

KIDS *of*
INTEGRITY

Joy



Create crazy hairstyles, play a zany balloon game, host a wedding ceremony or hear “the Prodigal Son” as you’ve never heard it before!

Choose your favourite activity ideas to help your kids:

- recognize that joy isn’t found in possessions, activities or other people
- find joy in God’s goodness, presence, protection and sovereignty
- be joyful in all circumstances.

This lesson also helps address anxiety, a negative outlook, dissatisfaction and over-reacting to minor issues.

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Parents’ prayer

Despite our best efforts to nurture an attitude of joyfulness in our children, only God can bring about lasting change in a child’s heart. Before you begin leading your children through this study on joy, spend time alone with God interceding for His help.

You can use the sample prayer below. Or, if you prefer, you can build your own prayer using the verses provided under “Scripture-guided prayer.”

Sample prayer

Lord, You make me glad by Your works O Lord. You give me so many reasons to sing for joy! (Psalm 92:4) You have made known Your salvation and shown Your righteousness to all nations (Psalm 98:2). I come before You with thanksgiving and praise because You, the Lord, are the great King above all gods. In Your hands are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to You. The sea is Yours for You made it, and Your hands formed the dry land. I bow down in worship before You, my Lord and Maker. With You as my God, I can rest in comfort, knowing I am one of the flock under Your care (Psalm 95:1-7). What joy there is in knowing that You hear my cry for mercy and respond as my strength and shield. As I trust in You, please give me a heart that leaps with joy as I give You thanks (Psalm 28:6-7). You reign in my heart and over all the earth – I need no other reason to rejoice.

As I read in Your Word that I am to be joyful always, to pray continually and to give thanks in all circumstances, I am reminded that too often my outlook becomes negative and I forget to pray and be thankful (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). When Satan tries to steal my joy by infecting my heart with pessimism, self-pity or anxiety, please remind me that I can turn to You and Your love will bring me consolation and restore joy to my soul (Psalm 94:18-19). Please make me glad and remind me to delight in the joy of Your presence, despite the constancy of life’s demands (Psalm 21:6). I want to be fully aware of my eternal blessings so I can choose joy in my everyday duties of _____ (list some never-ending tasks such as going to the office every day, picking up things left behind by others, preparing food that is inhaled and gone in moments, attending to the call “Mom!” or “Dad!” again and

again). More significantly, when I am immersed in painful or difficult circumstances, please send Your Holy Spirit to give a deep sense of Your presence, to bring peace to my soul even though there is turmoil in my mind and heart.

It excites me to pray for joy for my children, _____ and _____. Please shower them with the joy of Your presence as they read Your Word and follow You along the path of life You lead them on (Psalm 16:11, Psalm 19:8, Psalm 119:111). When they are frightened, please assure them that those who love You can rejoice in Your protection (Psalm 5:6-12). If sin causes distance between You and my children, please send Your Holy Spirit to teach them that there is great joy in repenting and restoring a right relationship with You (Psalm 51:8,12). Praying through this myriad of ways for _____ and _____ to experience the joy of knowing You reminds me of how I feel on Christmas Eve when I fill their stockings. My prayer is that they will embrace You with the same kind of unbridled enthusiasm with which they approach their Christmas treasures.

Now, as I pray for our family, I ask that we will understand that our faith is of far greater worth than gold. As life's trials refine us, I pray that our faith will be proved genuine and that others will see in us an inexpressible and glorious joy that results in praise, glory and honour for You. Though we have not seen You, we love You and thank You that we are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:7-9). Amen.

Scripture-guided prayer for parents

Read and pray through one or more of the selected Scriptures under each heading. Focus on listening to God and allowing His Spirit to direct you as you pray.

Character focus

Begin by thanking God for giving you joy through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Psalm 66:1-5 | Psalm 97:1-6 | Isaiah 12:1-6 | John 15:9-11 | Hebrews 12:2-3

Heart search

Acknowledge the areas in your life where you are lacking joy or peace.

Psalm 51:7-9,10-12 | Psalm 139:23-24 | Luke 12:22-30 | Philippians 4:6-7 | 1 Peter 5:6-9

Gratitude

Thank God for ways you have seen your family members rejoicing, even in difficulties.

Family requests

Ask God to help you and your children live joyfully in good times as well as in hard times.

Psalm 4:6-8 | Psalm 5:11-12 | Psalm 94:18-19 | John 16:24 | Romans 15:13

Kids talk with God

Use this section to help your children learn to reach out to God in all things. These sample prayers all begin with "Dear God," however, you may use any other names for God your children are comfortable with (i.e. Jesus, Father God, Lord Jesus, Heavenly Father, Abba Father, Lord).

If your children are ready to pray original prayers, you may wish to use the Bible verses provided under "Scripture-guided prayer for children."

Sample prayers

Dear God, I don't feel like being joyful right now. I need Your Holy Spirit to help me. Amen.

Dear God, knowing that You protect me gives me joy (Psalm 5:11). Amen.

Dear God, thank You for loving me and sending Jesus to set me free. Amen.

Dear God, Your ways are right and they give me joy in my heart (Psalm 19:8). Amen.

Dear God, can You please send Your Holy Spirit to help me choose to be joyful right now? Amen.

Dear God, please remind me that You are always in control. Amen.

Scripture-guided prayer for children

Read through one of the selected Scriptures under each heading and help your children pray based on the verse you read. Encourage them to listen to God and allow His Spirit to guide them as they pray.

Character focus

Begin by thanking God for giving you joy.
Psalm 65:8 | Psalm 92:4 | Isaiah 12:2-4

Heart search

Acknowledge when and how you have trouble being joyful.

Psalm 51:10,12 | Psalm 139:23 | 1 Peter 5:7

Gratitude

Thank God for times when you and your family members have been full of joy, even when life has been hard.

Personal requests

Ask God to help you, your siblings and parents to be joyful in good times and in hard times.

Psalm 5:11 | Psalm 119:14 | John 16:24

Speak a blessing

Your affirmation will give tremendous encouragement to your children as they strive to be more joyful. Use this section as a reminder to “speak a blessing” when you see evidence of this godly characteristic.

- _____, you are a joy to be around. You are _____ (kind, respectful, generous, cheerful, loving, etc.).
- Tell your child that he/she is a blessing from God to you, his/her parents (Psalm 127:3). You can also tell the story of how and when they were born and how you picked their name. Show them pictures and then explain how much joy they have brought to you and your spouse.
- Thank you for choosing to be joyful, even though things didn’t go your way today, _____.
- What a joyful smile you have, _____.

