

# A Heart for God

This week's readings focus on God's desire for our hearts to be full of love. The prophet Jeremiah speaks God's words of forgiveness; God forgives the people's sins and seeks to fill their hearts with love. One psalmist seeks to be in right relationship with God, and another wonders how to keep God's word close to the heart. We hear how Jesus is in a loving relationship with us, a love shown through his way of being.

## Focus scripture: Jeremiah 31:31–34

Jeremiah 31:31–34 brings us yet another covenant. It is different from the covenant made with the people who had escaped slavery in Egypt and wandered in the wilderness. God's earlier covenant with the people had included the ten commandments – laws for living together in loving community. The people, however, struggled to keep these laws; they did not hold up their end of the covenantal relationship. But God remains faithful, forgives and gives a new way of living together. In forgiving the people for what happened in the past, God also promises not to keep bringing up past sins. That is, future generations will not be reminded of the sins of their ancestors. It is a new beginning.

This time, God's law will dwell in their very being. The heart, for the Hebrew people, was the place from which a person thought, felt, and acted.

**Psalms 51:1–12** is from a person seeking to purify their heart. The writer is sorry for past sin, is upset about its effects and feels inadequate. They beg God for mercy and compassion. The psalm notes the importance of naming one's guilt or sin and then seeking to be in right relationship.

**Psalms 119:9–16** also notes the challenge of staying "pure" in the world and the challenge of following God's word. It, too, describes how to keep God's word close to one's heart. This psalmist seeks God with their whole heart as a part of committing to God to be in a deeper relationship.

**Hebrews 5:5–10** focuses on Jesus' relationship with us, and casts Jesus as a high priest. The role of a high priest is to mediate and mend people's relationship with God. Jesus intercedes and mends our relationship with God, in part because of his actions on the cross. Melchizedek was a "priest of God most high," the king of Salem and a king of peace who blesses Abram (Genesis 14:17–24). Jesus, as Messiah or high priest, did not come from the tribe of Levi. Knowing this, the author makes a comparison to an alternate priesthood, through Melchizedek. As a "priest," Jesus had empathy and shared experiences with people. He achieved this, in part, through suffering.

Caution is needed with this passage. Although Christ suffers and named as perfect, this is not necessarily an obligation for Christians today: An emphasis on suffering to be made perfect may cause harm.

**John 12:20–23** In this last public dialogue, Jesus speaks about his imminent suffering and death. He is at the Jewish religious festival Passover. The reading begins with Greeks who ask to see Jesus. By now, many had heard of Jesus' miracles, and the Greeks wanted an encounter with him. In his response to their question, Jesus prepares his disciples for what is to come. He speaks about his death and what it means to follow. Talking about the hour that is coming, Jesus foreshadows both his death and resurrection.

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As we near the end of this Lenten season, how might your heart be filled with love for God?



**Focus scripture**  
**Jeremiah 31:**  
**31–34**

**Additional scriptures**  
**Psalms 51:1–12 or**  
**Psalms 119:9–16**  
**Hebrews 5:5–10**  
**John 12:20–23**

**God of love, fill our hearts with your spirit so we may draw closer to you. May we follow in Jesus' way and be inspired by our encounters with Christ to share your love in the world. Amen.**

## Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on the link.

## The Focus for Ages 3–5

Children in this age group are usually very interested in their bodies. As they gain more dexterity and balance, they begin to explore their physical skills and abilities. They are probably aware of how their breathing and heart rate increases with exertion. Today's focus passage introduces the image of a heart, but as a metaphor. The challenge for leaders is that three- to five-year-olds are in the concrete thinking stage of their lives and their use and understanding of words is literal.

Jeremiah tells the people that God is determined that God's word will from now on be "written on their hearts." The response is not to dwell on the expression of the metaphor but to explore the process of learning something so thoroughly that it becomes

known to us in the deepest part of ourselves in a way that it can never be forgotten or ignored. In this week's time with the children, try to engage in conversations that will lead them to talk together about those important things that we keep deep within us – things like God's message of love. Pray that children will continue to grow more deeply into the truth of God's presence in their whole beings.

