

Today's Suggested Schedule—July 2024, Week 1

Today's Bible Story: Tidings of Comfort and Joy (Shepherds and Angels) • *Luke 2:8-20*

Today's Bottom Line: Jesus brings joy to the world.

Monthly Memory Verse: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* Philippians 4:4 (ESV)

Monthly Virtue: Joy—Choosing to celebrate what God is doing

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Before kids arrive, take a few moments to pray for them. Pray for those who might visit your group for the first time. Reflect on your own personal, ordinary, and everyday moments. Take time to thank God for the joy you can find in those moments and others because of the Good News that God sent Jesus. Ask God to help the kids learn to find joy in their own ordinary moments too.

Check out our Pinterest page here <https://bit.ly/447HSZi> for a visual on some of the activities.

LARGE GROUP (35 minutes)

STORY: Communicating God's Truth in Engaging Ways

WORSHIP: Inviting People to Respond to God

Welcome/Opener

Worship

Bible Story

Bottom Line

Prayer

Closer

SMALL GROUP (25 minutes)

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect

Story Exploration

Bible Story Review: Sleeping Sheep

Application Activity: Inflating Joy

Memory Verse Activity: OH, JOY-FILLED TREE

Prayer Activity: Pray and Dismiss

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

Parent Cue Card (Print or Email)

Devotionals for Kids

Parent Cue App

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Use this if kids have questions about following Jesus.

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word gospel. Clarify that the word gospel means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.

God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.

We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)

God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.

Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.

We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

- **A – ADMIT** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin. (*Romans 3:23, Acts 3:19, 1 John 1:9*)
- **B – BELIEVE** that Jesus is God's son and receive God's gift of forgiveness from sin. (*Acts 16:31; Acts 4:12; John 14:6, Ephesians 2:8-9*)
- **C – CONFESS** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (*Romans 10:9-10,13*)

If a child has expressed interest in following Jesus, please let the parents know so they can be a part of the conversation that their child is having about faith.

What Now?

If you put your trust in Jesus Christ and believe in Him as the One who forgives your sins and makes it possible for you to know God, we are so proud of you! There is no greater single decision that you could make.

We believe that baptism is an important next step for you. Baptism is your way of telling your friends and family, “Hey, I'm a follower of Jesus!” If you're interested in learning more or participating in baptism, talk to a staff member about the next steps you should take.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Story Exploration

The Setting:

Discuss the humble circumstances of the shepherds. They were ordinary people, often overlooked, working the night shift in the fields.

Relate it to how God often brings His greatest messages and joy to the most unexpected places and people.

The Angel's Message:

Read verses 9-12. Discuss the initial reaction of the shepherds (fear) and how it turned into joy with the angel's message.

Question: Why do you think the angel's message brought such great joy to the shepherds?

The Angelic Choir:

Read verses 13-14. Imagine the scene of a multitude of angels praising God.

Question: How does the praise of the angels help us understand the significance of Jesus' birth and the joy it brings?

The Shepherds' Response:

Read verses 15-16. Discuss how the shepherds hurried to see Jesus and then spread the word about Him.

Question: What can we learn from the shepherds about responding to the good news of Jesus?

Sharing the Joy:

Read verses 17-20. Focus on how the shepherds shared the joy they found in Jesus with others and returned, glorifying God.

Question: How can we share the joy of Jesus with others in our daily lives?

Other Verses

- **Psalm 100:1-2** - This Psalm calls for joyful worship, akin to the shepherds' reaction to the angelic announcement and their worship of Jesus in the manger.
- **Nehemiah 8:10** - This verse emphasizes the joy that comes from the Lord, which is similar to the joy proclaimed by the angels and experienced by the shepherds at the birth of Jesus.
- **Luke 1:46-49** - Mary's song of praise (the Magnificat) parallels the joy and gratitude expressed by the shepherds and the angels at the birth of Jesus.
- **Isaiah 9:6-7** - This prophecy foretells the birth of Jesus, who will bring peace and establish an everlasting kingdom. The shepherds' encounter with the angels and the birth of Jesus in Luke 2 fulfill these prophetic words.
- **Micah 5:2** - Micah's prophecy points to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah. Luke 2 records Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, aligning with this Old Testament prophecy.
- **Philippians 2:6-8** - This passage highlights Jesus' humility, from His birth in a manger to His death on the cross, reflecting the humble circumstances of His birth as described in Luke 2.