- You have chosen to be joyful, _____. I’m proud of you.
 - _____, because you have loved righteousness, the Bible says that God will give you joy (Hebrews 1:9).
 - Your joy is contagious. When you are joyful, I feel like being joyful too!
-

Memory verses

Memorizing Scripture with your children helps God’s Spirit bring about lasting change. Choose a verse that your children can learn in a pre-determined period of time and aim to review the verse at least once every day.

Nehemiah 8:10b “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Psalm 5:11 “But let all who take refuge in You be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You.”

Psalm 28:7 “The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart leaps for joy and with my song I praise Him.”

Psalm 45:7 “You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy.”

Psalm 47:1 “Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.”

Psalm 65:8 “The whole earth is filled with awe at Your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, You call forth songs of joy.”

Psalm 66:1 “Shout for joy to God, all the earth!”

Psalm 67:4 “May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth.”

Psalm 68:3 “But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful”

Psalm 70:4 “But may all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; may those who long for Your saving help always say, ‘The Lord is great!’ ”

Psalm 71:23 “My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to You – I whom You have redeemed.”

Psalm 81:1 “Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob!”

Psalm 90:14 “Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.”

Psalm 92:4 “For You make me glad by Your deeds, Lord; I sing for joy at what Your hands have done.”

Psalm 94:19 “When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought me joy .”

Psalm 95:1 “Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.”

Psalm 119:14 “I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.”

Psalm 119:111 “Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.”

Acts 13:52 “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Philippians 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Kick-off craft

In this kick-off craft, you’ll help your children make a joy seekers shadow box and an optional accompanying spyglass. The shadow box illustrates our tendency to look for joy in all the wrong places. Four small compartments in the shadow box will contain items illustrating wrong places to find joy. The largest compartment will house Jesus as a baby in a manger scene as a reminder that true joy can only be found in Jesus.

Joy seekers shadow box Directions

You will need the following supplies:

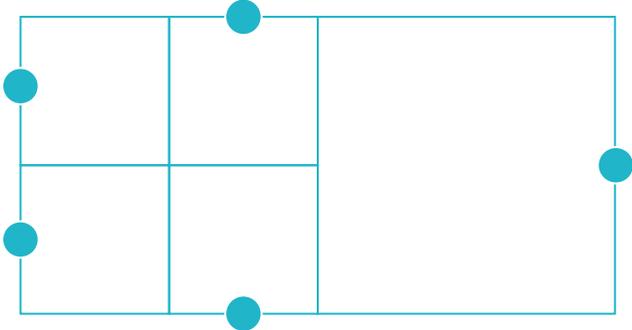
- a craft knife or scissors
- a shoebox (with a lid)
- a cereal box (to make cardboard dividers)
- a small carton or box (to serve as a “manger”)
- four ice pop sticks
- a glue gun or tape
- a tiny doll or figure wrapped in white cloth or a napkin
- some yellow construction paper and/or tissue paper
- various trinkets from around your home
- toilet paper tubes (optional).

Before enlisting your children’s help, prepare the shoebox to serve as your shadow box. This will involve cutting dividing walls from the cereal box and assembling them in the shoebox, then cutting peepholes into different sections of the shoebox. The diagram below shows a suggested final arrangement for the dividing walls and peepholes.

- 1** First, cut a cardboard dividing wall to size and glue it across the middle of the shoebox, dividing the shoebox into two halves. Next, add more walls to divide one of the shoebox halves into

quarters, as pictured above. The other half of the box does not require dividers.

- Each one of the sections you have made will need a viewing peephole. Cut the holes approximately 2.5 cm (1 inch) in diameter, using a craft knife or scissors. (If you don't have time



to make a shoebox with dividers, just use two separate shoeboxes – one to contain the manger scene and the other to contain an assortment of items.)

- Ask your children to help you find items representing things people turn to find joy – things such as money, food, entertainment or material possessions. Food could be represented by a chocolate bar or candy; entertainment could be represented by a toy car (because people often think that being busy, going places and doing things can make them happy); material possessions might be represented by a small toy; money could be represented by some coins or bills. As you collect the items to add to your shadow box, use discussion questions one to seven (below) to guide your conversation.

- In the largest section of the shadow box you will create a manger scene centred on Jesus. To build the manger, attach two ice pop sticks in the shape of an “X” to each end of a small carton or box. (One end section cut from a macaroni and cheese box is about the right size.) Have your children shred or cut strips of yellow paper to make straw, then fill the manger and the large compartment of the shadow box with your straw. Find a small figure to wrap in a white napkin to represent baby Jesus. If you have suitable figures available, you may also wish

to add Mary and Joseph to the manger scene, along with small farm animals. While you work on the manger scene, use question eight (below) to help explain that true joy comes through having a friendship with Jesus and through reading and following God's Word.

- Write a memory verse of your choice on the outside of the shadow box.
- When your shadow box is complete, secure the lid on the top and take turns peeking in the holes “looking for joy.” Make a game of looking in the “wrong” places and finally finding joy when you look to Jesus. Phrases you could use to reinforce the lesson include, “Money might make me happy, but true joy is found in Jesus;” “Toys might make me happy for a while, but lasting joy is found in Jesus;” “Food might bring happiness for a few minutes, but Jesus makes me joyful all day, every day.”
- For children who like to be active, have them decorate a toilet paper tube as a pretend spyglass. Encourage them to look for joy all over the house and then return to the shadow box to look for joy in the “right” place.

Each day, read one of the verses from below that talk about experiencing joy in knowing God. Then have your children select one item to add to the manger scene that will remind them where they can find true joy.

Questions for discussion

- What makes you happy?
- What is the difference between being happy and being joyful?
- People often say they are “looking for happiness” or “searching for joy.” Where do most people look?
- How would you feel if you were on your way to meet friends for a play day at the beach?
- Would your feelings change if it started to pour with rain?

- What would you say or do if your parents suggested that you spend the day with your friends at a museum instead?
- How could you choose to be joyful about the change of plans?
- What does the Bible say about how we can find joy?

Key concepts

We generally feel happy when things are going the way we want or when we are doing an enjoyable activity. When people say they are feeling happy they are often looking forward to having fun, or they have recently experienced something pleasurable like eating a treat, playing with friends or going somewhere exciting. Joy and happiness are not the same. Happiness is a feeling, but joy is a way of thinking or looking at life. Happiness is an emotion or something we experience; joy is an attitude or a mindset we choose to have in all circumstances, good or bad, because we trust that God loves us and is always with us.

Here's an example of the difference between happiness and joy: We might feel happy heading out to spend a day at the beach with friends. If it unexpectedly begins to rain, the feelings of happiness would likely turn to disappointment. Imagine if the adults agreed to visit a museum and have an indoor picnic instead. A child who decides to make the best of the day and enjoy the exhibits is choosing to look beyond the circumstances and to be joyful. On the other hand, if a child pouts all day due to the change in plans, he or she is choosing to be dissatisfied.

