

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.**

Lecture Connection

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

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Children know how to rejoice when they are happy or excited and they also know how to express freely their sadness and pain. Children know how wonderful it is to have the care of a parent, grandparent, or older sibling when they are feeling sick or sad. Older children in this age group are beginning to have fluctuating emotions and can easily feel overwhelmed by events that may seem minor to adults. Fights with friends, a sharp word from a teacher, or a poor performance in school can all feel devastating for them. In this week's session, all the children will be encouraged to talk about some of the "lows" and "highs" of their lives.

When things are going well, giving thanks comes naturally for children. There-

fore, the idea of praising God or giving thanks to God should not be difficult for them. They will also hear the psalmist offer the assurance of God's steadfast love no matter what happens. The understanding that God loves us unconditionally is a foundational truth in our faith formation. Be aware, though, that there may be some children in your group who may struggle to be thankful because of loneliness, fear, or worry caused by family conflict, illness, or abuse. Consider how you could become a source of encouragement in their lives but also be aware of your congregation's duty-of-care policies as you respond to their concerns. Pray that the children will be reassured by God's unconditional love in their lives.

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. 27).
- ☐ Prepare a worship space with a purple cloth, purple pillar candle, and a Bible with the purple, blue, and green bookmarks from previous weeks and a yellow bookmark placed in this week's focus passage.
- ☐ Bring matches, offering basket, [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), Bibles, and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.
- ☐ Review resource sheet "[Rituals for Lent](#)" (p. 110).

Gather

- ☐ Bring a copy of resource sheet "[Rituals for Lent](#)" (p. 110) and a stone.
- ☐ Bring craft sticks in two different colours.

Engage

- ☐ Bring this week's resource sheet "[God's Love Lasts Forever](#)."
- ☐ **Praise group:** song "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7; downloadable

MP3 available at www.seasonsonline.ca).

- ☐ **Litany group:** Bibles, newsprint
- ☐ Bring newspapers or newsmagazines with human interest stories, poster board.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ☐ **Prayer zone:** wide yellow ribbon, pieces of yellow paper
- ☐ **Game zone:** small self-adhesive heart stickers
- ☐ **Art zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Heart Bookmarks](#)" (several per child), heart stickers, glitter
- ☐ **Craft zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Thanksgiving Window](#)"; bring materials listed on the resource sheet and make a sample.
- ☐ **Music zone:** "Comfort Me" (pp. 12–13 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #14 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)

Bless

- ☐ Bring heart stickers.
- ☐ Bring "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or the song "Comfort Me" (pp. 12–13 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #14 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



Choose to Give Thanks

Scripture

Psalms 107:1–3,
17–22

FOCUS To explore how we can give thanks for God's steadfast love in both good and bad times

Gather

Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers.

Opening ritual

Call to gather Invite children to follow the rainbow-coloured stepping stones to the worship area. Gather around the worship table and remind children that we are still in the Season of Lent, a time to learn about God's promises and to explore what it means to live in God's way.

Prayer Invite two volunteers to lead in the "Lent 4" prayer on the resource sheet "[Rituals for Lent](#)" (p. 110), lighting the candle and placing the symbolic object. Invite the whole group to say the last line together.

Sing the "[Gathering Song](#)" (on p. 110).

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

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to think about both the good times and the hard times that have happened in the past week. Designate one colour of craft stick as a happy colour and the other as a sad colour. Have children choose craft sticks in one or both colours and share some experiences together. Start by giving an example of your own.

■ How do you feel when you have a bad day? What helps you to feel better?

This week's reading from the Psalms reminds us that God's love is always with us, in both good times and hard times.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table. Point out the purple and blue bookmarks marking the stories we have heard from the book of Genesis, and the green bookmark marking last week's reading from the book of Psalms. Use the yellow bookmark to find this week's focus scripture, another reading from the Psalms. Recall that the psalms are songs or poems written to God or about God and God's people.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[God's Love Lasts Forever](#)" to tell a story based on **Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22**. Invite older children to help lead younger children in the words and actions for the response.

■ What does God do for the people that shows that God loved them?

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Praise group The children in this group will have an opportunity to express the joyful praise that is found in Psalm 107. Invite the group to listen to the recording of the song "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7), joining in on the chorus. Some children may remember this song from the previous season. Sing the first verse and chorus together. If the song is new to the group, teach the first verse, one line at a time.

■ What are some things that you would like to praise God for?

Litany group The children in this group will have an opportunity to explore Psalm 107 by writing a group litany, their own prayer of thanks. Invite each person in the group to write one line for the prayer, something that expresses God's care during a good time or a hard time. Take turns reading each prayer sentence. In between each prayer say in unison the response line from the resource sheet "[God's Love Lasts Forever](#)."

Reporting Invite the praise group to sing the song "I've Got a Voice" and the litany group to read their prayer.

The Bible story and us

Psalm 107 reminds us that God's love is with us at all times, both the good and the bad. Form pairs (one older and one younger child) and distribute the newspapers and news magazines among the pairs. Invite them to find articles about things that have happened to people, cut these out, and arrange on poster board.

