

After the story

Poster Invite children to look again at the poster board of stars and talk about what they see.

Notice how the stars seem to be dancing and floating. How do these stars make you feel? Which star would you like to be? (*Invite children to point to a star.*) Hand out the streamers and encourage children to spread the joy of God's love by twirling and dancing joyfully.

Sing if possible, "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*) or "One, Two, Three, Alleluia!" (p. 22 in *SGF Songbook*, #15 on *SGF Music CD*).

Respond

Choose from the following activities.

- ☐ **Activity sheet** Children's happy faces spread the joy of God's love to everyone who sees them. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Follow the Path](#)" and wonder together what the children might be smiling about as you help each child trace the path. Invite children to add smiles to the faces at the end of the maze and decorate the page with coloured markers. Mention that God always loves us, no matter how we feel.
- ☐ **Shakers** Rhythm instruments can encourage children to show God's love and joy with their whole bodies. Invite each child to decorate the bottom of a paper plate with markers



and stickers. Fold each plate in half, place a few pebbles or paperclips inside and tape securely shut. Punch two holes close to the edge and tie a jingle bell through each. Sing some favourite songs together accompanied by the shakers.

- ☐ **Sharing songs** Children can share the joy of God's love with their presence. Explain that they will have a chance as a group to visit some senior members of the church with the minister or others on a pastoral care team. Practice together some songs that the group can share with others (see "[Additional Songs](#)" on p. 76 or other music resources).



Bless

Gather in the worship space and invite children to take turns ringing a bell as the group says, "God loves us!"

Pray Thank you, God,
for loving us no matter how we feel.
Be with us as we share your joy.
Amen.

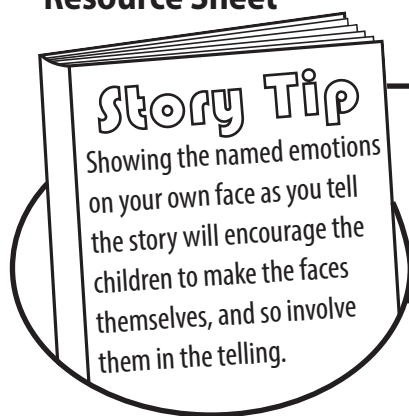
Sing if possible, "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Send each child out with the words "(child's name), God bless you as you share joy wherever you go."

Reflect

Which activities most effectively encouraged children to express joy? How do you affirm their feelings in the group?





God Loves Us

(based on Psalm 126)

(Invite children to make a fist and move their arms towards their bodies as they shout, "Yes!" Hug self when saying, "God loves us!")

Sometimes I feel angry, especially when things don't go my way. I stomp and I grumble and I give my toys a tumble – that's what I do when I'm angry.

Long ago the Hebrew people felt angry, too. Some people made their lives very hard. Was it okay for them to be angry? **Yes!**

God knows we sometimes feel anger. *(Children show angry face.)* It's okay... **God loves us!**

Sometimes I feel sad, especially when I'm sick or lonely. I cry and I frown and I hold my head down – that's what I do when I'm sad.

Long ago the Hebrew people felt sad, too. They had to leave their homes and move far away. Was it ok for them to be sad? *(Children show sad face.)* **Yes!**

God knows we sometimes feel sad. It's okay... **God loves us!**

Sometimes I feel surprised, especially when things are changing. I jump and I blink and I have to stop and think – that's what I do when I'm surprised.

Long ago the Hebrew people felt surprised, too. God promised them a land of their own. Was it ok for them to be surprised? *(Children show surprised face.)* **Yes!**

God knows we sometimes feel surprised. It's okay... **God loves us!**

Sometimes I feel scared, especially when I don't know what's happening next. I whimper and I hide and I keep my thoughts inside – that's what I do when I'm scared.

Long ago the Hebrew people felt scared, too. They were living way out in the desert. Was it ok for them to be scared? *(Children show scared face.)* **Yes!**

God knows we sometimes feel scared. It's okay... **God loves us!**

But other times I feel joyful. What do I do then? I laugh and I wiggle, I grin and I jiggle and I spread my joy around – that's what I do when I'm joyful!

Long ago the Hebrew people felt joyful, too. They remembered that God was with them always. Was it ok for them to be joyful? *(Children show joyful face.)* **Yes!**

God knows we sometimes feel joyful. It's okay... **God loves us!**

The Hebrew people knew God's love was forever with them always – whether they were... *(children show each emotional face)* angry, sad, surprised, scared, or joyful.