It is easier to choose joy when our attitude is influenced by our relationship with Jesus. The Bible teaches us that joy is found in the forgiveness of our sin, obeying God's Word, being in God's presence and in knowing that we will be with Him in heaven someday. All these things are possible because of Jesus (Romans 5:10-11). The world teaches us that happiness is found in having lots of money or possessions, in being well liked by others, in doing fun and exciting things, and enjoying good food and entertainment. The Bible teaches us that a

belief in God changes the way we look at everyday situations, because it helps us understand what is truly important in life.

Relevant Scripture

Verses about finding joy in reading God's Word and obeying it:

Psalm 68:3 "But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful."

Psalm 19:8 "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

Psalm 97:11 "Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart."

Psalm 119:14 "I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches."

Psalm 119:111 "Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart."

John 15:9-11 "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

God's promises that we will find joy in our relationship with Him:

Psalm 5:11 "But let all who take refuge in You be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You."

Psalm 16:11 "You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand."

Psalm 28:7 "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him."

Psalm 70:4 “But may all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; may those who long for Your salvation always say, “The Lord is great!”

Psalm 90:14 “Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.”

John 15:9-11 “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

1 Peter 1:8-9 “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Bible stories

This section provides Bible stories with the theme of joy, along with questions that can be used as a guide for family discussions. Choose one story that is appropriate for your child. Before reading aloud, take a few minutes to review the story. If the Bible passage is too complex for your child, paraphrase the story yourself or use the summary provided under “key concepts.”

Rejoicing in salvation

Read Acts 8:26-40.

Questions for discussion

1. If an angel came to your house and told you to go somewhere, would you go?
2. What did the angel tell Philip to do?
3. What was the Ethiopian reading as he travelled along the road to Jerusalem?
4. Who did God send to help this man understand what Isaiah wrote?
5. What did Philip ask the Ethiopian?

6. What did the Ethiopian ask Philip?
7. It says that Philip told him the good news about Jesus. What do you think Philip said?
8. After Philip told the Ethiopian about Jesus, what did the Ethiopian ask?
9. After the Ethiopian was baptized, what did he do?

Key concepts

An angel of the Lord told Philip that he was to go on the road south of Jerusalem, toward Gaza. Philip was obedient and he went. Along the way he came across a man in a chariot who was reading the book of Isaiah. God’s Spirit instructed Philip to stay near the man’s chariot. The man who was travelling was an important official from the country of Ethiopia. When Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, the Ethiopian said, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” and he invited Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:31). Philip explained what the book of Isaiah meant and told the Ethiopian the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:34).

The good news Philip explained is that, because of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven and we can have eternal life in heaven with Him. (*For a more detailed explanation of what salvation means, see the parable of the lost sheep in the **Bible stories** section of the lesson on **forgiveness**.)* As soon as the Ethiopian heard the good news, he wanted to become a follower of Jesus and be baptized. After Philip baptized the Ethiopian, the Bible says the man went on his way rejoicing! Knowing that we are God’s children and our sins are forgiven, and that someday we will go to heaven to be with God, is a very good reason to be joyful!

Relevant Scripture

Isaiah 25:9 “In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and He saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.’ ”

Romans 5:10-11 “For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Not only is this so, but

we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

There is a joyful celebration in heaven!

Read Luke 15:8-10 and Psalm 32:1-5,11.

Questions for discussion

1. Have you ever lost something that you value?
2. What did you do?
3. How many coins did the woman in the story have?
4. Why do you think she cared about losing one coin if she still had nine others?
5. Why did Jesus tell this story?
6. What happens in heaven when a person repents of their sin?
7. How did David describe the way he felt when he “kept quiet” about his sin?
8. How do you feel when you know you have done something wrong?
9. When you are obeying your parents, how do you feel?
10. What does David say at the end of Psalm 32?

Key concepts

Jesus told a story of a woman who had ten silver coins. When the woman lost one of the ten coins she lit a lamp, swept the entire house and searched diligently until she found the lost coin. Upon finding it, she called friends and neighbours to celebrate with her. Jesus said, “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

This story was told to teach people how much joy there is in heaven when one person asks God to forgive their sins. As much as sin causes God pain (Genesis 6:5-6), repentance brings Him joy. Not only does repentance make God happy, it also brings a great sense of freedom to the person who repents. In

Psalm 32, David talks about how awful he felt when he was quiet about his sin and what great relief he felt when he confessed his sin.

Relevant Scripture

Genesis 6:5-6 “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that He had made human beings on the earth, and His heart was deeply troubled.”

Looking for joy in all the wrong places

Read Luke 15:11-31. If your children have heard the story of the prodigal son many times, see the alternative version below.

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think the son wanted to leave home?
2. Where did he go looking for joy?
3. How do you think the father felt when his son left home?
4. Did the son find joy in spending money and living wildly?
5. Where did he finally decide to go?
6. Why did the father have a big party for his son when he finally came home?
7. Why do you think Jesus told this story?
8. What do you think will bring you joy?
9. Where is the best place to look for joy?

Key concepts

Jesus told a story about a son who wanted his share of the family property so he could go and live on his own. This son thought that he would be happier living away from home and doing his own thing. The Bible tells us that he went to a foreign country and spent his money on wild living. Eventually, when he ran out of money, he had to get a job feeding pigs. He ended up being so hungry that he wished

he could eat the pigs' food. He began to think that living at home might not be so bad after all. At last, he did return home. He humbly apologized and said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21). His father welcomed him with hugs and kisses and had a big feast.

Jesus told this story to illustrate how much God loves people and how readily He forgives those who confess their wrongdoing. The life lesson we can learn from this story is that as long as we go looking for joy and satisfaction anywhere other than God, we will never be satisfied.

Alternative retelling of "the prodigal son"

There was once a little boy who went to the fair with his family. At first he was very excited. But as the day wore on, he became more and more unhappy with the way his parents were "controlling" how the family spent their money at the fair. In anger, he asked if he could have all the money they planned to spend on him that day. He wanted to hold it and decide when and how to spend it.

Once his parents had given him the money, the boy he ran off to spend it as he wished. He gorged himself on mini-donuts and went on lots of rides. Just as his money ran out, he started to feel ill. Suddenly he felt very alone and scared. The fair wasn't fun at all with no family around and no more money to spend. Finally, a gruff midway worker offered him a job cleaning up the vomit on one of the rides and picking up garbage. At this point, the boy decided that spending the remainder of the day with his parents, even though he would have no more treats or rides, would be far better than working on the midway. He searched and searched until he found his mother and father. They were overjoyed to see him. Can you guess how they celebrated his return?*

** This may sound harsh and gross, but feeding pigs was the worst of jobs in Bible times.*

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 70:4 "But may all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; may those who long for Your saving help always say, 'The Lord is great!'"

