

KIDS of INTEGRITY

Christmas



**SPECIAL
SEASONAL LESSON**

Turn your family's Christmas preparations into holy moments with Jesus! Use these simple ideas to transform seasonal tasks like hanging lights and wrapping gifts into fun lessons that help kids focus on Jesus' birth and the importance of spreading Jesus' love and peace in your home.

Choose from 12 different suggestions (or "12 days of Christmas") that each touch on a different character trait to help kids:

- show kindness to others
- be quick to forgive
- cooperate with siblings
- focus on giving to others, rather than receiving gifts for themselves
- keep their thoughts centred on God's amazing love throughout the Christmas season.

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Parents' prayer

As you prepare to lead your children through some of the activities suggested here, begin by meeting the Lord in prayer and asking Him to help you guide your children lovingly and wisely during this lesson. If you wish, you can use one of these sample prayers. Choose from the first, shorter version for busy days, or the second prayer for more relaxed days.

Sample prayer for a busy day

Lord Jesus, You say, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). I welcome Your invitation as I do need a rest! Let me be yoked to the tasks You have set out for me today instead of my Christmas "prep" list. I lay my self-imposed weariness and burdens at Your feet. Please replace them with the burdens You have for me – those that are light and easy. Jesus, I want to learn from You. May I be a student of Your gentle and humble heart so I can find the elusive soul rest I crave and truly celebrate the joy of this season.

I praise You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You take pleasure in hiding things from the wise and learned, and instead reveal them to little children. In child-like faith I pray, asking that You will show Yourself to _____ and _____ (list all of your family members) this Christmas season (Matthew 11:25). Please send Your gift of Shalom to our home. We long for the "holy heart hush" that happens when we dwell closely with You and end up over-filled with Your Spirit such that Your "love-liness" spills out of us and onto others. Amen.

Alternative sample prayer

God of love, this is how You showed Your love among us: You sent Your one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9). You sent us Your love, wrapped up as a bundled baby in a manger. Thank you for loving us so much that You sent Your sinless Son, Jesus, to die in our place so that our sins are forgiven and we can look forward to spending eternity with You (John 3:16). Heaven must be so full of peace and joy and the power of Your presence! This season we want to practice singing with the seraphs, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). Please grace our lives with the same closeness that Adam and Eve had with You in the Garden of Eden.

You alone are perfect and holy, yet You love me in all of my un-loveliness (Romans 5:6-8). You see my impatience and hear my terse replies that are actually rude. When I excuse my tendency to be easily angered by pointing to my lack of sleep or someone else's behaviour, You are near. You are my uninvited guest when I have pity parties and make life all about me. In the privacy of my heart, You are aware of the way I keep track of the ways others have wronged me and _____ (list any other ways you know that you fall short of God's perfect standard of love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5). I know this saddens You and I am sorry.

Trying to "live in love" on my own is a hopeless endeavour, but Your Word gives me hope from Christ's promise, "If anyone loves Me he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23). What an amazing promise and what an enormous calling! So yes, please, send Your Spirit to live in me and teach me to live in You and Your love (1 John 4:16).

You ask us to lay down our lives like Jesus did, and You tell us that this is the greatest kind of love there is (1 John 3:16, John 15:13). I pray for myself, my spouse and our children, _____ and _____. May we bring glory to You through living lives characterized by self-sacrificial love. Humanly this is impossible, but with You all things are possible (Mark 10:24). With Your Spirit in us, it may even be possible for us to live in such love that we can put up our Christmas tree or _____ (add your own ideas) this year without arguing or fighting.

Our hope is that others will be drawn to You because they see we are sincerely devoted to one another in brotherly love and that we honour others above ourselves (Romans 12:9-10). Let them see and understand that all that is lovely in us is from You! We invite the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to be in our home and in our hearts (2 Corinthians 13:14). Jesus, come in all of Your "loveliness" and fill us so full of Your love that we can't help but share it. May Your Spirit dwell with us and in us today, filling us with peace and joy because You are near. Amen.

Kids talk with God

These sample prayers will help your children talk to God about the truths in this Christmas lesson.

Sample prayers

Dear God, I just love Christmas and I love You too! Amen.

Happy Birthday Jesus. I love you. Amen.

Dear God, things don't feel very Christmas-y at our house today. Please be here with us and fill our home with _____ (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.) instead of _____ (list the opposite). Amen.

Jesus, thank you for the gift of Your Holy Spirit. We love You, Jesus, and we are so happy Your Spirit lives with us and in us (1 John 4:13). Amen.

Jesus, You gave Your life for us. Please help us to be willing to give up having our own way today so we can live in love (John 15:12-13). Amen.

Jesus, we want our home to be a "fight-free zone." Please send Your Holy Spirit to teach us to be humble, gentle, patient and loving (Ephesians 4:2-3). Amen.

Dear Jesus, we want to say "I love You" in words and in the way we treat each other. Please send Your Holy Spirit to teach us to love everyone like You do (1 John 3:18). Amen.

Speak a blessing

Affirmation is so important for learning! Here are some ways you can compliment your children when you notice them practicing what they are learning from this Christmas lesson.

- Peek-a-boo! I see Jesus' joy / love / peace shining out of you!
- I can smell the sweetness of Jesus' joy here. It makes our home feel so Christmas-y!
- You are sharing Jesus' love. What a great way to celebrate His birthday!

- I noticed that you are being a peacemaker. Thank you for helping to make our home a happy place to be.
- It really feels like Christmas when we share Jesus' love with others.
- _____, thank you for sharing Jesus' love by _____. (Describe the way your child was kind / loving.)
- You are acting like Jesus. Jesus is happy when His kids share His love with each other.

Memory verses

Choose a verse, or part of a verse, that your kids can learn during your Christmas study. Aim to review the verse at least once a day.

1 John 4:12 “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”

Psalms 27:1a “The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?”

Isaiah 2:5 “Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

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.’”

Matthew 5:14,16 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Kick-off craft

For this kick-off craft, you'll help your children make a willow wreath wrapped with ribbon. Each time you complete one of the 12 “days” of this Christmas lesson, you'll add additional items to your wreath to remind you of each character trait you've studied.

Willow wreath Christmas decoration

Directions

You'll need the following supplies:

- an 8-10" willow wreath
- ribbon in two colours – a metre of each colour per wreath
- an extra length of ribbon to hang the wreath
- a low-temperature glue gun
- a plastic or paper heart.

For additional Bible story sections you choose from this lesson, each child will need:

- day 1 (harmony): a tiny wrapped gift box
- day 2 (joy): a drinking straw
- day 3 (courteous communication): a Hershey's Kiss chocolate
- day 4 (forgiveness): a pretzel snack
- day 5 (generosity): a favourite candy
- day 6 (obedience): a birthday candle with a paper “flame”
- day 7 (cooperation): a tiny paper chain
- day 8 (kindness): a small angel
- day 9 (righteousness): a star or bulb from a string of Christmas lights
- day 10 (acceptance): a sprig from an evergreen tree
- day 11 (compassion): an adhesive bandage
- day 12 (contentedness): a tiny bundle of hay or dried grass.

