

Choose to Give Thanks

This week's readings are all about making choices. The wilderness wanderers choose to complain against God. A psalmist writes of God's response to their prayers and the people choose to give God thanks. A letter to the church in Ephesus reminds us that we can choose to respond to God's grace by doing good in the world. The gospel of John tells us that God chooses to love the whole world and promises life.

Focus scripture: Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22

Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22 opens with people choosing to give thanks because God has saved them (vv. 1–3). After this initial introduction, the psalm follows a distinctive pattern. First, the people describe an issue or trouble, then pray to God to save them. They then describe God's saving actions and end with thanks for God's love. The psalm notes a variety of troubles: people lost in the desert (vv. 4–9), prisoners in misery and irons (vv. 10–16), people who are sick (vv. 17–22), and caught in a storm (vv. 23–30). In each instance, God responds.

The particular focus for this week's reading is on the people who are in distress because they are sick and distressed. They cry to God, and God saves and heals. They choose to give. This thanksgiving psalm reminds us that part of the nature of God is about restoring, saving, and liberating.

God guided the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt, and it is these same people who are encountered once again in **Numbers 21:4–9**. Earlier, the now-freed people had seen a miraculous parting of the waters, which allowed them to cross to the other side. They encountered God in dramatic ways (in a pillar of fire, in a cloud, and as smoke). The people are now wandering in the wilderness and perhaps have forgotten both their liberation and God's promise to guide them to a new land. Instead, they grumble and complain to Moses about a lack of food and water. The storyteller tells about poisonous serpents that bite and kill. These serpents have the power to destroy, yet faith in the bronze serpent crafted by Moses has the power to save. The people face and look at what they fear.

It might be hard to wrestle with the notion of God sending snakes to bring death upon a people. Why would God do this? This reality may be particularly challenging to reconcile with an understanding of an all-loving and grace-filled God. Perhaps the good news in this story is that God brings healing and saves the people.

Ephesians 2:1–10 also focuses on what it means to be saved – through God's grace and not good works. There is God-action, and then our response: grace is poured out upon us, and we are inspired by God's love to do good works. Works alone are not what saves; rather, we work towards justice in response to God's loving actions.

The passage describes the difference in life with Christ. Now people are "dead" to other ways of being and are alive in Christ. Now they walk in good works. Being "saved" in this passage is not about personal morality; instead, it is about God's good work in us and through us.

John 3:14–21 reminds us of God's good work in Christ. Jesus talks with Nicodemus about what it means to be saved and draws on the image of the bronze serpent that brought healing to the wilderness wanderers. The same serpent that brought death also brought life. Similarly, Jesus would also experience death, and would also bring new life. The God of love experiences life with us.

• • • • •

God hears our cries of distress, outpours love over us and then invites us to respond. How will we respond to God's love and grace in this Lenten season? In what ways can we choose to give thanks?



Focus scripture
Psalm 107:1–3,
17–22

Additional scriptures
Numbers 21:4–9
Ephesians 2:1–10
John 3:14–21

**Ever-present God,
we choose to
give thanks for
your presence
in our lives. You
shower us with
extravagant love
and invite us to
respond with our
love, thanks, and
praise. Your love
and grace inspire
us to act justly in
the world. Help us
to choose to trust
in your protection
and your love for
us all. Amen.**

Lesson 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

From their birth, children must trust in the constant love of family and other caregivers. They know what it is like to depend on someone for virtually all their needs. They may understand, but they are not likely to be able to articulate their vulnerability. Being part of a faith community helps them to learn about and to trust in the constant love of God. Generous themselves, young children assume that God's love is for everyone, and they react with concern when someone seems to be hurting or excluded.

This week's Bible story encourages children to act out and repeat the phrase "over

and over and over again" to highlight a generous love that is great enough for all people. Children this age often recognize others in hard situations and may try to find help for them or offer it themselves. Without coaching, they respond appropriately to God's unconditional love and grace by offering their own love freely and generously. Build on their natural inclination to express concern for others by encouraging a caring attitude within the group. Pray that every child will thrive in God's unconditional love and experience this love expressed by the people around them.