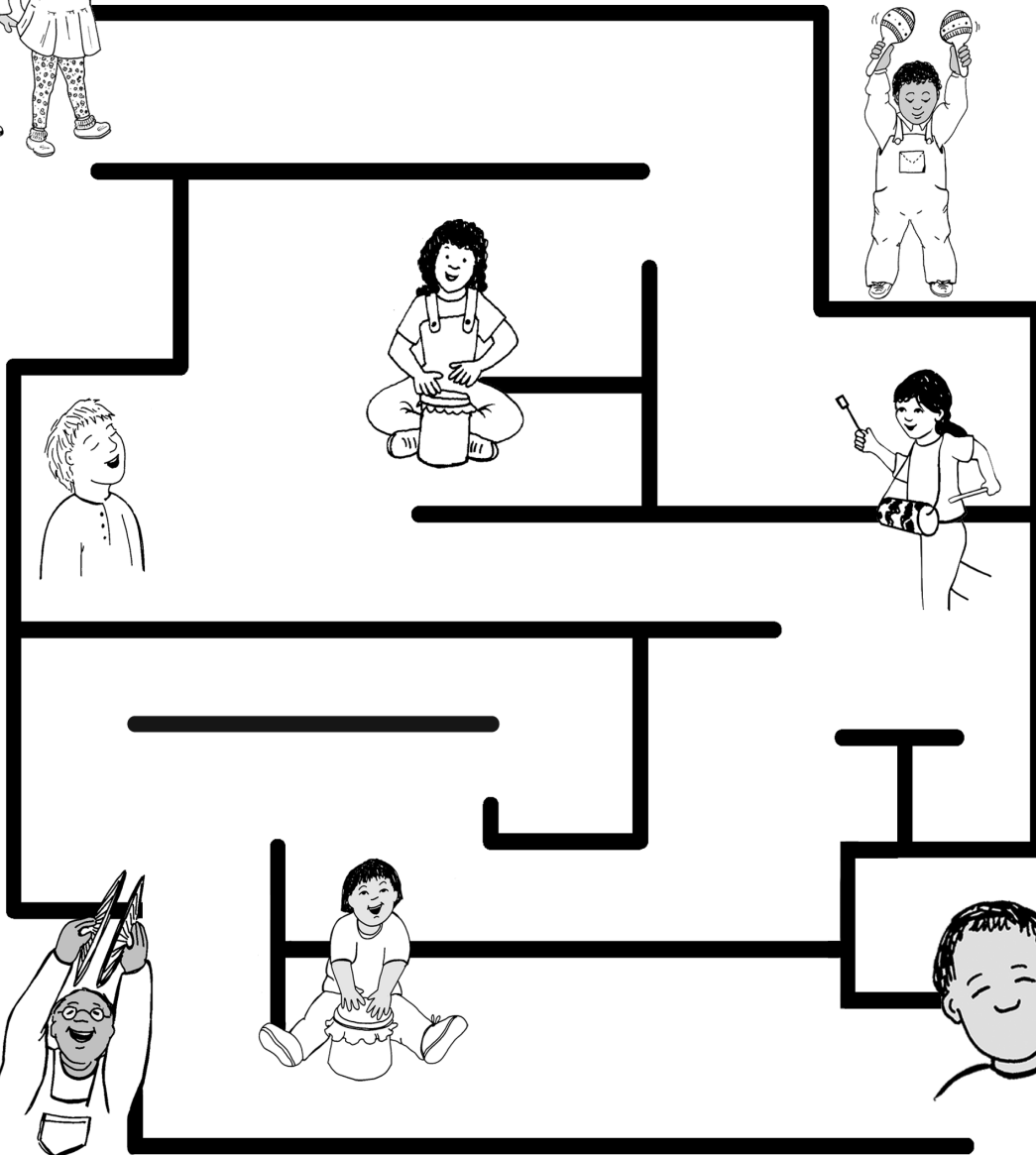
God is with us and loves us however we feel, too! **Yes! Yes! Yes!**



December 13, 2020

Follow the Path

Smiles can spread the joy of God's love. Follow the path that takes you by all of these joyful children. Where will you spread your smile today?



Additional Songs

We Are Waiting

(tune: "Frère Jacques" or "Are You Sleeping?")

We are waiting, we are waiting,
every day, every day,
to celebrate a birthday,
to celebrate a birthday,
Jesus' birth! Jesus' birth!

Ring the Bells

(tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Ring, ring, ring the bells.
Ring the bells today.
Jesus comes to share God's love.
Ring the bells today.

God Is With Us

(tune: "Frère Jacques" or "Are You Sleeping?")

God is with us, God is with us,
all the time, all the time,
comforting and loving,
comforting and loving,
Thank you, God. Thank you, God.

If You're Happy and You Know It

The musical notation is written on a single staff in 4/4 time. It includes four lines of music with lyrics and actions. Chords F, C7, Bb, and F are indicated above the staff. The lyrics are: "If you're hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. stamp your feet. snap your fingers. If you're hap - py and you know it, then your face will sure - ly show it. If you're hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. stamp your feet. snap your fingers." The actions are: "clap your hands", "stamp your feet", "snap your fingers", and "clap your hands", "stamp your feet", "snap your fingers".

Other verses:

If you're sad and you know it, cry boo hoo.
If you're tired and you know it, give a yawn.
If you're angry and you know it, stamp your foot.
If you're excited and you know it, give a jump.
If you're loving and you know it, throw a kiss.