Psalm 90:14 "Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days."

John 15:9-11 "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

1 Peter 1:8-9 "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Rejoicing in difficulty

Read Acts 16:16-34.

Questions for discussion

1. What is fortune telling?
2. How did the owners of the slave girl make money?
3. Was it God's Spirit that allowed the girl to predict the future?
4. What did the girl say about Paul and Silas?
5. How did Paul make the spirit leave the girl?
6. Why were the owners of the slave girl mad?
7. What did the owners of the slave girl accuse Paul and Silas of doing?
8. How were Paul and Silas punished?
9. What did they do when they were in prison?
10. Why did the jailer decide to become a follower of Jesus?
11. When the jailer and his whole family came to believe in God, what were they filled with?

Key concepts

In Paul's time, there was a slave girl who had a spirit in her which allowed her to predict the future. Her special ability to "tell fortunes" made a lot of money for her owners. For many days this girl followed Paul and Silas and called out, "These men are servants of the Most High God" (Acts 16:17). Paul was bothered by this and finally said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!" (Acts 16:18). Immediately the spirit left the girl!

The owners of the slave girl were angry when they saw that they would no longer be able to make money from her fortune-telling. They took Paul and Silas to their community judges and accused them of causing trouble. As a result, Paul and Silas were severely beaten and put in prison.

Later that night, when Paul and Silas were singing and praising God, an earthquake came and shook the prison, allowing the prisoners to escape. The jailer was so upset, he was about to kill himself. But Paul and Silas stopped him and told him that none of the prisoners had run away. The jailer was so impressed with Paul and Silas that he decided to become a follower of Jesus too, and asked them what he needed to do to be saved. Paul and Silas told him that he needed to believe in the Lord Jesus. The jailer took them to his own home and Paul and Silas told the jailer's whole family about Jesus. The Bible tells us that the jailer was "filled with joy" because he and his whole family had come to believe in God (Acts 16:34).

Relevant Scripture

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The vine with a special secret

Read John 15:4-13, 16-17, and Galatians 5:22-23.

Questions for discussion

1. How do tree branches get food and water?

2. What happens to a branch that gets broken off a tree?
3. How are we like branches?
4. Who is like the vine?
5. How can we "remain" in God's love?
6. Can you list the fruit of the Spirit?
7. How is love connected to joy?

Key concepts

Just as a branch needs to stay connected to the tree trunk or vine in order to grow leaves and bear fruit, God tells us to "remain in Him" so that we can "bear fruit." By "fruit," the Bible means that others will be able to tell that we have God's Spirit living in us because of the things we say and do. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The Bible tells us we can "remain" in God by obeying His commands. When we obey God's commands, His love will be in us and we will experience joy!

Relevant Scripture

Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Joy and strength

Read Mark 15:16-32, Hebrews 12:1-2 and 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Questions for discussion

1. Does life ever seem hard?
2. Is there anything in your life that is painful?
3. Why did Jesus choose to die on the cross?
4. What did Jesus think about to help Him endure the pain?
5. Who can help you be strong and joyful, even when life gets hard?

Key concepts

When Jesus died on the cross it was a very difficult thing to do. It was very painful to have people beat Him, spit on Him and leave Him to die, hanging on a cross. The Bible tells us to “fix our eyes on Jesus” or to look at Jesus as an example when life gets hard.

All athletes experience pain at the end of a race. If a runner focuses on the finish line, it makes it easier to endure the pain of the extreme physical exertion they are experiencing. The “joy” that helped Jesus die on the cross was knowing that His death would allow everyone to experience forgiveness for their sins so that we all can have a close friendship with God.

At times, there may be other children who make fun of you for choosing to follow Jesus and do what is right. These are the times that you can remember that Jesus had people hurt Him too. He helps us feel joyful when things are hard by giving us His Holy Spirit.

Creative discipline

Here are some suggestions to help you coach your children toward a more joyful attitude.

For problems with a negative attitude

Biblical basis

Numbers 13:31-33; 14:23-24,36-38.

Suggested disciplinary action

When your child has a negative attitude, begin by removing the “good thing” that your child complained about. For example, if they are complaining about going swimming, have them sit the session out and watch the others having fun. Essentially, this is what God did with the spies who were negative about the Promised Land. Next, have your child make a list of the blessings they have in their life. Explain that the blessing God wanted to give the Israelites was the Promised Land. When the spies went into the land and reported back that it would be too hard to fight the people living in the land, God was angry. He had promised to give them a wonderful place to live, but they did not trust that He could give them victory over the “giants” living in the land.

Affirmation

Read Psalm 30:10-12 together. Pray with your child and help them ask God’s forgiveness for their negativity. Also ask God to give your child a joyful attitude to replace their attitude of ungratefulness or doubt.

Psalm 30:10-12 “Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me; Lord, be my help. You turned my wailing into dancing; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing Your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise You forever.”

For problems with being joyful despite disappointment

Biblical basis

Habakkuk 3:17-18 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

Suggested disciplinary action

Just as Habakkuk listed all of the problems in his life, have your child tell you and God about all the things that are troubling them. Then encourage your child to pray as Habakkuk did, trusting God to be his/her strength and acknowledging God as awesome and famous because of the things He has done.

Affirmation

Read Habakkuk 3:2a, which says, “Lord, I have heard of Your fame; I stand in awe of Your deeds, Lord.” Follow this by reading Habakkuk 3:19: “The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to tread on the heights.” Pray with your child, thanking God for His power and control. List awesome things that God has done and ask Him to give your child strength to face their problems. You may also choose to read and pray through Psalm 126:1-6 with your child to encourage them to trust God to fill him/her with joy despite the pain of their disappointment.

For problems with complaining

See “short circuit complaints” in the **hands-on options** section of this lesson.

Hands-on options

These ideas require very little preparation, making it easy for you to share some simple but memorable lessons with your children. Read over the options at the beginning of your week and choose one or two that will fit your schedule.

The most wonderful wedding

drama / role play

Gather some fancy clothes or dress-up clothes and help your children plan a pretend wedding. As an alternative, have the children dress up their stuffed animals to be in a wedding party instead. (Boys may be more easily enticed to participate if there will be cake and other goodies after the wedding ceremony.) To provide inspiration, you may want to watch your own wedding video or DVD with your children.

While you are dressing up, talk about how a bride makes herself beautiful for the groom. After the ceremony is over and you are having “wedding cake” (a sweet snack of your choice), read some of the verses listed below. Talk about the most amazing wedding that will ever take place – the wedding that will happen when Jesus returns in person.

Relevant Scripture

Revelation 19:6-9 “Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.) Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ ’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’ ”

Isaiah 61:10 “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

Short circuit complaints

drive time or any time

For this activity, you will need a buzzer. A “That was easy” buzzer from Staples is perfect, but any fun noise maker will do.