To make your wreaths:

- 1 Secure one end of the ribbon to each wreath with a knot or a spot of glue.
- 2 Have your children weave the ribbon through the willow branches in any fashion they choose. (Taping the end of the ribbon with some masking tape will stiffen it slightly, making it easier to weave through the wreath.)
- 3 Glue a plastic or paper heart shape to each wreath.
- 4 As you work, share your thoughts prompted by the discussion questions.
- 5 Make a loop with remaining ribbon and tie each child's wreath to the back of their chair at the meal table. (Or display them elsewhere if you wish.)

Questions for discussion

- What is the best part of Christmas?
- Is there a special food or treat that reminds you of Christmas?
- Do you have any favourite Christmas songs you like to sing?
- Is there anything you don't like about Christmas?
- Is there someone you would like to give a gift to this Christmas?
- Can you tell me about a time when someone did something kind for you?
- When God sent us Jesus, what was He really sending us?

Key concepts

Christmas is such a special time of year. There are so many things to love about Christmas! I think God loves Christmas too. My guess is that He likes it when we make an extra special effort over Christmas to think about Jesus and His love.

A long time ago, people didn't celebrate Christmas, because Jesus hadn't been born yet. In those days, people didn't have electricity either. There were no switches to turn lights on after it got dark. And flashlights hadn't been invented yet. Oil lamps and fires provided all the light, and nighttime was very dark.

Before Jesus was born, people also had a lot of darkness in their hearts. All their sin made them feel lost and lonely. God's Word says the people were like a flock of sheep who were lost, because they didn't have a shepherd (Jeremiah 50:6, Mark 6:34). Even the people who were supposed to be helping all the other people be close to God were confused. It was like they were blind people leading others who were also blind (Matthew 23:16-26).

God knew the only way to get rid of all the darkness and sin was to send the people His love. God decided that His Son Jesus would be the perfect gift because Jesus would live with the people and teach them about God's love (1 John 4:7-12, Matthew 9:35-36).

Today we added a heart to our wreaths because the heart reminds us of the first Christmas and the gift of love God sent when He gave us Jesus.

Our wreaths themselves are like God's love, too, because each wreath is a circle that has no start and no end. The Bible tells us that God's love is everlasting, meaning it goes on forever and ever (Jeremiah 31:3).

God's Word says, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12). Have you seen Jesus' love anywhere or in anyone today?

Between now and Christmas, we will be adding a few more items to our wreaths to remind us how we can show God's love to others

If you wish, you can end your craft time in prayer:

Dear God, thank you for loving us with love that goes on forever and ever. Thank you for loving us enough to send us Your son Jesus. We love You! Please send Your Spirit to live in us so that we can love everyone like You do. Amen.

Bible stories

This Christmas lesson is structured a little differently from most of the other Kids of Integrity lessons. With this lesson, you can do as few or as many of the following “twelve days of Christmas” Bible stories and activities as you wish.

The Bible stories may be familiar from other Kids of Integrity lessons, but the related discussion questions have a Christmas theme.

Day 1: A lesson in harmony

Theme: God’s Spirit living in us brings us peace, and helps us live in harmony with others.

Lead-in activity: Wrap some gifts together. Wrap one empty box as a beautiful gift (this will serve as an object lesson later).

Bible story:

Pray to start your Bible story discussion time. First read Micah 5:4-5a, then pray along these lines:

Lord, You are Yahweh Shalom, the Lord of Peace. Please be our shepherd and fill every corner of our home with Your peace, because we want to stay close to You and to live in peaceful harmony with other members of our family. Amen.

Read **Genesis 2:19-22**.

Questions for discussion

1. If you had been born in the Garden of Eden, what would be the best part about living there?
2. Would you have enjoyed the job of naming the animals?
3. How would it feel to walk and talk with God like you would with another person? (Wonderful? Scary? Both?)

If you wish, you could take a break here and have some fun pretending you’re in the Garden of Eden. Use a script that goes something like this:

Oh look! There’s a butterfly that looks like a rainbow! Try hugging this huge tree. What a fresh-looking stream! There goes an otter. Shall we see if he will let us pet him? Wow! I see some funny-looking fruit that look like banana berries. Who wants to try one? Look over there! I see a tiger! Who wants to take a ride?

Read **Genesis 3:1-13,20-24**.

4. How did Adam and Eve ruin the peace that existed between themselves and God?
5. What kind of excuses did they make to explain why they had disobeyed God and eaten the one and only fruit God had told them *not* to eat?
6. Have you ever done something wrong and tried to blame it on someone else?
7. What do you think Adam and Eve said when God told them they had to leave the Garden of Eden? (That also meant they would not feel so close to God anymore.)

Key concepts

The words “Shalom aleichem” mean “Peace be with you.” “Shalom” is a word used in many countries as a way to say hello or goodbye. Can you say “Shalom”?

Today people all over the world are searching for shalom, or peace. Our sense of deep peace was lost when Adam and Eve were sent out of the Garden of Eden.

As much as God may have wanted to give Adam and Eve a second chance, Adam and Eve had sinned so they were no longer able to experience Shalom – the joy of being close to God and the peace that His presence brings.

It must have been very sad for Adam and Eve when they had to leave the garden. I can imagine them calling back to God, “We’ll miss you so much!” And from what we know about God, I can imagine God was very sad too (Exodus 25:8; John 1:14; Revelation 21:3).

Adam and Eve eventually had children and grandchildren, but the children, and even the adults, bickered all the time, and people grew more and more wicked, until every thought they had was evil. The Bible records that God “was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain” (Genesis 6:5-6).

That’s true for us today too. Our sin fills God’s heart with pain and it separates us from Him (Isaiah 59:2).

The good news is that God sent His Son, Jesus, who was born into the world that first Christmas, to die for us and take the punishment for all the wrong things we have done or said or thought. Now anyone who asks can have their sins forgiven and enjoy living at peace with God and in close relationship with Him (John 3:16, John 14:6, 1 John 1:8-9).

God wants to help us keep all the sin out of our lives so that we can stay living closely with Him, and so we can live in peace with others. And so, He sent us the Holy Spirit.

When we ask God to clean the sin out of our heart, God sends His Spirit to live in us, just like God lived with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We can’t see Him or smell Him or taste Him or hold Him, but the Holy Spirit is all around us – just like the air. God is delighted to give us His Holy Spirit whenever we ask Him. And the Holy Spirit brings us joy and peace, or shalom.

Now turn your kids’ attention to your brightly wrapped gift.

Gifts usually come from people who love us! This gift reminds us of God’s gift of peace that the Holy Spirit brings to us. Let’s pray and talk to God about His gift of peace.

Pray this prayer based on Jeremiah 24:7 and Romans 15:13, or pray another prayer of your own:

Lord God, thank you for the gift of shalom. We want You to be our God and we want to be Your kids! Please come and make our home like a happy garden where You can walk and talk with us. We want to turn away from our sin and obey You so that our hearts can be a place

where You want to live. We confess _____ (have family members confess personal sin aloud or quietly). Please send your Holy Spirit to fill us with Your love, joy and peace. Amen.

Add to each child’s wreath a small wrapped gift as a symbol of God’s gift of shalom. Use a tiny gift box, or wrap a small item such as an eraser or an empty matchbox.