**Note:** The sessions for the next two weeks are designed for all ages to come together to explore the events of Holy Week (March 28) and the story of Easter (April 4). If you will not be meeting with your group of children for the next two weeks, consider looking ahead to Palm/Passion Sunday during the Lenten calendar ritual.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Jeremiah 31:31–34, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 27).
- ❑ Set a worship space with purple cloth, purple candle, matches, offering basket, Bible with the purple, blue, green, and yellow bookmarks from past weeks, and an orange bookmark placed in this week's focus passage from Jeremiah.
- ❑ 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](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring "Gathering Song" (on resource sheet ["Additional Songs,"](#) p. 89) or song, "Thank God" (p. 28, *SGF Songbook*; #18, *SGF Music CD*).
- ❑ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2) and a stethoscope, if possible.

### Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet ["Love Deep Inside"](#) and heart stickers (one per child)

- ❑ Bring large [paper heart](#) (see pattern p. 90).
- ❑ 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.

- ❑ **Paper doll:** this week's resource sheet ["Paper Doll,"](#) card stock, yarn; make copies of the resource sheet on card stock or heavier stock paper, cut out a set for each child and place each set in an envelope.
- ❑ **Heart prints:** finger paints, large heart-shaped pieces of white paper, metal baking trays or plastic serving trays (one per child), paint smocks; print "God's love is in my heart" on each paper shape.
- ❑ **Heart shapes:** play dough (see recipe in [Virtual Resource Booklet](#) in Library on [Seasons website](#)), heart-shaped cutters

### Bless

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



# A Heart for God

## Scripture

Jeremiah  
31:31–34

**FOCUS** To wonder about the deep love of God in our hearts

## Gather

**Welcome** each child by name.

### Opening ritual

**Gather** around the worship space and remind children that we are in the Season of Lent and that 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** Loving God,  
your love is all around us.  
Thank you for the people who love us.  
Thank you that we can share love too.  
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. I’ve just been running and my heart is beating really quickly. I can feel it through my whole body!

**Leader:** Wow! I think that you had better sit still for a few minutes and let your heartbeat slow down. You know, Priscilla, our heart is a very important part of our body. Our heart keeps us going. It keeps us living. And it keeps us loving.

**Priscilla:** I know that when I am happy in my heart I also feel it in my whole body!

**Leader:** Yes, and when we are sad in our hearts we will also feel it in our whole body.

**Priscilla:** Let’s feel with our whole body now! (*Encourage children to jump up and down many times and then sit down again.*) What do you feel? (*Encourage children to describe how their whole body feels.*)

**Leader:** Today we are going to hear about a message of love that God wanted to put deep inside. (*Say goodbye to Priscilla.*)

- ☐ **Listening to our heart** Invite children to take turns listening to their heart with a stethoscope. If this is not possible, have the children jump up and down many times and then have them feel how their heart is beating. Can they feel it through their whole bodies? Talk about the importance of the heart and how it keeps us living and keeps us loving.

## Engage

### Before the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the orange bookmark to open it to the book of Jeremiah. Explain that Jeremiah was a prophet who listened to God and then told the

people what God wanted them to do. Show the purple, blue, green, and yellow bookmarks from previous weeks’ stories and then return to the orange bookmark for this week’s focus passage. Use the resource sheet “[Love Deep Inside](#)” to tell

the story based on **Jeremiah 31:31–34**. At the end of the story distribute heart stickers and invite children to place these over their hearts.

### After the story

Mention that God's love is shining all around us, like the bright colours of a rainbow. And God's love is also deep inside, filling our whole body with love.

**Lenten calendar** Lent is a special time to remember God's wonderful promises to us. Invite children to gather around the Lenten calendar. Remind group that we have been counting the days through Lent by placing stones on the pathway. Have children place stones on numbers 23–28. Read aloud the phrase beside the illustration for March 18. (If you will not be meeting as a group next week, you might want to look ahead to Palm/Passion Sunday.)

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

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## Respond

Choose from the following activities:

- ❑ **Paper dolls** God's love is deep inside every one. Distribute the envelopes with the figures. Read the phrase on the heart: "God is with me." Invite children to draw in facial features and add yarn hair to their figures. Have them decorate the clothing and dress their dolls. Talk about how the heart is still inside on the paper doll, even when we can't see it, and God's love is always deep inside us too.
- ❑ **Heart prints** Jeremiah reminded the people that God's love would always be deep inside them. Invite children to make heart prints as reminders of God's love. Give each child a tray and a paint smock. Place several colours of finger paint on each tray and encourage chil-



dren to swirl the paint with their fingers. Then help them press a paper heart shape onto the swirled design and lay flat to dry. Read aloud the phrase on the hearts: "God's love is in my heart."