Unfortunately, people seem pre-programmed to complain. In our affluent culture, it seems as though people get very accustomed to having things just the way they like them, doing the things they enjoy and eating food they enjoy. What are some of the common reasons for complaining in your home? Is it doing chores? Cleaning up? Eating vegetables? Going somewhere “boring” on errands? In most families, the list goes on and on. This activity helps to change attitudes from negative to joyful, with help from a buzzer. Every time a family member is tempted to complain, have them go and find the buzzer. Once they have thought of one thing to praise God for instead, they get to push the buzzer.

Relevant Scripture

Philippians 2:14-16 “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the Word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.”

1 Timothy 6:6-9 “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.”

Joy in obedience

drive time or any time

Throughout your study on joy, be quick to affirm your children when they are obedient or when they make righteous choices. Let them know that God blesses people who chose righteousness with joy. Explain that when we disobey God we end up feeling guilty and unhappy, but when we obey God’s commandments, we feel free and joyful. Read one of the verses below and bless your child with your words of affirmation or another small reward.

Relevant Scripture

Proverbs 10:28 “The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.”

Psalms 119:13-15 “With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways.”

Rejoicing in the rain

getting into nature

Many people complain when it rains. Even though it is tempting to have a negative mindset on rainy days, it is important to remember that rain is something we should be thankful for, as rain is a gift from God. If there was no rain, eventually everything on earth would die: plants, animals and people. Hopefully you will be privileged to have a rainy day while you are studying joy. Dress warmly, take umbrellas, put on rubber boots and go for a walk in the rain. Thank God for the rain that provides moisture so grass and crops can grow.

Celebrate by splashing in puddles and say this fun little ditty (you may add your own tune to it if you like to sing):

We're dancing and singing and drinking root beer in the rain.

Change it up and use different alphabet sounds. For example, replace the first letter of each word with “M” and try:

We're mancng and mingng and minking moot meer in the main.

Singing any song can add a celebratory atmosphere to your walk.

Relevant Scripture

Joel 2:23 “Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for He has given you the autumn rains because He is faithful. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.”

Acts 14:17b “ . . . He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He

provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.’ ”

Finding joy in nature

getting into nature

The busyness of our lives combined with a separation from nature can cause us to forget that there is incredible joy to be experienced in the quiet, beauty and fascination of nature. The goal of this activity is to create some time and space where you can help your children find awe in God’s creation. Suggestions include watching a summer storm, analyzing snowflakes, viewing a sunrise or a sunset, going for a quiet walk or observing a caterpillar go through metamorphosis.

Summer storm

Cozy up as a family and watch a summer storm from the safety of your living room. It seems as though people have one of two reactions to storms – either fear or fascination. When your children are thoroughly aware that God makes the thunder and lightning, it can be very calming for an otherwise fearful child. To add more excitement or drama, put on some suspense-filled classical music to listen to as you watch the “light show.” Read the verses listed below and thank God that He is in control of all aspects of the wind and weather.

Relevant Scripture

Job 37:2-5,10-12 “Listen! Listen to the roar of His voice, to the rumbling that comes from His mouth. He unleashes His lightning beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth. After that comes the sound of His roar; He thunders with His majestic voice. When His voice resounds, He holds nothing back. God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways; He does great things beyond our understanding. . . . The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. He loads the clouds with moisture; He scatters His lightning through them. At His direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever He commands them.”

Jeremiah 10:12-13 “But God made the earth by His power; He founded the world by His wisdom and stretched out the heavens by His understanding. When He thunders, the waters in the heavens roar;

He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from His storehouses.”

Sunrise

Pack a breakfast picnic and find a quiet place to eat and watch the sunrise. Listen to the sounds of nature waking up around you. Take turns naming and identifying sounds. As the sun comes up, imagine that God is painting a picture in the sky for all to enjoy. Talk about how creative God is and how much fun He must have mixing the colours every day. Paint your own sunrise pictures at home and add a verse from below to the picture. You can also cut out black shapes, making silhouettes of your family, to add to the foreground of the paintings.

Relevant Scripture

Job 38:12 [The Lord said] “Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place . . . ?”

Psalm 65:8 “The whole earth is filled with awe at Your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, You call forth songs of joy.”

Snow

This activity is seasonal; however, you can use an ice shaver to make “fake” snow when there is no snow on the ground. Using a large plastic bowl, scoop up fresh snow and bring it indoors to play with. Seat your children around a table and place a cookie tray in front of each child. Have fun making and decorating mini-snowmen. As you read Psalm 147:16-18, have your children act it out using their snow piles. They can spread snow, hurl down hail and then breathe on the snow to melt it. Honour God as the One who owns the storehouses of hail and snow.

Relevant Scripture

Job 37:5-10 “God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways; He does great things beyond our understanding. He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth’ and to the rain shower, ‘Be a mighty downpour.’ So that everyone He has made may know His work, He stops all people from their labor. The animals take cover; they remain in their dens. The tempest comes out from its chamber, the cold from the driving winds. The breath

of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen.”

Psalm 147:16-18 “He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down His hail like pebbles. Who can withstand His icy blast? He sends His word and melts them; He stirs up His breezes, and the waters flow.”

Stargazing

On a clear night, go outside and lie on a blanket and look at the stars. This experience is intensified if you can view the stars in a rural, versus urban, setting. The darker your surroundings, the brighter the stars appear. A quieter setting also adds to the awe and magnificence of a starry night. Spend time praising God and talking about how amazing it is that He knows each star by name. Packing a bedtime snack and a story is a fun way to round out your family’s evening.

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 148:3-6 “Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all you shining stars. Praise Him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at His command, they were created, and He set them in place forever and ever – He issued a decree that will never pass away.”

Psalm 147:4 “He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.”

Jeremiah 31:35 “This is what the Lord says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the Lord Almighty is His name.”

Nature walk

Take a walk with your children and encourage them to look for living things. Whenever you do find a living creature, ask it some questions such as, “Who made you?” and “Who made the world?” Your children can answer for the wild creatures saying, “God did!” Ideally, walk somewhere that will have a few wild animals to see. If you do not have easy access to the country, even in city parks there is a multitude of creatures to see if you walk slowly

and watch for them. Be sure to observe the respect rule: If God made it, we don't hurt it. Children find bugs and other creepy crawlies just as cool as larger living organisms.

Relevant Scripture

Job 12:7-10 "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind."

Butterflies 'n' bugs

Many observatories and museums have bug and butterfly exhibits that you can visit. If you are adventurous, you can even purchase a caterpillar and watch it go through metamorphosis in your home. The Painted Lady butterfly is an easy one to care for. One potential source is Educationalscience.com. For a video version of the process of metamorphosis, search online or check out your local library. Talk about how amazing it is that God made so many different creatures.