Prepare

Before the session

- ☐ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 21).
- ☐ Set a worship space with purple cloth, purple candle, matches, offering basket, Bible with the purple, blue, and green bookmarks from past weeks and a yellow bookmark placed in this week's focus passage from the Psalms.
- ☐ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *SGF Music CD*, CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ☐ Cut out many small paper hearts and place them around the room; bring a basket to collect these.
- ☐ Bring "Gathering Song" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs](#)," p. 89) or song, "Thank God" (p. 28, *SFG Songbook*; #18, *SGF Music CD*).
- ☐ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).
- ☐ Bring several broken crayons.

Engage

- ☐ Bring this week's resource sheet "[God's Wonderful Love](#)."
- ☐ Bring songs "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) and/or "Jump for Joy" (p. 14 in *SGF Songbook*, #10 on *SGF Music CD*).
- ☐ Bring Lenten calendar (from previous weeks) and container of stones (see p. 88 for more information about the [Lenten ritual](#)).
- ☐ Bring song "God's Promise" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs](#)," p. 89).

Respond

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

- ☐ **Poster:** construction paper cut into large heart shapes, poster board
- ☐ **Musical instruments:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Biblical Musical Instruments](#)"; review information, prepare and bring supplies for chosen instruments.
- ☐ **Snack:** sugar biscuits or cookies, tubes of frosting/icing, decorations; check for allergies to ingredients.

Bless

- ☐ Bring "Leaving Song" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs](#)," p. 89).



Choose to Give Thanks

Scripture

Psalm 107:1–3,
17–22

FOCUS To hear that God's love is for everyone and for all time

Gather

Welcome each child by name. Encourage them to search the room to find the paper hearts and place these in the basket.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space and remind children that we are in the Season of Lent and the colour for Lent is purple. Light the candle, saying, "This candle reminds us of God's love shining in the world." Then repeat for each child, "God's love shines in (*child's name*)."

Pray Dear God,
thank you for being with us today.
Thank you for your love.
Amen.

Sing "Gathering Song" (p. 89) or "Thank God" (p. 28, *Seasons Growing Faith Songbook*; #18, *Seasons Growing Faith Music CD*).

Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

☐ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hi everyone (*sounding really sad*).

Leader: Priscilla? Is something wrong?

Priscilla: Oh, I feel so bad about this (*points to some broken crayons*).

Leader: That's OK. Crayons do break. Why are you so sad?

Priscilla: It was my fault. I didn't mean to but I dropped some crayons and they broke.

Leader: Oh, Priscilla. Do you see any angry faces here?

Priscilla: (*looks around*) No...everyone looks kind and loving.

Leader: That's right, Priscilla. We will always, always love you.

Priscilla: That sure makes me feel better! (*Turns to children.*) Girls and boys, have you ever made a mistake? (*Encourage their answers.*) Who keeps loving you over and over again? (*Encourage answers.*)

Leader: We all make mistakes, but our family and friends still love us, over and over again. Today we will hear about someone else who loves us over and over and over again. (*Say goodbye to Priscilla.*)

- ☐ **Heart basket** Place the basket of hearts in the middle and ask the children if they can think of times when they felt especially loved, even when they have made mistakes. Start by giving an example of your own. Then ask, "Who keeps loving you over and over again?" Each time an answer is given, take a heart from the basket and make a "trail" of hearts on the floor.

Engage

Before the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the yellow bookmark to open it to

the book of Psalms. Explain that the Psalms are a collection of songs and poems about God. Show the purple, blue, and green bookmarks from

previous weeks' stories and then return to the yellow bookmark for this week's focus passage. Use the resource sheet "[God's Wonderful Love](#)" to tell the story based on **Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22**. At the end of the story invite children to each take several hearts from the basket to keep as reminders of God's love.

After the story

People in the Bible felt a very special happiness when they came to the temple to worship. They sang and danced the psalms in praise to God. People today can also show their love for God in music and dance.

Music Encourage children to sing along and dance to the song "I've Got a Voice" (#13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) or "Jump for Joy" (#10 on *Seasons Growing Faith Music CD*).