- **What might we say to the people in each situation about God's steadfast love?**
- **What are some ways we can give thanks for God's love even during hard times?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

□ **Prayer zone: Lenten prayer wall**

Invite children to add to the Lenten prayer wall. Tape a yellow ribbon to the sign beside the other ribbons. Distribute squares of yellow paper for the children to write or draw prayers on the theme of God's love being there through good times and bad. Tape or pin these prayers to the ribbon and read aloud together.



- **Game zone: Heart tag** The psalm offers the assurance that God keeps on loving us no matter what. Distribute a set of heart stickers to each child and invite them to play a game of "freeze tag" that reminds them of this love. Take turns being "It" and each time a player is tagged he or she "freezes." To be unfrozen, another player must put a heart sticker on them and yell out "God's love lasts forever." The goal of the game is to get as many hearts as possible.

- **Art zone: Bookmarks** The psalmist gave thanks that God's steadfast love surrounds us. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Heart Bookmarks](#)" and read aloud the printed phrase.

Invite children to cut their bookmarks apart, colour the hearts (they might want to use rainbow colours) and decorate the bookmarks with stickers, designs, and drawings. After the worship service, help the children place these bookmarks in Bibles and hymnbooks in the pews.

- **Craft zone: Thanksgiving windows** The psalmist recalls God's faithfulness to the Hebrew people. We can also give thanks for God's steadfast love. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Thanksgiving Window](#)," review the instructions, and help group members create their "stained glass windows."
- **Music zone: Songs of comfort** The song "Comfort Me" (pp. 12–13 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #14 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) presents the expression of sadness in the verses and the expectation of God's comfort or love in the chorus. Teach the group the song and sing it together a few times. Invite children to name times when they were sad. After each one has shared, sing the chorus together.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and relight the candle. Invite children to repeat each line and action after you for the poem "As Far As I Can See" (bottom of p. 31). Distribute heart stickers and invite children to place these on the worship table around the Bible as they remember God's steadfast love lasts forever (Psalm 101:1).

Pray the following prayer or one of your own:

God, we thank you
that you are always with us,
in the happy times and in sad times. Amen.

Sing the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or the song "Comfort Me" (pp. 12–13 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #14 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Blessing Send each child out saying, "(Name), remember God's love is with you always."

Reflect

In what ways were the children able to broaden their understanding of God's steadfast love? What did you discover about the children and their sense of God's love in their lives? What challenges emerged for you in this session?

As Far As I Can See

As far as I can see, God is there. (*Shade eyes with hand and look around.*)

As high as I can stretch, God is there. (*Stand on tiptoe and reach up.*)

As low as I can go, God is there. (*Crouch down.*)

God says, "Reach out in love." (*Spread arms wide.*)

I will share some love with you. (*Shake hands and smiles with each other.*)





God's Love Lasts Forever

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

Use different tones of voice to help the children hear the different emotions in this reading. Practice the response lines several times before beginning to read the story.

The Hebrew people sometimes lived through difficult times. During those difficult times they would sing songs like Psalm 107 to help them remember that God's love was always with them.

**Oh give thanks to God, for God is good.
God's love lasts forever.**

Every year at Passover, the people of God remembered when their ancestors, their great-great-grandfathers and great-great-grandmothers, were slaves in Egypt. They told the story of how God took them out of Egypt and provided for them as they journeyed to a new home.

From north and south, from east and west,
God saved us all from our distress.
God reached out with loving hands
and brought us home from every land.

**Oh give thanks to God, for God is good.
God's love lasts forever.**

Sometimes people would tell stories about times when they had been very sick and had prayed to God.

When we were sick and feeling bad
our bodies ached, we were so sad.
We called aloud, "God, are you there?"
and God reached out with love and care.

**Oh give thanks to God, for God is good.
God's love lasts forever.**

Sometimes the people remembered when they had made mistakes and had forgotten to follow in God's loving ways. They had wondered if God would still love them.

When we forgot God's loving ways
we wondered if God's love would stay.
Then God's love came and held us tight
as God reached out to make things right.

**Oh give thanks to God, for God is good.
God's love lasts forever.**

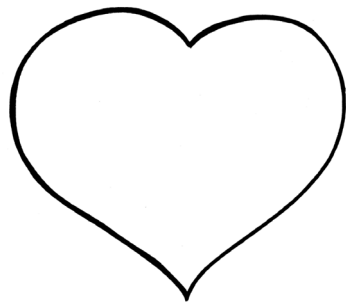
The people knew that no matter what happened
God would always keep on loving them.

No matter what, no matter where,
we always know God's love is there.
We'll tell the world what God has done
and share God's love with everyone.