God Loves Us

(tune: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star")

We are all God's family. (Open arms wide.)
Look around and you will see.
(Shade eyes with one hand and look around.)
God loves you and God loves me.
(Place hands over heart.)
We are all God's family. (Open arms wide.)
Look around and you will know.
(Shade eyes with one hand and look around.)
God's love helps us all to grow.
(Bring arms up and hold hands above head.)

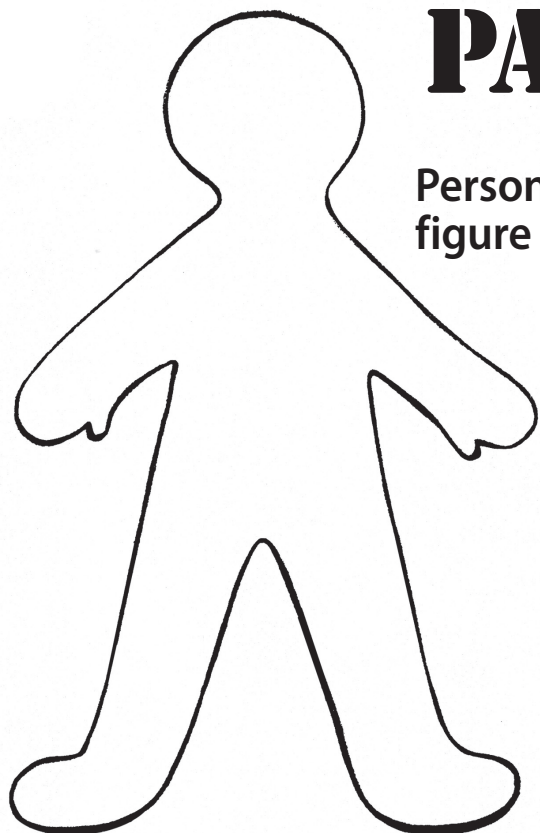
We Will Follow Jesus

(tune: "The Bear Went Over the Mountain")

We will follow Jesus
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Je-sus
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Je-sus
and do what Jesus did.



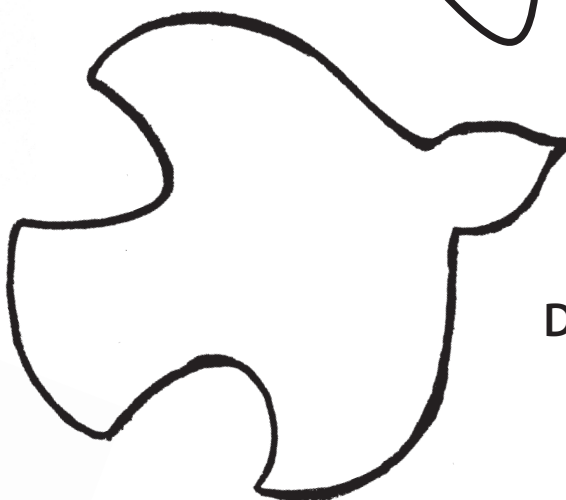
PATTERNS



Person
figure



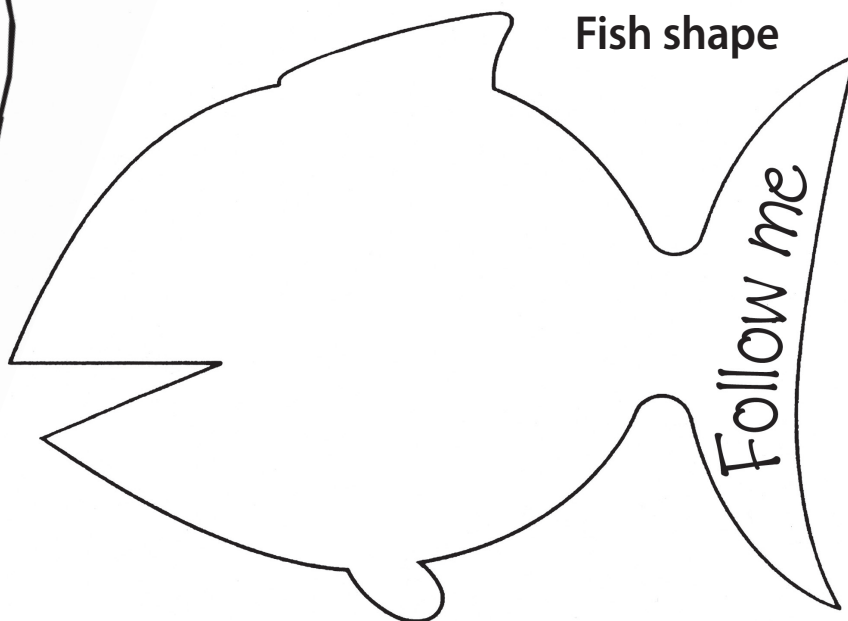
Star shape



Dove shape



Footprint shape



Fish shape