Make it real

Put your brightly wrapped gift under the Christmas tree to remind your family of God’s gift of shalom through His Holy Spirit. Over the Christmas season, use the word “Shalom” as a greeting, but also as another way of saying, *I forgive you* or *I want the best for you* or *I choose to let God’s Spirit bring peace to this relationship*, or simply as a way to say, *I love you*.

Relevant Scripture

Jeremiah 24:7 “I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. They will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with all their heart.”

Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Day 2: A lesson in joy

Theme: Joy is found in Jesus – not in “stuff.”

Lead-in activity: Make an interactive Nativity scene by dressing up dolls, teddy bears or other stuffed animals. (If you’re short on time, you could instead set up a store-bought Nativity scene or simply examine a picture of the Nativity.)

Later in this lesson you’ll need a drinking straw, and a spy glass for each child, made from a toilet roll tube. Together you’ll go looking for joy in all the “wrong” places.

Bible story:

To begin your Bible story and discussion time, pray this prayer based on Psalm 4:6-7:

Dear Jesus, we ask You to shine Your light on us today. Please fill our hearts with joy that is even greater than when we enjoy _____ (name a favourite Christmas treat). We want to love You more than we love anything else. Amen.

Read **Luke 15:11-24**.

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think the son wanted to leave home?
2. Where did he go looking for joy?
3. Did the son find joy in spending money and living wildly?
4. What do kids think will make them happy at Christmastime?
5. Where is the best place to look for joy?

Key concepts

Many people look for joy or happiness in the wrong places. They think that getting more stuff or having lots of fun or friends will make them happy. These things may be enjoyable for a while, but happiness doesn’t always last. Happiness depends on circumstances.

God does give us many good things to enjoy, but real joy comes when we have Jesus. And the joy Jesus brings us is lasting joy.

Because of Jesus, we have forgiveness of our sin, the strength to obey God’s Word, and the certainty that God loves us and that we will be with Jesus in heaven someday. All these reasons for joy are possible because of Jesus (Romans 5:10-11).

Give each child a “spy tube” made from a toilet paper roll. Search your house together using your spyglasses to find items that represent different things people try to find joy in. (For example, toys, money, entertainment, material possessions, yummy food and even other people.)

Each time you find an item, say “_____ might make us happy for a while, but lasting joy is found in Jesus!”

End your search back at your Nativity scene, where you’ll find Jesus – the “right place” to find lasting joy.

Read Psalm 21:6 and John 15:9-11 (see below), then pray together:

Jesus, we love You! We want to obey You and love You so that we can be full of joy! If we are tempted to look for joy in the wrong places, please remind us that real joy can only be found in You. Amen.

Add to each child’s wreath a mini spy tube as a reminder to look for joy in Jesus. (Snip a short portion off a drinking straw to make each spy tube.)

Make it real

Use your choice of craft supplies or Christmas wrapping to decorate your toilet-roll spy tubes. Take them along when you go shopping or on Christmas errands or outings. Take note of all of the wrong places you can look for joy. Each time a wrong place is identified, refer to Jesus as the right place to find joy.

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 21:6 “Surely You have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of Your presence.”

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.”

Day 3: A lesson in courteous communication

Theme: We need say “I love you” not just in words, but in our actions too.

Lead-in activity: Take a break from your Christmas preparations by enjoying an outdoor activity in the cold (make a snowman, go skating or tobogganing), then warm up afterward with some hot chocolate or a warm bath.

Bible story:

Pray this sample prayer to start your Bible story discussion:

Jesus, Your word says “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18). We don’t want to just say we love people; we really want to show others that we love them by the things we say and do. Amen.

Read Matthew 12:34-37.

Questions for discussion

1. How do you feel when you say hello to someone but they don’t reply?
2. How do you feel when you try to talk to someone but they ignore you?
3. Have you ever been hit in the face with a snowball?
4. What might one person say to another that would be like a snowball in the face?

5. Can you think of something you can say that is like a cozy cup of hot chocolate?
6. Would you rather be a friend who is cold and harsh with their words, or a friend who is warm and comforting with their words?

Key concepts

We communicate love to others when we treat them in a warm and friendly way (e.g., offer a friendly wave, make eye contact, say hello and express interest in them). On the other hand, we can be “cold” to one another by not smiling, by being less than friendly, or by failing to acknowledge someone else’s presence or ideas.

If someone is unkind or makes a mistake, we can make life hard for them by being unforgiving – or we can choose to be gracious by being loving and gentle in our response. Cruel or unkind things that we say to others can hurt far more than we know. But when we show love in our words and actions, the “warmth” we share with others can feel like it goes right down inside them.

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Jesus, we believe You are God’s son! We want to obey You and we want to love others like You do! Thank you for the good gift of Your Spirit. During this busy Christmas season, help us through Your Holy Spirit so others see and feel Your love through us. We want Your love to show in the things we say and do. Amen.

Add to each child’s wreath a Hershey’s Kiss chocolate as a reminder to show love to others with words *and* actions.

Make it real

While interacting with each other over the holidays, use terms like “cold,” “icy” or “snowball in the face” to remind your kids how unkind communication impacts others. Affirm your children when they are gracious and kind by saying, “That felt like a cup of hot chocolate on a cold day,” or “That was sweeter than a Hershey’s Kiss.”

Relevant Scripture

Proverbs 12:18 “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

1 John 3:23 “And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us. Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit He gave us.”

Day 4: A lesson in forgiveness

Theme: Love forgives others for their sins.

Lead-in activity: Have fun baking soft, heart-shaped Christmas pretzels together. (See recipe provided on the next page.) Sample both some hard, store-bought pretzels, and your soft pretzels, and discuss which you prefer.

If you're short on time, simply purchase both hard and soft pretzels. Alternatively, you could buy ready-made dough to bake soft, heart-shaped pretzels.

Bible story:

Pray to start your discussion time. First read Ephesians 4:32, then pray along these lines:

Lord Jesus, the Bible says we should forgive each other, just as You forgave us. Sometimes this is hard, but we ask You to come and fill our hearts with Your love so we can love and forgive like You do. Amen.

Read **Matthew 18:21-35**.

Questions for discussion

1. In this story that Jesus told, what did the king do for the first servant?
2. Was the servant thankful?
3. Why did the king become angry with the first servant?
4. When do you find it hard to forgive?
5. Have you ever had someone refuse to forgive you? How does it feel?

6. Do you deserve to have your sins forgiven?
7. Today's Bible story reminds me of our pretzels. Were our hard pretzels salty or sweet?
8. Do you like the taste of salt?
9. Would you rather eat a little bit of salt, or a little bit of sugar?
10. How does it feel when you get salt in a cut?

Key concepts

When someone has done something wrong, they usually feel badly about it. When we refuse to forgive them, it is like putting salt in a cut – it makes something that is already painful sting even more.

When we are impatient and refuse to forgive, we are like the hard, salty pretzels that have no flexibility or “give” to them. If we refuse to forgive someone, we can be called “hard-hearted.” And like the salt on the hard pretzel, we can cause someone extra pain.

When we are patient with others and willing to forgive someone, we are like the soft pretzels that bounce back when squeezed or under pressure. Our hearts are soft, and our attitude is flexible. And like the sweetness of the soft pretzels, there is sweetness in our relationships with others too.

We don't deserve God's love and we don't deserve to have our sins forgiven. However, God is loving and gracious and He forgives us anyway. When we forgive others, it is as though we are giving them the same gift of grace and mercy that God gives to us.