Relevant Scripture

Genesis 1:24-25 "And God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good."

Sharing joy

servicing others

Bring joy to another family member by doing something nice for them. When they say "Thank you," respond by saying, "Share the joy!" Then it is their turn to surprise someone. Try to make it an ongoing family tradition. You can do this with your children by having them help make cookies or muffins to give to a friend or neighbour. Pray together and ask God who He would like your family to share joy with through this kindness. Be quiet and allow your children to listen to God's direction as to who should receive your baking. If you have family or friends who would

prefer flowers or a gift of service, this is another way you can spread joy in your community.

Relevant Scripture

Acts 20:35 "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Popcorn dipping party

fun with food or physical activity

Plan a zany activity you can enjoy as a family. Choose from the options below (or any combination thereof), or plan an activity of your own. The goal is to laugh together as much as possible.

Fun with food

Have a popcorn fondue party. Beforehand, prepare by using a low-temperature glue gun to glue cotton balls all over disposable shower caps (one for each family member). The plan is to wear these hats during your party. After everyone dons a cap, put popcorn in the microwave or hot-air popper. While the popcorn is popping, jump around pretending that you are popcorn kernels popping too. Pretend that you are exploding; bump into each other and roll on the floor again and again until the real popcorn is done popping.

Have everyone in the family decide on one or two "dipping sauces" to use with the popcorn you have popped. Examples include peanut butter, peanut butter mixed with melted chocolate, chocolate or butterscotch sundae sauce, melted cheese, jam, ranch or dill-flavoured salad dressing, cream cheese (any flavour), melted butter, pizza sauce, mustard and ketchup. Put a spot of each of the dipping sauces on each person's plate and give out toothpicks to use as fondue forks. Enjoy as many creative popcorn dipping combinations as you can think of – or stomach!

Fun with hair

Try some crazy hair capers. Start your family fun time by blowing up some balloons. Rub balloons on each person's head to create enough static electricity to cause their hair to stand on end. See if you can create enough static to stick the balloons on the walls or on

your clothing. Can you cover someone completely in balloons?

Since everyone's hair is now a mess anyway, this is an ideal time to take turns "sculpting" each other's hair. Bring out some styling gel and have fun creating wild and wacky hairstyles on each other. Don't forget to take photos or video footage of your escapade!

Note: Supervise young children closely during this activity to ensure they do not chew or inhale deflated balloons or balloon fragments.

Fun with faces

Visit the website Dogster.com and look up pictures of dogs and cats that share the names of your family members. (Young kids find this particularly funny.) See how many dogs you can look at without laughing! You'll have to navigate around the site a little to find the correct search field. On the home page, click the orange "Community" button. On the drop-down menu, choose "See the dogs." Next, scroll down near the bottom of the "See the dogs" page and choose "Advanced search." On the search criteria page, just enter the name of a family member in the search field "Name." If you prefer feline humour, there is a similar website called Catster.com.

After you enjoy the absolute silliness of letting loose with people you trust enough to be crazy with, thank God for placing you in a family where you can enjoy laughing together. Pray together, thanking God for laughter and for the joy of being a part of a loving family.

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 68:4-6 "Sing to God, sing praise in praise of His name, extol Him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before Him – His name is the Lord. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, He leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land."

Helium and the Holy Spirit

science with a twist

Take care to supervise this activity closely if young children are involved – balloons pose a serious choking hazard.

On your next shopping trip, purchase some helium-filled balloons and some regular balloons. At home, use a regular, breath-inflated balloon to play a simple game of "keep the balloon in the air" by batting the balloon upward as it nears the floor. (Be sure to play in a large open area that is free of obstacles.)

Explain to your children that the self-inflated balloon is like people who try to make themselves feel joyful by filling their lives with things they think will make them happy – things like food, fun activities, being with other people, toys and other material possessions, and doing things to make themselves feel important. Each time a player bats the balloon, encourage them to name something that a person might use to try make themselves feel happy. Ideas might be ice cream, a new toy, candy, parties, play dates, new clothes, a puppy, cookies, games and TV.

Point out that when we try to fill ourselves with joy, it only works in the short term – like the balloon going up in the air and then back down again. Compare the self-inflated balloon to human efforts to be joyful and the helium balloon to God's Holy Spirit, who provides continuous joy. Pray and ask God to curb your desires for "things" and the momentary pleasure these things provide. Also ask that He fill your hearts with the long-lasting joy of knowing Him.

Relevant Scripture

Galatians 4:6 "Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"

Galatians 5:22-26 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."

Joyful bubbles

physical activity or any time

For this activity, you will need commercial or homemade bubble solution and wands. Here's a recipe for homemade bubble mix.

Bubble mix recipe

Combine the following ingredients:

- 1/4 cup of dish soap (any Dawn product, or Dawn with “Olay hand renewal” works very well)
- 1/4 cup of cool water
- 1 tsp. sugar

Use any circular item to blow bubbles. If you don't have any traditional bubble-blowing wands, the handle of a pair of scissors works well, but first tape the blades closed and wrap the blade end in a protective cover, such as bubble wrap, to prevent injuries.

Have fun blowing bubbles together outside. If it isn't warm enough to play outside, you can still blow bubbles indoors at bath time. A fun song to sing while blowing bubbles is *Jesus' Love is a Bubblin' Over*. After your children are tired of blowing bubbles themselves, suggest that they take a break from blowing and try to pop the bubbles that you blow. When they are done blowing and chasing bubbles, call your children together and tell them this make-believe story. (Feel free to change it to personalize it for your kids.)

Bubble-time story

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Karis. Karis was a normal girl who lived in a normal home with a very normal family. But she thought her life was abnormally boring. She desperately wanted to be a princess. If only I could live in a palace! she thought. If I could live in a palace and have all the privileges of a princess, my life would be full of joy.

As she fell asleep one night, Karis wished – for the one hundred and first time – that she could one day become a princess. Moments later, much to Karis' surprise, a huge butterfly flew through her window and spoke to her. The butterfly told her that she had been chosen as the next princess of the Land of Chara, and that they must fly there right away.

Away through the dark night they flew, eventually arriving at their destination. As they flew down

toward the Land of Chara, Karis noticed that the streets were golden. When the butterfly showed Karis her new bedroom and gave her a tour of the royal palace, Karis thought that she would be incredibly happy in her new role. Her room was full of hundreds of dolls, complete with a tiny kitchen that had mini-appliances of every kind, including a fridge, an oven and a dishwasher – and they all worked!