Lenten calendar Lent is a special time to remember God's wonderful promises to us. Invite children to gather around the Lenten calendar. Explain that we are counting the days through Lent by placing stones on the pathway and when the whole path is covered with stones it will be time to celebrate Easter. Have children place stones on numbers 17-22. Read aloud the phrase beside the illustration for March 11.

Sing "[God's Promise](#)" (on p. 89)

Respond

Choose from the following activities:

- ☐ **Poster** We can show the love God shows to us. Invite children to make a poster about God's love. Distribute paper heart shapes and have children draw happy faces on their hearts and decorate them with bright colours. Demonstrate how to glue these onto a sheet of poster board and draw arms and legs on each heart. Invite children to think of a title for the heart poster and display it in the church hall.
- ☐ **Musical instruments** People celebrate God's wonderful love with music. Invite children to make some musical instruments. Show the illustrations on the resource sheet "[Biblical Musical Instruments](#)" and help children use



the materials provided to make one or two instruments. When completed, have a parade and sing about God's wonderful love. Consider distributing copies of the resource sheet for children to take home and make other instruments.

- ☐ **Snack** Sharing food together is one way of sharing love. Help children wash their hands. Demonstrate how to use a frosting/icing tube to make happy faces and smiles on the biscuits or cookies; add other decorations if desired. Thank God for the snack and share together, talking about how God loves us over and over, no matter how we feel and no matter what happens.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and light the candle again.

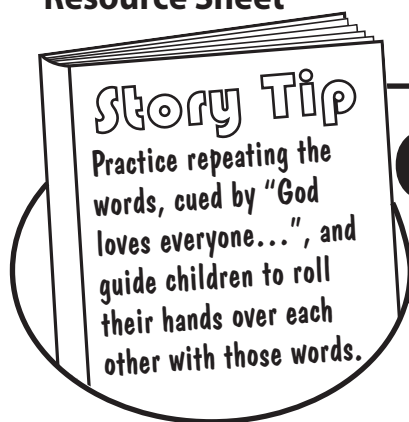
Pray Dear God, thank you for songs that help us to say how we feel.
Help us to always remember your love.
Amen.

Sing the "[Leaving Song](#)" (on p. 89).

Send each child off with this blessing, "(Child's name), God's love is for you, always and everywhere."

Reflect

How can you continue to make God's presence known to the children? In what ways are the children building relationships with one another? What can you do to help this process?



God's Wonderful Love

(based on Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22)

All the men came. All the women came. All the big children and the little children came. Some of them came from the east. Some of them came from the west. Some of them came from the north and some of them came from the south. They were coming back to the temple in Jerusalem. They remembered all the times that God had helped them when they were away. And they wanted to thank God for God's wonderful love.

"Let's sing a song to God," they said. And this is what they sang...

Let's give thanks to God.

God loves everyone... **over and over and over again.** (Roll hands over and over each other.)

God has helped us in every land – east and west, north and south.

God loves everyone... **over and over and over again.** (Roll hands...)

God showed us peace during terrible storms.

God loves everyone... **over and over and over again.** (Roll hands...)

God's healing love made us well again.

God loves everyone... **over and over and over again.** (Roll hands...)

God brought us together so we can live together.

God loves everyone... **over and over and over again.** (Roll hands...)

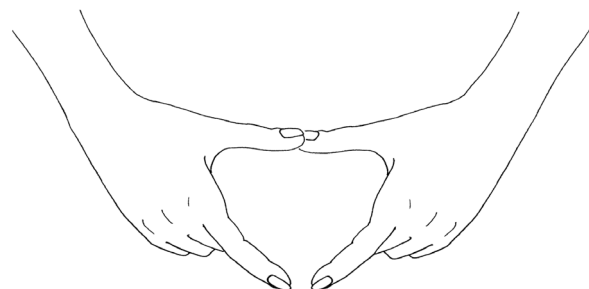
God is good and loves us forever.

God loves everyone... **over and over and over again.** (Roll hands...)