We made our soft pretzels into heart shapes to remind us that God wants us to share His love with each other by forgiving each other.

Read 1 Peter 4:8 and Colossians 3:13 together, then pray together:

Jesus, sometimes our hearts get hard and all twisted up with _____ (anger, pain, jealousy) like a pretzel. Please keep our hearts soft and help us to be willing to forgive, even when we are _____ (hurting, angry,

unhappy, disappointed). Is there anybody You want us to forgive right now? Please bring them to mind. Amen.

Add to each child's wreath a hard, salty pretzel to serve as a reminder of the importance of being "soft-hearted" and willing to forgive.

Make it real

For the rest of the Christmas season, when you see someone in your family being hard-hearted toward another person, gently ask them if they are acting like a soft pretzel or a hard, salty pretzel.

Relevant Scripture

1 Peter 4:8 "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

Colossians 3:13 "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Christmas Pretzels Bread Dough Recipe

This recipe is designed for a bread machine, but can be used to make bread in the traditional way too.

- 2 cups white flour (Robin Hood Best for Bread is excellent)
- 2 ½ cups whole wheat flour (use white if you prefer)
- ½ cup unsweetened pumpkin puree or mashed potatoes or applesauce
- ⅛ tsp salt
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 cup milk
- 1 egg
- 2 ½ tsp yeast
- 3 tsp white sugar for sprinkling on top

- 1** Add the ingredients in the order suggested by your bread machine manufacturer and run the "dough" cycle.
- 2** When the dough is ready, place the entire batch of dough on a firm surface. Using a rolling pin, roll out the entire batch of dough until it is approximately 1 cm thick.
- 3** Use a knife to cut the dough into strips about 2 cm wide.

- 4** Dampen your hands slightly, then roll the strips into "snakes" or "ropes" about 20 cm long and 1.5 cm in diameter.
- 5** Lay two ropes of dough of equal length side by side on your work surface. Pinch both ends of the dough ropes together (like two snakes with their heads and tails pinched together).
- 6** Once the ends are joined, push the ropes apart to make an O shape. Then take one joined end and drag it into the centre of the circle to form a heart shape.
- 7** Place the pretzels on a non-stick or lightly oiled pan.
- 8** Spray or brush the pretzels with cooking oil and sprinkle them with sugar.
- 9** Cover the pretzels loosely with plastic wrap and place them in a warm, draft-free place to rise until they double in size (1-2 hours).
- 10** Bake at 425 °F for 12-15 minutes or until golden brown.
- 11** Store pretzels in airtight container for up to three days. They also freeze well.

Day 5: A lesson in generosity

Theme: When we are generous, God gives us joy in return.

Lead-in activity: Have fun singing together *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. Then announce to your children that you are going to give them “the 12 candies of Christmas.” Let your children decide how to divide up the 12 candies, but throw in a couple of “bonus” candies, so that the candy won’t divide equally. Watch to see who is generous to others by being willing to accept the smaller pile.

Bible story:

Begin your Bible story and discussion time by reading 1 John 3:15-17,20, then pray together:

Jesus, it is easy to want to keep things for ourselves. Would You teach us to share? We need You to help us get excited about giving things away. Amen.

Read Matthew 19:16-30.

Questions for discussion

1. Was it hard to decide how to share out the candy?
2. What did the rich young man brag about when he met Jesus?
3. What did Jesus tell him?
4. Then what did the rich young man do?
5. Is it harder to share if you have a lot, or a little?
6. What is the question Santa asks all the kids who come to sit on his knee?
7. Do you think you *need* more toys, or do you just *want* more toys?
8. Would Jesus want us to be more concerned about getting, or about giving?

Key concepts

The song that we sang, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, goes on and on about the gifts someone got for Christmas. But God wants us to focus not on what we can *get*, but on what we can *give* to others. He wants us to care for the needs of others, especially those who have less than we do. He also promises to bless those who take care of others.

When we are generous, it honours God. When we are good to others, it is as though we are being good to God (Matthew 25:40). When we ignore the needs of others, it is as though we are neglecting God (Matthew 25:45).

Can you think of something you can do personally to help and bless someone else?

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Dear God, thank you for Your love. Please put lots of Your love in our hearts and teach us how to give it away to others. Amen.

Add to each child’s wreath a favourite candy to remind everyone that God wants us to be generous to others.

Make it real

Make it a challenge to find creative ways to “give” to other family members each day over the Christmas season. Make your own *The Twelve Days of Christmas* song that focuses on what you gave to others, not what you received.

Another option is to gift some cash to your children (perhaps they can earn a little extra too) and let them choose a charity to donate the money to. To really stretch them, permit your kids to keep some of the cash if they wish, and challenge them to decide how much they will keep, and how much they will give.

Relevant Scripture

Matthew 25:40 “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me.’”

Matthew 25:45 “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.’”

Acts 20:35b “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Proverbs 22:9 “A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.”

Day 6: A lesson in obedience

Theme: To love Jesus means to listen to Him and obey Him.

Lead-in activity: Go for a drive or a walk around your neighbourhood to admire the Christmas lights decorating people’s homes. When you get home, play a game of Flashlight Hide and Seek. Hide in a darkened room, then turn on a flashlight beside you to help your children find you. Smother them with expressions of love when they find you! Each time you are “found,” share one of these verses with your children: Jeremiah 29:13, John 8:12, 2 Corinthians 4:6 and 1 John 1:5.

Bible story:

To begin your Bible story and discussion time, read John 14:21, then pray this sample prayer:

Dear Jesus, we want to obey You to show You that we love You. Thank you for promising to love us and show Yourself to us. Amen.

Read **Luke 2:4-18** and **Matthew 2:1-2**.

Questions for discussion

1. What kind of birth announcement did God send when Jesus was born?
2. How did the shepherds know where to find baby Jesus?
3. How did the wise men find Jesus?
4. What kind of announcement do you think the Christmas lights in our neighbourhood are making?

5. Compared to a normal game of Hide and Seek, did the flashlight make it easier or harder to find the person who was hiding?
6. What does it mean to “seek God” or to “seek Jesus”?
7. Does Jesus want to be found by us?

Key concepts

Jesus is the light of the world and He wants to be found by everyone! If the shepherds had ignored the angel’s announcement of Jesus’ birth, they would never have found Jesus. If the wise men had not been attentive to the star God put in the sky to show them the way, they would not have found Jesus either. We, too, need to listen to God’s voice and be willing to follow His leading in our lives. God wants us to search for Him eagerly – just like when we played Hide and Seek – and He promises to be found by those who look for Him! His Word says, “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). We seek God by praying, worshipping, reading the Bible and obeying what God says.

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Jesus, we know You love us, because You were willing to be born on Earth to help us. It’s Your birthday and we want to give You the gift of our love in return. We know that loving You means listening to You and obeying You. We want to do that. Amen.

Add to each child’s wreath a birthday candle with a paper flame as a reminder that Jesus doesn’t hide from anyone; He wants everyone to find Him and follow Him.

Make it real

Whenever you admire Christmas lights, use it as a reminder to be seekers of Jesus – people who want to hear from Him and obey Him.

Relevant Scripture

Jeremiah 29:13 “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.”