The butterfly told Karis to put on an extravagant gown and get ready for a royal feast. As she quickly dressed, she wondered what kind of food would be served at the party. Almost as soon as Karis had fastened her gown, she noticed that the lace at the neck and the sleeves had begun to itch. Soon, Karis wished she could take the dress off, but she thought to herself, If this is what I must do to be a princess, then I will have to leave the gown on.

At the feast there were many people Karis didn't recognize, but they all smiled at her and bowed or curtsied when she walked past. It seemed as though everyone was almost afraid to talk to her because she was royalty. The food that was brought to her table was wonderful; it was pizza with all her favourite toppings, and tiny hamburgers with exquisite miniature fries. For drinks, there were five different flavours of milkshakes to choose from. Karis chose chocolate and strawberry. For dessert, they rolled out a very large tray full of fancy cakes and candy. There were more treats on the tray than Karis had ever seen all at once, and she got to choose whatever she wanted.

After dinner, everyone went outside for a carnival. There were rubber inflatables, giant slides and even a climbing wall. Pretty bubbles floated through the air, generated by automatic bubble-making machines. Although everyone seemed to be having a grand time, Karis felt a little lonely wandering around and playing by herself at the different attractions. She also was a little worried about the nasty-looking little dwarves who ran around popping all the bubbles, laughing as they went. Karis decided to go back to her room to play. She set the dolls up in the kitchen, but it wasn't much fun playing alone.

By nightfall, Karis' stomach had started to hurt and her gown had given her a horrible rash. Just as she was thinking about going to bed, the butterfly came fluttering in the window, and reminded Karis that she was now a princess, which meant she could stay up as late as she wanted. But Karis was very tired, and soon going to bed seemed like a very good idea. The bed was beautiful, but it was so high off the ground that Karis worried that she might get hurt if she fell out. As she lay in bed, she longed for her mom and dad to come and tuck her in. She wished she could hear her little brother making silly noises in the room next door. Then a frightening thought came into her mind: Will I ever see my family again? she wondered. All night long Karis tossed and turned as her worries and her aching belly disturbed her sleep.

In the morning, Karis was delighted to find herself in her own bed, in her own bedroom. She ran downstairs and found her family eating cereal for breakfast. Her younger brother was making loud slurping noises at the breakfast table as usual, but this time it didn't bother Karis.

Later that morning, Karis told her parents about her dream and everything she experienced in the Land of Chara. Her parents listened, deep in thought, as Karis explained her dream. Then Karis' parents offered their thoughts about the dream, and Karis saw the Land of Chara in a whole new light.

What Karis had not known was that the Land of Chara was a fake or a "counterfeit." All the wonderful things in the dream were things that people often think they need in order to be happy. Although it was named the Land of Joy – for the word "chara" means "joy" in Greek – it was not really the land of joy at all. It was a place that offered false joy instead of true joy.

Karis' parents explained that the only way anyone can experience true joy is through knowing Jesus. They said that there is nothing wrong with wanting to be happy, as long as a person doesn't seek after happiness instead of seeking the joy of knowing and being with Jesus.

Then Karis' parents told her that her name means "grace," and that her name also came from the Greek root word for "joy." Her mother then explained that it is because of God's grace that everyone can have their sins forgiven and experience the joy of knowing God as a friend.

"A relationship with God will give us much joy here on earth," her mother said, "but we will have even more joy when we go to live with God in heaven someday." Then Karis' father got out a Bible and read from the book of Revelation to let Karis know what heaven would be like some day. Heaven sounded much better than the land in her dream. Karis' favourite part was the promise that in heaven there will be no more tears or pain (Revelation 21:4). Karis found herself thinking a lot about heaven in the days that followed, but never again did she wish to be a princess.

A note to parents: The Greek word for "joy" is "chara," derived from the word "charis," which is the Greek word for "grace." This is important to note, for it tells us that "chara" is produced by the "charis" of God. This means that true joy is divine in origin . . . it is a Spirit-given expression that flourishes best in hard times.

Finish your time together by asking the following questions:

- What caused Karis to be dissatisfied?
- What are some things in your life that tempt you to be discontent?
- When are you tempted to be selfish or discontent?
- How do we find true joy?
- If the bubbles we played with represent joy, then what kind of thoughts and attitudes can pop your "joy bubbles"?
- What kind of attitudes can prevent your joy bubbles from bursting?

Key concepts

People can have everything their hearts desire and still feel empty and alone if their goal in life is to please themselves and not God. We can be joyful in “normal” circumstances – even when life gets very hard – if we love and trust God. The soap bubbles, as pretty and fun as they were, only lasted a short time. Similarly, having things, popularity and entertainment are short-lived in the length of time they entertain us or offer us fascination.

Some common joy stealers include dissatisfaction and greed (always wanting more or wanting the biggest or the best). These attitudes steal joy, but being content and generous with what we have gives us joy. True joy is found in Jesus and in sharing His love with others.

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 37:3-4 “Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

Find God’s promises in a pot of gold

physical activity

You will need an assortment of verses cut from the chart provided below, a pot, a sunny day and a garden hose to make rainbows. (If you are unable to get outside to make rainbows, rainbows can be made indoors with crystal figurines, crystal glass or even with cut glass pieces detached from a chandelier. Triangular prisms can be purchased at science supply stores.)

Prior to doing this activity, print off and cut out your top choices from the “pot of gold” verses and put them in a pot to be used for your discussion after the rainbow activity. If you wish, foil-wrapped gold coins can be placed in the pot along with each Bible verse.

Go outside prepared to get wet and have fun making rainbows with your children. The best time of day to make rainbows is when the sun is close to the horizon. Stand with your back to the sun and set the garden hose to “mist” or use finger pressure over the end of the nozzle so that only a fine spray of water escapes.

While you create a rainbow, talk about God’s promise to Noah and his family after the flood (see Genesis 9:13-15 below). Your kids will likely want to take a turn making rainbows too. See if they can think of a promise from God for each rainbow they make. After sharing your ideas, tell your children about the myth that there is a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow. You can also tell or read a story about the futile searching that happens if someone were to try and walk to the end of a rainbow. Then let them know you have a pretend pot of gold that contains something way more valuable than all the gold coins in the world in it. See if they can guess what it is.

When you return indoors, allow each child to draw a verse out of the “pot of gold.” Read each verse aloud and identify a promise from God in it. To reinforce the truth that God’s Word and His promises are of much greater value than gold, read Psalm 19:9b-11. In closing, read Psalm 145:3 and thank God for being faithful in keeping all of His promises.

Relevant Scripture

Genesis 9:13-15 [And God said], “. . . I have set My rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember My covenant between Me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.”

Psalm 19:9b-11 “The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Psalm 145:13 “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in all He promises and faithful in all He does.”

Here are some suggested Bible verses to use in your “pot of gold.”