And all the men, and all the women, and all the big children and all the little children sang, and sang, and sang of God's wonderful love. They sang the stories of what God had done.

God loves everyone... **over and over and over and over and over and over again.** (Roll hands...)

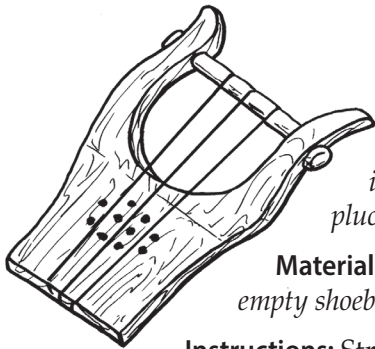
And God loves YOU! (One at a time, show children the heart hand signal and have them signal it back to you.)





Biblical Musical Instruments

People in the Bible felt a very special happiness when they came to the temple to worship. They sang and danced the psalms in praise to God.



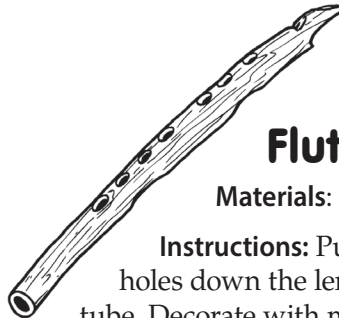
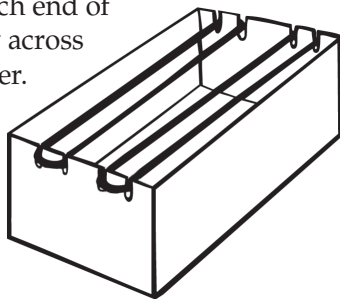
Lyre

(This is a stringed instrument that is plucked like a harp.)

Materials: rubber bands, empty shoeboxes

Instructions: Stretch rubber bands across the length of the empty shoebox. For each rubber band, cut a pair of notches at each end of the box directly across from one another.

To play: Pluck and strum.

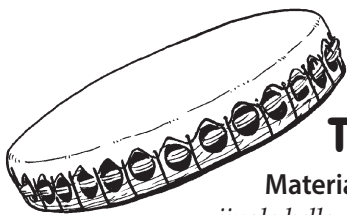
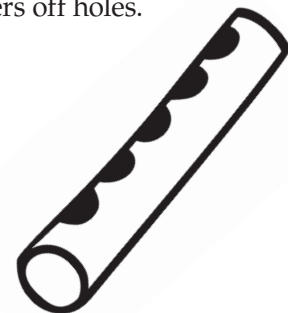


Flute

Materials: long cardboard tube

Instructions: Punch four or five holes down the length of a cardboard tube. Decorate with markers.

To play: Hum different notes into the tube while lifting fingers off holes.

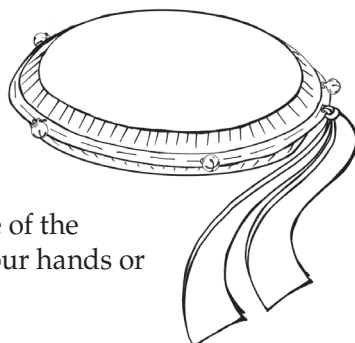


Tambourine

Materials: two paper plates, jingle bells, pebbles or paper clips, crepe paper streamers, yarn

Instructions: Place some pebbles or paper clips between two paper plates and staple and tape the plates together face to face. Punch holes and tie some jingle bells around the edge of the plates. Tape streamers to one edge.

To play: Tap the side of the tambourine with your hands or shake it.



Cymbals

Materials: two kitchen foil or tin pie plates, felt strips, paper fasteners

Instructions: Attach a felt handle to the back of two pie pans. (Paper fasteners work well.)

To play: clang the pie plates together.