1 John 5:3 “This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome.”

John 14:21 “Whoever has My commands and obeys them, He is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love Him and show Myself to Him.”

Day 7: A lesson in cooperation

Theme: God wants us to be willing to put aside our own wishes to let others have their way.

Lead-in activity: Work together to build a paper chain Christmas decoration, or string popcorn and / or cranberries. As you work, emphasize the fact that you are making a “chain” and talk about the “cooperation rules” laid out in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5.

Bible story:

Use this sample prayer or one of your own as a lead-in to your storytime:

Dear Jesus, it can seem that life is better when we get what we want, or when people do exactly what we want. But Your word says “*Better a meal of vegetables where there is love, than a fattened calf with hatred*” (Proverbs 15:17) and “*Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife*” (Proverbs 17:1). Thank you for that reminder. We’d rather have very little, but live together in love and peace, than have a fancy home where there’s lots of squabbling and people insisting on getting their own way. Amen.

Before reading the Bible story, share this background information:

In the years leading up to these events, God had allowed the king of a foreign country to capture most of the Israelites and bring them back to the foreign king’s country to work as slaves. Nehemiah was working for the foreign king. When Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem (in his home country) were broken down, he asked the king for permission to return to Jerusalem to lead others in rebuilding the city walls. The king gave Nehemiah permission, so he went back to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1-3, 2:4-9). When the rebuilding of the

wall began, some neighbouring people wanted to put a stop to it. They made fun of the project and threatened to harm those who were building the wall.

Read Nehemiah 4:7-21.

Questions for discussion

1. Would you have been scared to stay and rebuild the wall if there were bad guys lurking around who wanted to harm you?
2. What did Nehemiah and the builders do?
3. What do you think would have happened if some of the Israelites rebuilding the wall had decided they didn’t want to follow Nehemiah’s plans for protection?
4. Do you ever have trouble agreeing with someone else’s plans or ideas?
5. If you disagree with someone about how to do something, does that usually make a task go faster, or slower?
6. If you disagree with someone you’re working with, do you usually have more fun or less fun doing the task?
7. Do you think we did a good job of cooperating together when we made our chain decoration?
8. What usually causes arguments in our house?

Key concepts

Do you know what a “chain reaction” is? A chain reaction occurs when one event causes another event to happen, and that causes another event to happen, and on and on it goes. Chain reactions can be good or bad. They can make a situation better and better, or they can make a situation worse and worse.

Arguments can be like a chain reaction. Someone might start feeling a little grumpy when they don’t get their way. Next thing you know, they say something unkind and hurt someone else’s feelings. The other person is now grumpy too and says something mean back, and before you know it, there’s punching and hitting.

But love can stop a bad chain reaction. When someone's being mean, instead of being mean back, a person can show love by saying, *You seem a bit frustrated right now. How can I help?* Or when you are playing or working together, a person can show love by cooperating and saying, *I can see you really want to try your idea. Let's try it your way first.*

Love can start a good chain reaction of its own too. When we are loving toward others, it can help them be more loving. And love can start a chain of other good reactions as well. Being loving can lead to others being more patient and kind, which in turn leads to peace and joy in our home.

In the hustle and bustle busyness of the holiday season, it's easy to be unkind, and for bad chain reactions to break out. Let's work extra hard to cooperate with one another so that only loving chain reactions happen.

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Dear Lord Jesus, we want our home to be decorated with the wisdom that comes from heaven, just like in James 3:17. Please send your Holy Spirit to give us Your love so that we can be peace-loving, kind, thoughtful, fair, quick to forgive and willing to let others have their way. Amen.

Add to each child's wreath a tiny paper chain made of strips of paper, to remind your children to cooperate and start only loving chain reactions.

Make it real

Watch for loving chain reactions in your home over the holiday season. Point out how someone, for example, gave another child the bigger cookie, and how that loving act of putting someone else first, in turn, led to peace.

Relevant Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”*

James 3:17 *“But the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”*

Day 8: A lesson in kindness

Theme: Kindness is “love in action”

Lead-in activity: Read together the book *Because Brian Hugged His Mother*, or create a similar story of your own and involve your children in adding to the story. For example, *Because Brian Hugged His Mother* starts with a boy hugging his mother in the morning. Because the mother felt loved and appreciated, she in turn did something kind for someone else, who then did something kind for another person. In the story, the postman felt pleased because the storekeeper noticed how efficient he was. The postman then complimented the baker when he dropped off the baker's mail. The baker then gave a woman some extra bread to feed to her pets.

Bible story:

Use this sample prayer or one of your own as a lead-in to your storytime:

Dear Jesus, You are kind and You delight in kindness! We want to be just like You. Please show us who needs our kindness today. Amen.

Read 2 Samuel 9.

Prior to reading this story, give a brief history of who Jonathan was and the friendship between David and Jonathan:

Saul was the King of Israel. Unfortunately, Saul was not a king who pleased God, so God chose to give the honour of being the king to another person (1 Samuel 15). The one God chose to be the next king was David, a young man who eventually came to the palace to live with King Saul.

David became very good friends with Saul's son Jonathan. After some time, King Saul became so jealous of David that he wanted to kill him. Even so, Jonathan remained David's best friend. Jonathan even gave up his position as the next king of Israel for David, and he risked his life to defend David.

Jonathan died in battle before David was made king of Israel.

Questions for discussion

1. What do you remember about David?
2. Who was Mephibosheth?
3. How did David show kindness to Mephibosheth?
4. What do you think it would be like to eat at the king's table?
5. Do you think God was pleased that David was kind to Mephibosheth?
6. What are some ways we can be kind to those who are less fortunate than we are?

Key concepts

King David wanted to show kindness to the family members of his friend Jonathan. He did this by returning property and honour to one of Jonathan's remaining relatives – Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. David honoured Mephibosheth by having him eat with David at his own table.

In many places in the Bible, God makes it clear that He is pleased when we are kind to others. In Jeremiah 9:24 God says, *“But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth, for in these I delight.”* One of the wonderful things about showing kindness to others, is that we can start a kindness “chain reaction” just like we talked about in the story *Because Brian Hugged His Mother*. Our kindness makes others feel so good, they often go on to show kindness to others in special ways.

Let's decide on something we can do to start a kindness chain reaction of our own this Christmas!

Here are some ideas – or you may like to come up with some ideas of your own: bake goodies for Mom or Dad to share at their workplace, shovel snow to surprise a neighbour, give simple gifts to those who serve in the community (e.g. store clerks, waste

collectors, custodians) or even help a family member with their chores.

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Father God, Your Word says “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Thank you for calling us Your dearly loved children! We want to be just like Jesus and share kindness, compassion and forgiveness with everyone. May the things we do to show kindness this Christmas season start a kindness chain reaction that goes on and on to bless many people. Amen.

Add to each child's wreath a small angel to remind that we can be “angels of encouragement” when we show kindness to others.

Make it real

All through the holiday season, affirm your kids when they go out of their way to be kind to others. Model kindness yourself, by asking a store clerk how their day is going, by letting someone go ahead of you in a lineup, or by complimenting someone on the quality of their help. You might also wish to read to your children Leo Tolstoy's story *The Old Shoemaker* (also called *Papa Panov's Special Christmas*). Many versions of this story are available online.