Celebrate the joy of Christmas anytime

servicing others or *drama / role play* or *fun with food* or *creative crafts* or *drive time*

The purpose of Christmas is to remember Jesus' birth, so why not celebrate it outside the traditional season? Most children love Christmas and would not object to some Christmas festivities being added to the family schedule any time of year! The ideas provided here focus on the joy surrounding the birth of Jesus and on the enjoyment found in giving. Whichever activity you choose, you can use the discussion questions and related Bible verses to highlight the "Christmas-Jesus-Joy" connection.

Servicing others

Organize a stocking stuffing event as a way to have family members bless each other with non-material blessings. Have each family member hang a mini-socking. Put each person's picture on their stocking, then have each family member write a note or draw a picture for every other family member, telling or displaying something they appreciate about them. Encourage your kids to be creative and provide assistance as needed. When you open the stockings, do so one person at a time, allowing time for each person to share what the other family members have written or drawn. To make the occasion even sweeter, you may want to hand out candy canes (or flavoured

Specific promise

Scripture verse

God promises to care for and protect us.

Psalm 121:7-8 "The Lord will keep you from all harm – He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."

God promises to guide us.

Psalm 32:8 "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with My loving eye on you."

John 8:12 "When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' "

God promises to forgive us.

1 John 2:12 "I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of His name."

Hebrews 8:12 "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Acts 10:43 "All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."

Acts 13:38 "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you."

God promises to answer prayer.

Matthew 21:22 "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Mark 11:24 "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

1 John 5:14-15 "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of Him."

Specific promise

Scripture verse

God promises that He will always be with us.

Hebrews 13:5 “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”

God promises to help us when we are tempted to sin.

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

God promises to give us the gift of His Holy Spirit.

John 14:26 “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

Acts 2:33 “Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”

God promises to give us eternal life.

John 10:28 “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 14:3 “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.”

1 John 2:25 “And this is what He promised us – eternal life.”

God promises that He has good plans for our lives.

Jeremiah 29:11 “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’ ”

hard candy sticks) to savour while you enjoy the sweetness of your together time.

Fun with food

Make mini-gingerbread “stables” out of graham crackers. Use one cracker for each side wall, one for the roof and one for a back wall. Leave the front side open. While your kids are decorating the walls and interior, ask your kids what they think Jesus was like when He was a child. Have them think of a “Jesus-like” character trait that each type of candy, cereal or dried fruit can represent. For example, cinnamon hearts can serve as a reminder that there is joy in a home when family members are loving toward each other. Another child might say that a gummy blue whale reminds him to be generous and share his toys.

To make the icing for your gingerbread stables, you will need:

- 2 egg whites
- 1 tsp vanilla or peppermint extract
- 2 ½ - 3 cups of icing sugar

Use a hand mixer to beat the egg whites until they are fluffy. Add the flavouring, along with half a cup of powdered sugar. Beat the mixture until it’s smooth. Keep adding icing sugar, half a cup at a time, until the icing forms stiff peaks. This icing is ideal for decorating as it hardens quickly. If you are not going

to use it right away, cover it tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate it.

Serving others

To allow your children to experience the joy of giving, plan to surprise someone with a gift of some Christmas baking, out of season. Prior to deciding who you should share your baking with, ask God which family friend, relative or neighbour is in need of extra encouragement. Use the experience as an opportunity to talk with your children about how joyful they feel when they bless another person with a gift. Compare this to the joy they feel when they receive gifts.

Nativity drama

Set up a Nativity scene and have your children act out the Christmas story while you read it aloud. Household items like brooms, towels and bathrobes can serve as props and the cast's wardrobe. As you read the Christmas story, let your kids play a variety of roles using props of their choice. For example, they might choose a mop to be a donkey, a laundry basket as a manger and a tissue box as a wise man's gift.

Creative crafts

If your children enjoy crafts, have them make a "baby Jesus in a manger ornament." As they work, use the opportunity to discuss the joy of the first Christmas. Share with your children the angel's announcement to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Remind your kids that through Jesus, God gave the whole world the gift of salvation.

To make one manger ornament, you will need:

- a circular mini-grape vine wreath (6-8 cm or 2½ - 3 inches in diameter)
- a wooden bead (1.5 cm or ½ inch in diameter)
- strips of cloth (cut from an old tea towel)
- cardboard
- a piece of string or ribbon
- an ice pop stick

- straw of any sort
- felt markers
- a low-temperature glue gun

- 1** Begin by gluing a layer of brown cardboard on the bottom of the grapevine wreath to create a manger. Spread a layer of glue in the bottom of the manger and have your child fill it with craft moss, shredded yellow paper or tissue, yellow yarn or Easter basket grass, making a cozy manger.
- 2** To make baby Jesus, draw closed eyes and a little mouth on the wooden bead. Glue one-third of an ice pop stick to the back of the bead to serve as a "body," then have your child wrap strips of cloth around and around the stick until it looks like a wrapped-up baby. Secure the end of the cloth with a spot of glue.
- 3** Glue another smaller strip of cloth over the baby's head to cover the bead hole.
- 4** Finally, glue the baby in the manger and tie a ribbon to the top of the wreath so you can hang it up.

*Note: This baby Jesus ornament can also be used in the shadow box for the **kick-off craft** of this lesson.*

Drive time

While you are travelling in your family's vehicle, sing *Joy to the World* and talk about ways that Jesus brings joy to your lives. Put your ideas into song with your own Jesus-centred remake of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. Here's a sample to jump-start your own ideas:

On the first day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me, His Spirit to live in me.

On the second day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me, two helping hands . . .

On the third day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me, three cups of kindness . . .

*On the fourth day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me,
four jugs of joy . . .*

*On the fifth day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me,
five reasons to share . . .*

*On the sixth day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me, six
packs of peace . . .*

*On the seventh day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me,
seven sacks of smiles . . .*

*On the eighth day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me,
eight gobs of goodness . . .*

*On the ninth day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me,
nine loads of love . . .*

*On the tenth day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me,
ten tons of trust . . .*

*On the eleventh day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me,
eleven pounds of patience . . .*

*On the twelfth day of Christmas, Jesus gave to me,
twelve jars of gentleness . . .*

Luke 2:10-12 “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’”

Luke 11:13 “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

1 Thessalonians 5:11 “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

Recommended resources

For a list of children’s stories that reinforce the theme of this lesson, consult the home page for the **joy** lesson at Kidsofintegrity.com.

Questions for discussion

- What is your most favourite Christmas tradition of all?
- If you could play a part in the Christmas story, which character would you like to be?
- What do you think it would have been like to have Jesus as a brother?
- How does Jesus bring joy to your life?
- How does knowing Jesus change the way you treat others?

Relevant Scripture

Acts 20:35 “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”