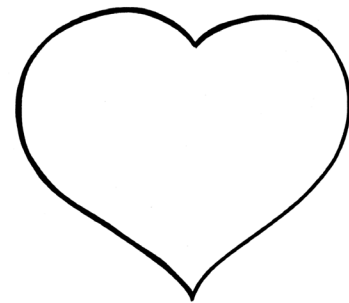
**Oh give thanks to God, for God is good.
God's love lasts forever.**



Heart Bookmarks



**No matter
what
happens
God keeps
on loving
us.**



**No matter
what
happens
God keeps
on loving
us.**



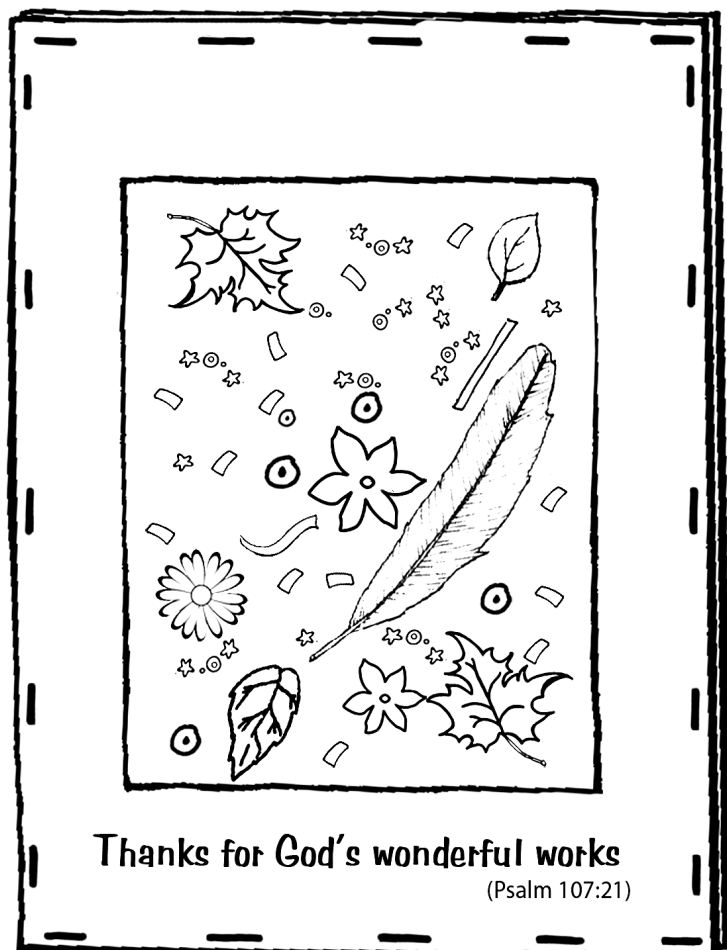
Thanksgiving Window

For each window:

- ☐ 2 sheets of clear adhesive contact paper (20 x 30 cm/8.5 x 11 in) or 1 large sheet that can be folded in half
- ☐ pressed flowers or petals, leaves, grasses, feathers, glitter, tissue paper, confetti, ribbon, crayon shavings
- ☐ 1 sheet of white paper
- ☐ 1 card stock frame (same size as contact paper)
- ☐ stapler and staples

Instructions

1. Choose a variety of items and practice arranging them in a design on a sheet of white paper.
2. Lay out one page of contact paper, sticky side up, and carefully transfer the items, recreating the chosen design in the middle of the sticky paper, leaving room on the edges for the frame.
3. Carefully lay a second sheet of contact paper sticky side down over the first sheet to seal the items together.
4. Staple a cardstock frame around the edges to create a "window."
5. Choose a phrase or verse from Psalm 107 (such as, "God's wonderful works") and write it around the frame.
6. Tape the "window" in a sunny window at home, so light will shine through, reminding you to give thanks for the light of God's love in your life.



Rituals for Lent

Lenten rainbow pathway

Create a pathway of “stepping stones” using large circles cut from coloured construction paper: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Cut several circles of each colour to make the pathway connect from the doorway of your meeting space to the worship area. During Lent the children will follow this rainbow path of stepping stones to gather in the worship space during the opening ritual each week.

Gathering prayers

Choose two volunteers to read the opening prayer each week: one will light the candle and the other will place an object (symbolizing the focus scripture theme) beside the candle. These symbols can remain in the worship space with all five displayed on the fifth Sunday. There are only five prayers included on this page because there will be a special all-ages gathering on Palm/Passion Sunday.

Gathering song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**

Every day. **Every day.**

God will always love us. **God will always love us.**

Thank you, God. **Thank you, God.**

Blessing song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

May God bless you. **May God bless you.**

Keep you safe. **Keep you safe.**

May God’s love surround you.

May God’s love surround you.

Go in peace. **Go in peace.**

Lent 1

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this first Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for the rainbow which is a sign of God’s love.
(*Place a rainbow-coloured object beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 2

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this second Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for all the stars in the sky that remind us of God’s love. (*Place a star beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 3

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this third Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”

for all the wonderful things in creation. (*Place an object from nature beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 4

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this fourth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for giving us hope when times are hard. (*Place a stone beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 5

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this fifth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for your love that is deep in our hearts. (*Place a heart beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