Relevant Scripture

Ephesians 4:32-5:2 *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

Day 9: A lesson in righteousness

Theme: When we make good choices and live a Christlike life, we can help other people find Jesus.

Lead-in activity: Work together to hang lights on your Christmas tree. Admire the tree with the lights

off, then watch to see what a difference it makes when the lights are turned on.

Bible story:

Read John 8:12, then pray this sample prayer:

Dear Jesus, You are the light of the world and You want us to help You light up the world. Please teach us how to shine so that we can help other people find You, Jesus. Amen.

Read **Genesis 39:1-6a**.

Questions for discussion

1. When Joseph was a slave for Potiphar, what was Joseph's job?
2. What did Potiphar notice about Joseph?
3. Joseph made choices that pleased God. If Joseph had made bad choices, how do you think his story might have turned out?

Key concepts

Joseph didn't always live in Egypt. He was born in the land of Caanan into a family who feared God. He was Abraham's great grandson, and the son of Jacob. But Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, and one day they did something evil: they sold him to some slave traders and told their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Joseph was taken far away, to the land of Egypt, where he became a slave to Potiphar, one of the Pharaoh's most important officials. (The Pharaoh was the ruler of Egypt.)

Potiphar soon noticed that Joseph was wise and very trustworthy. But more than that, Potiphar noticed that God was blessing Potiphar's household because God was pleased with Joseph. Joseph's choices to please God (his righteousness) became obvious to everyone around him.

Joseph went through some hard times, but eventually God blessed him so much that he rose from being a humble slave to being the Pharaoh's trusted assistant and the second in command of all of Egypt.

God wants us to be like Joseph: to make such good choices that people will notice that we love to please

God. In Matthew 5:14 and 16, God's Word says "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Just like Christmas lights light up our Christmas tree and make people notice it much more readily, we can help people find their way to Jesus by "shining" brightly for Him. Jesus is the light of the world. When we live with Jesus in our hearts, our love for Him and our good choices can also be a light to others. We shine best when we love others like Jesus did and follow the instructions He gives us in the Bible.

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Jesus, many people feel lost and empty inside and are looking for You, and You know who they are. Please put Your Spirit in us so we can shine like You do and help lost people find You. Amen.

Add to each child's wreath a star or a lightbulb from a string of Christmas lights to inspire you to shine brightly for Jesus.

Make it real

Print out the verses below and hang them individually on your Christmas tree. Have your children take turns finding a verse and bringing it to you to read. Explain that all the verses are "righteousness rules" that Jesus taught people to show them how to please God by loving others. As you read the verses, ask your kids to identify the righteousness rule in each one. Keep the verses handy and refer to them as you aim to "live in love" throughout the holiday season:

Matthew 22:36-40, Matthew 6:14-15, Matthew 19:19
Luke 6:31, Matthew 5:43-44, Matthew 6:2-3, Mark 9:35.

Relevant Scripture

Daniel 12:3 "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."

Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Day 10: A lesson in acceptance

Theme: Acceptance means sharing Jesus’ love with everyone.

Lead-in activity: Watch the movie *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, or read the book of the same title.

Bible story:

Begin your Bible story time with this prayer based on Acts 10:34-36, John 13:34 and 1 Thessalonians 4:9:

Jesus, You are Lord of all. We are not perfect people, yet we are still loved by You! We want to share Your love with everyone, even when they are less than perfect. Please fill our hearts with Your love and teach us to love like You do! Amen.

Read Luke 19:1-10 and 1 John 2:5-6.

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think Charlie Brown liked the scruffy tree?
2. What things did the other Peanuts characters say to Charlie Brown to make him feel rejected?
3. Has anyone ever said things like that to you?
4. In our Bible story, Zacchaeus was rejected by people too. Do you remember why?
5. How did Jesus show love to Zacchaeus?
6. What do other kids sometimes do that you don’t like?
7. Do you think Jesus would be happy to go to those kids’ homes and spend time with them?
8. Who does Jesus love more – me or you?

Key concepts

We like the story *A Charlie Brown Christmas* because it’s about compassion and accepting others. Charlie Brown showed kindness and acceptance to the

shabby little Christmas tree and eventually Charlie Brown, too, felt loved and accepted by the other kids.

We share Jesus’ love with others when we accept people as they are – even if they smell funny, dress differently or speak or act in ways that seem a little odd to us. Jesus wants us to love everyone, even if they are a little “less than perfect” in our eyes. An important part of loving others is treating everyone as valuable.

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Jesus, when we feel unloved, please remind us that You love us. Please send Your Holy Spirit to help us to love everyone like You do. We want to say “I love you” both in words and in the way we treat others. Amen.

Add to each child’s wreath a sprig from an evergreen tree (like Charlie Brown’s tree) to remind everyone that although we aren’t perfect, God loves us anyway.

Make it real

Try to find a “perfect” Christmas tree. (If you have an artificial tree, go for a walk and look for a tree that could be a “perfect” Christmas tree.) As you search, discuss how it is impossible to find the “perfect” tree, just as it is impossible to find (or to be) a “perfect” person. Challenge your kids to keep their eyes open for people who are like the Charlie Brown tree – less likely to be loved because they are not perfect. Ask God to help you figure out a way to make those people feel loved and accepted.

Relevant Scripture

Acts 10:34-36 “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.’”

John 13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

1 John 3:18 “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

Day 11: A lesson in compassion

Theme: We show God’s love by showing compassion for those who are hurting or in need.

Lead-in activity: Seek God’s direction and select a Christmas compassion project you can do as a family. If you are short on time, it could be something as simple as a donation to the food bank.

Bible story:

To begin your Bible story and discussion time, read Micah 6:8, then pray this sample prayer:

Heavenly Father, we want to walk humbly with You. We want to love mercy as You do. Please show us someone who is hungry, sad or hurting in some other way so we can share Your love with them. Amen.

Read Matthew 15:29-39.

Questions for discussion

1. How do you feel when you see an animal that is lonely or hungry?
2. Would your pet be happy if you fed it, but never loved it?
3. Why did Jesus have compassion for the people?
4. What kind of miracles did Jesus do for the people?
5. What would happen to sheep that did not have a shepherd to care for them?

Key concepts

When we care for our pets we don’t just feed them, we also love them. To care deeply for the needs of another is an expression of our love for them. This tender concern is called compassion.

The Bible tells us that Jesus has compassion for people. We know that Jesus is concerned about those who are sick and hurting, because He healed those who were blind, crippled and unable to speak. We know that He is also concerned about the

physical needs of people who are healthy. In this story, Jesus told His disciples that He was concerned that the people had not eaten for a long time and might collapse from hunger on their way home, so He performed a miracle and fed them before He sent them away (Matthew 15:32).

The Bible tells us that when Jesus saw that the people were like a sheep without a shepherd, He began teaching them many things (Mark 6:34). This shows us that Jesus is also concerned about people’s spiritual needs. Although we don’t know exactly what He taught the people that day, based on what Jesus said elsewhere in the Bible, we can guess that He was likely telling them about God’s amazing love, eternal life and the importance of loving and obeying God and loving each other.

In His Word, God tells us that He expects us to show love, mercy and compassion to others, just as He does. When we do so, God is pleased. He even promises to reward those who show care and concern for others!