- ❑ **Heart shapes** God loves us, will always love us, and will always be with us. Distribute some play dough to each child. Encourage them to think of God's wonderful love as they play with the play dough for a while. Then help them use the heart cutters to make heart shapes. Or they might want to mould their play dough into a heart shape with their hands. Have them take these hearts home as reminders that God's love is always in their hearts.

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## Bless

**Gather** in the worship space and light the candle again.

**Pray** Dear God, thank you for all the love you have for us.  
Help us to always feel your love deep inside and all around. Amen.

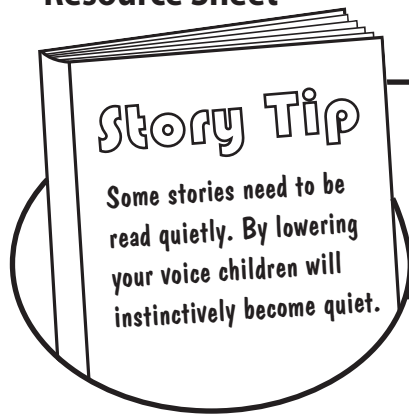
**Sing** the "[Leaving Song](#)" (on p. 89).

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

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## Reflect

In what ways have you helped the children know that they belong to God? If possible, send a postcard with a heart sticker or drawing on it to each child as a reminder that God loves and cares for them.



# Love Deep Inside

(based on Jeremiah 31:31–34)

God was worried. The people were forgetting how to live in loving ways. “They need my love and help,” God thought. And so God called Jeremiah. Jeremiah would be God’s messenger.

“Jeremiah,” God called. “I am going to make a new promise. I want you to take this message to my people. Listen carefully.”

And then God told Jeremiah what to say: “I promise that my people will know me so well that they will never forget me. I will give them a heart that helps them know how I want them to be with each other. Deep down they will know my loving ways.”

Jeremiah listened to God. Then Jeremiah talked to the people. Soon the people began to listen. Soon the people began to know God’s promise. And whenever the people wondered about God’s way, and about what choices they should make, they would wait and listen.

*(Place both hands over your heart and encourage children to do the same. Use a quiet voice).* They would wait and listen deep inside. Deep down and all around they would feel God with them, helping them to make good choices. With their whole body they would feel God’s way.





# Paper Doll



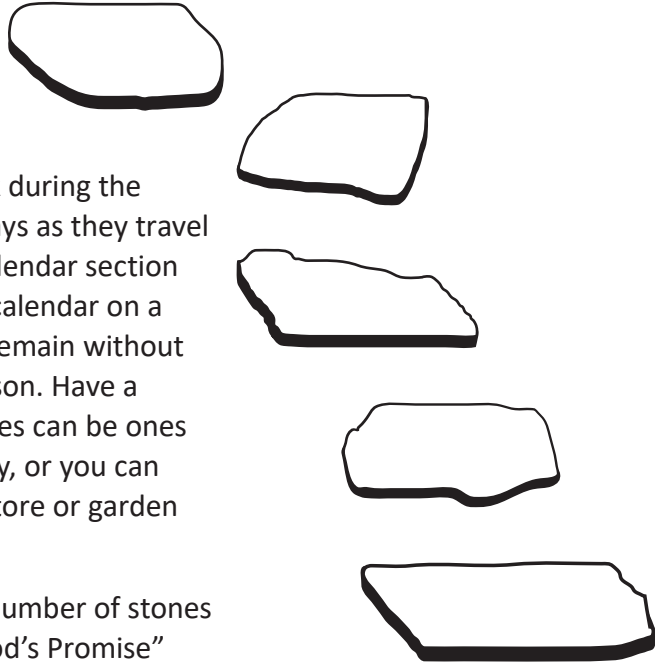
# Storytelling Resources

## 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.



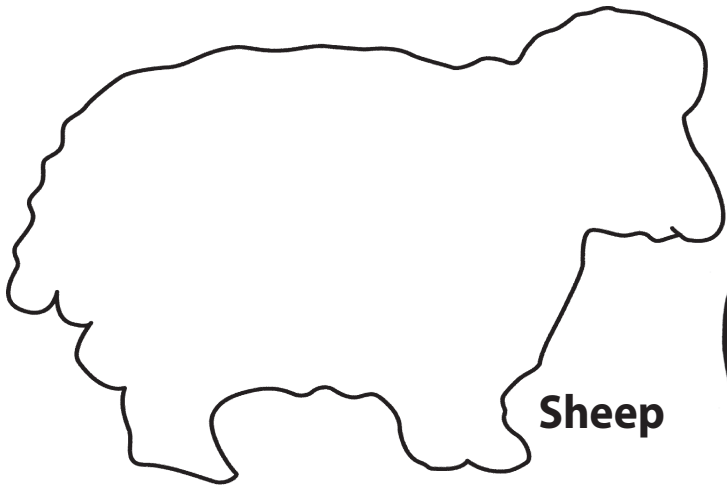
### Love

Open hands  
are crossed  
and pressed  
to the left.