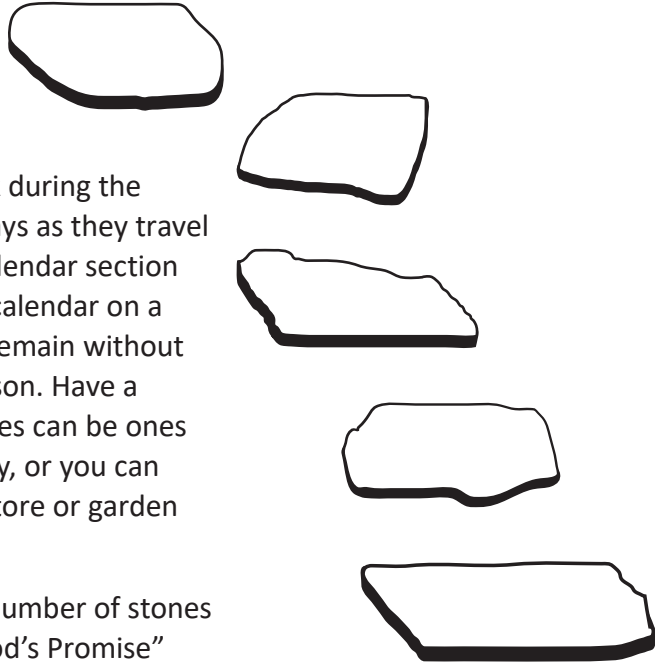
Storytelling Resources

Lenten calendar

The *Rainbow Path of God's Promises* is a calendar found on the poster [Storytelling Resources](#). This calendar will be used each week during the Season of Lent, to help the children mark the days as they travel through Lent towards Easter Sunday. Cut the calendar section off the [Storytelling Resources](#) poster. Place the calendar on a low table, preferably somewhere where it can remain without being disturbed during the six weeks of the season. Have a container of 40 small stones nearby. These stones can be ones collected from a beach or woodland area nearby, or you can purchase bags of polished stones from a craft store or garden centre.

Each week the children will place the required number of stones on the path for that week and sing the song "God's Promise" (on the resource sheet "[Additional Songs](#)" on p. 89). On Easter Day they will reach the empty tomb and celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

If the children will be part of an all-ages gathering on Palm/Passion Sunday and Easter Sunday, plan how you will complete the calendar activity. You might want to "look ahead" on your last day together as a group before Palm/Passion Sunday and then "look back" on the calendar on your first day together after Easter Sunday.



Note that the 40 days of the Lenten Season refer to the week days during this time. Each Sunday during Lent is traditionally considered a "little Easter" and is not counted as part of the 40 days.

Easter storytelling figures

The [Storytelling Resources](#) posters include figures to use in the Bible stories during the Easter season. There are figures of Jesus, Thomas, a pair of disciples, and two figures representing Philip and the Ethiopian official. Each figure is labelled with a date but they can also be used during the telling of stories on other Sundays if desired.

Cut out the figures and mount on paper rolls or large craft sticks so that the children can hold them and move them during the storytelling times.



Additional Songs

Gathering Song

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

Thank you, thank you, thank you God.
Thank you for this day.
God loves you and God loves me.
We're glad we're here today.

Gather Round

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

Gather round the table now,
we gather round today.
Time to listen, sing, and pray,
Let's worship God today.

God's Promise

(tune: "Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping")

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

Listen closely. **Listen closely.**
To God's promise. **To God's promise.**
God will always love us. **God will always**
love us.
We can love too. **We can love too.**

Leaving Song

(tune: "Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping")

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**
As we go. **As we go.**
It is time to leave now. **It is time to leave**
now.
Go with God. **Go with God.**

Follow Me

(tune: "Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping")

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

I'm the shepherd. **I'm the shepherd.**
Follow me. **Follow me.**
Listen to my voice. **Listen to my voice.**
Share my love. **Share my love.**

Friendship Song

(tune: "Jesus Loves Me")

Jesus loves me and you too.
That's the good news and it's true.
Share God's love and be a friend.
Love's the gift that has no end.
Friends, join together. Friends, join
together.
Friends, join together, and share the love
of God!

Hand Signs

Jesus

Place the tip of the middle finger
of the right open hand into the
left palm. Repeat the
action in reverse.



Love

Open hands
are crossed
and pressed
to the left.