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Jesus, the Bible says that whoever claims to live in You must live like You did (1 John 2:5). We want to have eyes to see those who are hurting, hands that are gentle like Yours, hearts that are caring, and feet that are willing to go where You send us. Thank you for living in us so that we can share Your love with others. Amen.

Add to each child’s wreath an adhesive bandage to remind you that Jesus wants to use you to heal those who are hurting and to share His love with them.

Make it real

For the remainder of the holiday season, keep a box of adhesive bandages handy. When God shows your family someone who is struggling, write their name on a bandage. Pray and ask God to show you how you can provide for their needs and ask Him to send His Holy Spirit to bring healing where there is pain or sadness.

Relevant Scripture

Proverbs 19:17 “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and He will reward him for what he has done.”

Proverbs 22:9 “A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.”

Matthew 25:40 “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me.’”

1 John 4:21 “And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Day 12: A lesson in contentedness

Theme: When we have a thankful, content attitude, we enjoy the gift of peace too.

Lead-in activity: Make a “manger” for baby Jesus by filling a shoebox with dried grass, straw or shredded paper.

Before you start your Bible story discussion, and without your children’s knowledge, print out each of these verses on a small strip of paper, roll each one up tight, and hide them in the straw of your manger: Hebrews 13:5; Romans 14:17; Psalm 73:23-24.

Bible story:

Read Proverbs 14:30 and Colossians 3:15-17, then pray this sample prayer:

Dear Jesus, we want to have peaceful hearts. Please help us to be content with what we have, because we don’t want envy or jealousy to eat away at us inside and spoil our sense of peace. Amen.

Read Luke 2:1-16.

Questions for discussion

1. Would you like to sleep in an animal feeding trough like Jesus did?
2. What does this make you thankful for?
3. What else are you thankful for?

Now read Luke 12:13-21.

4. Why did the man come to Jesus?
5. What did Jesus say to him about greed and possessions?
6. What was wrong with the way the rich man used his possessions?
7. Can you think of times when you envy others?
8. What helps you when you are tempted to envy others?

Key concepts

From what we know about Joseph and Mary, it seems that when they came to Bethlehem where Jesus was born, they had very little money. Although Jesus was king of the whole world, His first bed was not a lovely soft crib full of colourful blankets and stuffed toys. Instead, he slept in a manger in a stable, where animals were kept. A manger is a feeding trough where people put the hay to feed their animals.

When Jesus had grown up and was teaching the people, a man came to Jesus hoping that Jesus would make his brother share his inheritance with him. But instead, Jesus warned the man about being greedy and always wanting wealth and possessions. Jesus said there are more important things to think about. Instead of always thinking about what we can get for ourselves to enjoy, we should be thinking about how we can give some of what we already have to please God.

It’s easy to compare what we have with what others have. But constant comparison causes discontent. If we look at what others have and wish it were ours, it makes us forget to be thankful for what we do have. When we are tempted to envy others, we can stop

and say thanks to God for all the good things we already have.

As believers in Jesus, we have some very special things we can always be thankful for.

At this point, let your children take turns searching for one of the Bible verses hidden in the manger. Read each verse aloud and ask your children to identify things they can give thanks for, based on the verses.

God wants us to be content with what we have and to be especially thankful that we have Jesus as our friend, for the power and the closeness of His Holy Spirit living in us, and for the promise of spending eternity in heaven with Him.

Close your discussion time with this prayer, or a similar one:

Jesus, thank you for promising to be with us always. Please help us find such great joy in being with You that we forget to want other things. Amen.

Add to each child's wreath a miniature bundle of hay or dried grass as a reminder to be content.

Make it real

Play the “contentedness challenge” game from the **hands-on options** section of the Kids of Integrity lesson on **contentedness**.

Relevant Scripture

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.’”

Proverbs 14:30 “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.”

Colossians 3:15 “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

Hands-on options

These simple activity ideas will help you create “memorable moments” that reinforce the messages you’ve shared with your children during your Bible story times. There’s no need to do all these activities. Choose as few or as many as you like. You can do them in conjunction with your Bible story times, or at a different time of the day – whatever suits you best.

Wrap gifts – a reminder about acceptance

creative crafts

As you wrap Christmas gifts together, point out how each package is unique. Talk about how God made each person unique too, in looks, preferences and abilities. Read Psalm 139:13-16 and discuss the differences between your family members. Stress that each person is cherished by God. Then pray, thanking God for each person in your family and for the ways each one uniquely enriches your family.

Make an Advent blessings tree – a reminder about contentedness

creative crafts

To encourage gratefulness instead of greed during the Christmas season, make an Advent blessings tree.

Purchase 25 clear, plastic, fill-able ornaments online or from a craft store. Each day in December, fill an ornament with a visual reminder of something that you are thankful for.

For example, if children are thankful for your pet dog, fill an ornament with tiny “doggy bone” biscuits made from modelling clay. If you are thankful for snow, fill a ball with shredded coconut to represent snowflakes. Other “stuffers” could be photos of special people, drawings or small toys.

As you fill the ornaments, take time to thank God for the blessings He has placed in your lives. Here are a few verses to add to the ornaments, or to read aloud to encourage thankfulness: 1 Chronicles 16:8; Psalm 34:8-9; Psalm 100:4; Psalm 107:1,8-9; Psalm 118:28-29; Colossians 3:15; Hebrews 12:28.

Alternative options: Instead of hanging your Advent blessings on a tree, display them in a festive basket or bowl, or hang them from ribbon over a window or along a fireplace mantel.

Candy cane crunchin’ – a reminder about faithfulness

fun with food

Eat a candy cane each and talk with your children about Jesus being like a faithful shepherd to us. Read Psalm 23 and search the Internet for *The Legend of the Candy Cane* and read it to your children while they savour their peppermint treat.

Relevant Scripture

Micah 5:4-5a “He will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will live securely, for then His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And He will be their peace.”

Christmas lights – a reminder about joy

drive time

Whenever you notice some pretty Christmas lights, pretend they are birthday candles for baby Jesus. Say “Happy Birthday Jesus” and sing the Happy Birthday song:

Happy birthday to You

Happy birthday to You

Happy birthday dear Jesus

We really love You!

Gift opening – a reminder about contentedness

other

Help your children practice contentedness by wrapping up two “unequal” gifts. For example, wrap up a full-size chocolate bar and then a treat-size chocolate bar. Discuss with your children what it means to envy and what it means to boast, then hand out the gifts for them to open.

Discuss with your children how it might be easy to be envious of a gift someone else receives, or overly boastful about a gift you really like. Pray and ask God to help you be content with whatever gifts you receive this Christmas. (Hopefully your children will decide to redistribute the chocolate fairly!)

Cleaning house – a reminder about forgiveness and righteousness

physical activity

Get your kids thinking by comparing cleaning your house to cleansing your heart from sin. Point out to your children that, just as it’s much more pleasant to live in a clean house, God delights in living or dwelling in hearts that are clean and free from sin.

Pray based on Psalm 51:10 and Matthew 5:8 and ask God to forgive your sin, cleanse your hearts, send His Spirit to live there, and help you continue to make choices that keep your hearts “clean” and free from sin.