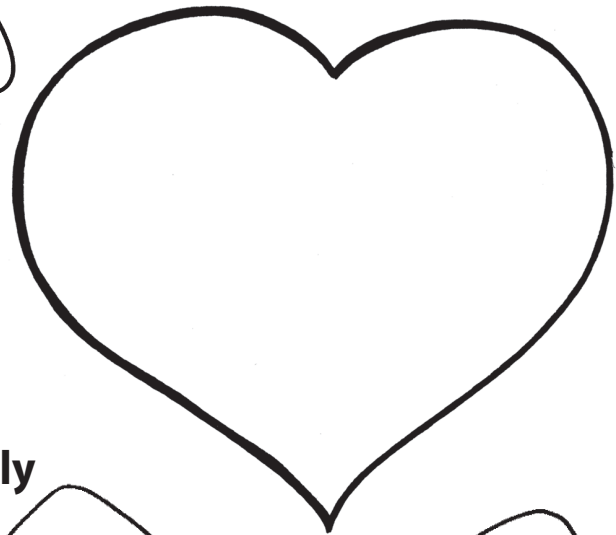




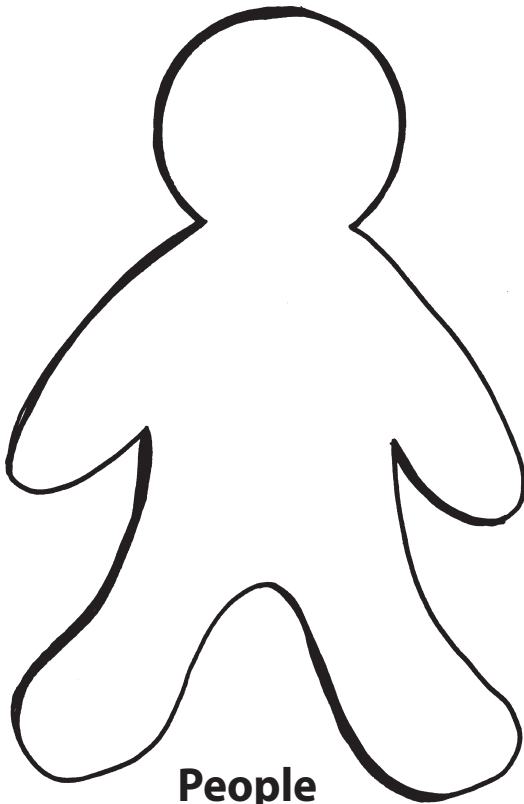
# Patterns



**Sheep**

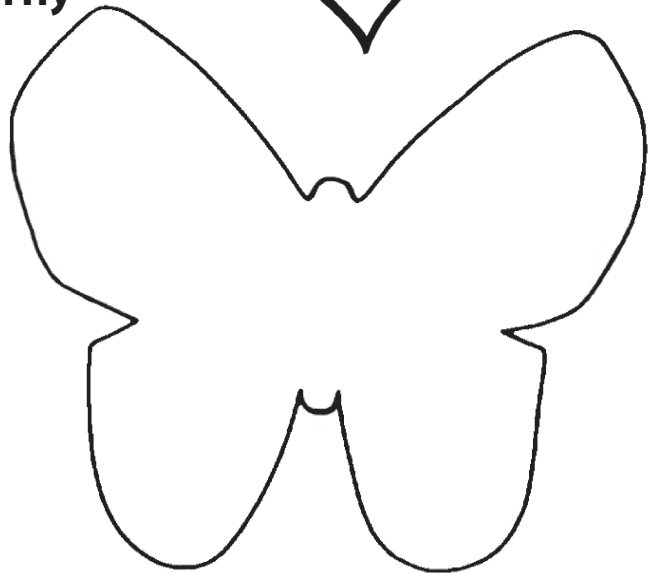


**Heart**



**People**

**Butterfly**



**God knows me**

**Stars**