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 51:10 “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Matthew 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Make a homemade gift – a reminder about generosity

creative crafts

Help your children practice hands-on generosity by spending time making a kid-crafted gift for a family member or friend. If you’d like to make a very simple but beautiful “baby Jesus in a manger” Christmas ornament, you’ll find instructions in the **hands-on options** section of the **joy** lesson under the heading “celebrate the joy of Christmas in July.”

Footprints in the snow

physical activity

While you’re outside having fun in the snow, challenge your children to see if they can walk in your tracks. Later, ask these questions to start a discussion time:

Questions for discussion

- Did Jesus walk with a swagger and expect others to treat Him like a king?
- Can you think of any Bible stories that give us clues about how Jesus treated other people?
- How can we care for others as Jesus did?

Key concepts

Share with your children that you try to “follow in Jesus’ footsteps” i.e., live as He lived. Point out to your children that Jesus “walked” or lived in a way that showed He was always looking out for the needs of others. Jesus gives us His Spirit to live in us so that we can live and love like He does.

Pray and ask Jesus to fill each of your family members with His love so you have *lots* of Jesus’ love to share with others. Introduce the theme *Jesus in me means I care for you*. During the holiday season, use this phrase as a way to affirm your children when you notice them being respectful or considerate, or treating others with kindness or gentleness

Relevant Scripture

1 John 2:5-6 “But if anyone obeys His word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.”

Matthew 11:29 “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Ephesians 4:2 “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

Search for the real Santa - a reminder about generosity

other

Sadly today, the Santas your children are likely to encounter in stores tend to ask children, “What do you want for Christmas?” which can foster self-focused greed. To counter this perspective, find and share a story about Saint Nicholas, who was generous and focused on giving to others.

Encourage your children to be generous, like the original Santa, by challenging them to consider “What can we give this Christmas?” Read Acts 20:35 together and ask your children, “How can we spread the joy of Jesus by being kind to the needy?” Each time you see a Santa, remind your children that the original Santa became famous for being generous.

Relevant Scripture

Proverbs 14:21 “He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.”

Proverbs 14:31 “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”

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.’”

1 John 3:17 “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”

Craft a prayer Advent calendar

creative crafts

Practice faithfulness in prayer by making an Advent calendar featuring pictures of family members, friends, your pastor, missionaries and others who need your prayer support. Each day as you open one of the little doors in your calendar, pray for that person or need.

If you don’t have time to make an Advent calendar, put slips of paper in an envelope or in a jar and draw one out each day. As you open greeting cards that arrive in the mail or via email, pause and pray for the friends who sent it. Similarly, as you prepare your Christmas cards, you can pray for those friends too.

Make a paper chain

creative crafts

Make a paper chain that “grows” during the month of December by adding a link when you notice family members acting like Jesus.

Begin by displaying a basketful of colourful paper strips in a central location. Let your children know that when someone is noticed sharing God's love in your home, they will get to add a link to the paper chain. Write on each new link a summary of how God's love was shared with others. For example, *Ben waited patiently for supper to be served. He showed his love for Mom and Dad.*

You can explain, too, that just as Christmas decorations make your home beautiful, your lives are attractive if they are "decorated" with Christlike traits like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, compassion, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

Emphasize that these character traits are often linked to each other: when we are loving toward others, it produces a wonderful "chain reaction" and other people are encouraged to live in love too. The Bible says, "Love is patient, love is kind" (1 Corinthians 13:4a). In turn, patience and kindness bring peace and joy to relationships.

Remind your children that it is the Holy Spirit living in us who makes us want to act like Jesus. His love in our hearts starts a chain reaction of more and more love being shared.

On Christmas Eve, Christmas Day or New Year's Eve, read through the links together and thank God for the many ways His love is evident in your family.

Relevant Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:4-6 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

Galatians 5:22-26 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature 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."

Christmas Bingo

creative crafts

Make your own family game card and score a Bingo by showing love to other members of the family.

- 1 Begin by brainstorming as a family, listing ways that family members can show love and kindness to one another. You'll need at least 24 ideas. (The list that follows will help get you started.)
- 2 Draw up a large table that has five rows and five columns (25 squares in all).
- 3 In the centre square, write the word "unity" and illustrate the square with a heart. This will be the "free score" square.
- 4 In the remaining 24 squares, write or illustrate each one of your 24 ideas.
- 5 Post the Bingo card in a prominent location and play the game for a few days, letting your children take turns crossing off the relevant squares as the tasks are completed. Your goal is to complete one row (vertical, horizontal or diagonal) per family member. For example, if you have four people in your family, complete four rows. Celebrate your family's accomplishment with a special celebration or treat that everyone will enjoy.

Here are some ideas for your Bingo squares:

- Let someone go ahead of you through a doorway.
- Listen carefully to someone who is telling a story.
- Sincerely compliment another family member.
- Offer to do a job without being asked.
- During a meal, pass the food as soon as you are asked.
- Let someone else choose which game to play.
- Allow another child to play with a favourite toy first.

- Eat a food you are less than fond of without whining.
- Plan or make a meal together.
- See someone working and offer to help.
- Do a job that requires two people to complete (i.e. folding a blanket or a sheet, or sweeping a floor with one person holding the broom and the other a dustpan).
- Share a special treat.
- Overlook a rude comment.
- Encourage someone who is glum.
- Let another person speak first.
- Give someone else the preferred seat or cup or blanket etc.
- Carry a heavy object together.
- Share a sink nicely.
- Walk away from a potential conflict.
- Let another person speak first.
- Do an unpleasant job cheerfully.
- Forgive someone before they say sorry.
- Set the table together.
- Choose not to be offended by a loud or smelly noise.
- Share a small space without shoving and pushing.
- Give someone else the larger portion of dessert.
- Give someone a hug.
- Let someone think they are right, even if you know they are wrong.
- Surprise someone by doing a job that is usually theirs to do.
- Laugh together.
- Before having seconds, offer them to others first.
- Everyone help clean up after supper.
- Say nothing negative for an hour.
- While driving, allow another car to go ahead.
- Play a board game without fighting.
- Shovel snow like two graders working in tandem.
- Modify the words to a carol and sing it together.
- Help another family member clean their bedroom.
- Wrap gifts together.
- Let someone else choose which music to have on.
- Read an inspiring Christmas story aloud.

Relevant Scripture

James 3:17 “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

Philippians 2:1-2 “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

Sniff out scents

creative crafts

The Christmas season is full of delightful smells. Sample the sweet “scents of the season” or make pomander balls to inspire your children to consider how wonderful it is to be part of a family where the “sweet aroma” of Christ’s love is present. Close by praying and asking God to fill your home with His Spirit.

To make pomander balls:

Help your children make holes in an orange with a toothpick, then poke a whole clove into each hole. (Firm navel oranges work better than mandarins.) Once the orange is covered in cloves, tie a ribbon around it and hang it in an area where you can enjoy the delightful smell.

To sample the scents of the season:

Blindfold your kids and bring them samples of foods to smell. Have fun seeing if they can identify the following scents:

- cinnamon
- gingerbread
- hot chocolate
- freshly baked bread
- vanilla extract
- almond extract
- peppermint extract
- a freshly cut orange
- crushed pine needles
- spiced apple cider
- pumpkin pie
- apple pie
- sage, rosemary or mixed turkey stuffing spices.

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 133:1 “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”

2 Corinthians 2:14 “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.”

Recommended resources

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