1. Sleeping Sheep

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

- Designate two kids in the group to be shepherds.
- Instruct the rest of the group to be sheep.
- Direct the sheep to lay on the ground and pretend like they're sleeping.
- Instruct the shepherds to walk around trying to "wake" the sleeping sheep by making them laugh.
- Encourage the shepherds to walk around the sleeping sheep while making silly faces, singing silly songs, or doing anything else safely to make the rest of the kids laugh.
- When a sleeping sheep "wakes" (or laughs), pause to ask them a Review Question from below.
- After the sheep has answered a Review Question, invite them to join the shepherd in trying to wake the other sheep.
 - *Note: If the shepherds are having no trouble waking the sheep, only allow 1-2 shepherds in play at a time.*
- The last sleepy sheep left is the winner!

Review Questions:

1. Where did Mary and Joseph have to travel to and why? (*Bethlehem, to be counted*)
2. Since Bethlehem was crowded, where did Mary have to give birth to Jesus? (*in a place where the animals stayed*)
3. What kind of people were outside the town of Bethlehem and what kind of animals were they taking care of? (*shepherds and sheep*)
4. What surprising thing happened to those shepherds out in the field after Jesus was born? (*an angel appeared to them*)
5. What did the angel say to the shepherds? (*"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. . . . Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord!" —Luke 2:10-11, NIV*)
6. How did the angel describe Baby Jesus so the shepherds would know what to look for? (*He would be wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.*)
7. What did the shepherds do after their angel visit? (*They visited Baby Jesus, and were filled with so much joy they told everyone about Him.*)
8. How can you share God's joy with others? (*Answers will vary. Repeat this question as needed.*)

What You Say:

"Maybe you have heard this story before—around Christmas time. It's normally when we talk about it, right? But we shouldn't sleep on this good news the rest of the year. The story of Jesus being born and the good news that **[Bottom Line] Jesus brings joy to the world** is something worth celebrating every day. Just like the shepherds were filled with joy when they heard about Jesus, we too can be filled with this same kind of joy everyday—even in the ordinary moments!" **[Make It Personal] (Share a story about how the joy of Jesus has changed you.)**

* 2. Inflating Joy

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Explore: an activity that extends learning through hands-on experimentation and discovery

What You Need: Disposable tablecloth, empty bottles, prepared plastic sandwich bags (with baking soda), vinegar, funnels, balloons, and food coloring

What You Do:

- Set the tablecloth out in your group space.
- Divide your group into three smaller groups.
- Instruct the three groups to sit with each other around the tablecloth.
- Set out the following supplies for each group: bottle, sandwich bag of baking soda, funnel, bottle of food coloring, and balloon.
 - If you're only using one bottle of food coloring and one funnel, set both of those supplies out near one group and explain they're to be shared with the other groups.
- Say: "I'll let you know how and when to use each of these supplies."
- Fill each team's bottle 1/4th full of vinegar.
- Invite one kid from each group to put a few drops of food coloring inside their team's bottle.
- Instruct the groups to choose one kid to place the neck of the funnel inside the opening of the balloon.
- Direct another kid to pour the baking soda inside the funnel into the balloon.
 - Demonstrate this and encourage kids to hold on to their supplies carefully to avoid any spills.
- Help each group connect the opening of the balloon to the top of the bottle while making sure none of the baking soda spills out.
- Choose one kid from each group to tilt their balloon upright and watch the balloon inflate!

What You Say:

"Did you see how the gas from this chemical reaction filled the balloons? (*Pause for responses.*) I wasn't sure if we could fill our balloons with enough air to inflate them, but it worked! Balloons are much more fun when they're inflated! Sometimes we're faced with circumstances that kind of leave us feeling deflated—it feels like they suck the joy out of us. Sometimes things happen to us that leave us wondering how we'll ever be filled back up with joy. But today we learned that **[Bottom Line] Jesus brings joy to the world.** Instead of trying to find joy elsewhere, we can connect to Jesus and trust that He will ultimately fill us with the joy we need. This means that every moment holds an opportunity to share God's love and joy."

3. OH, JOY-FILLED TREE

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Create: an activity that explores spiritual ideas through the process of drawing, building, and designing

What You Need: Bibles, green party streamers, clear tape, index cards, and markers

What You Do:

- Make sure each kid has a Bible.
- Together, look up this month's Memory Verse using the Bible Navigation Tips below.

Finding verses with 2nd and 3rd graders: Guide them to open their Bibles to the front and find the table of contents. (Hold up a Bible opened to the table of contents to show the kids what the page looks like.) When the kids find the table of contents, lead them to find Philippians in the list under "New Testament." When the kids find Philippians, lead them to look at the page number beside the word. Explain that the number tells them on what page they can find Philippians. Help the kids find the page. When they find Philippians, explain that the big numbers on the page are the chapter numbers. Help them find chapter 4. Explain that the small numbers are verse numbers. Help them find verse 4 in chapter 4.

- Choose one kid to read the verse aloud to the group.
- Invite other kids in the group to read the verse out loud.
- Divide the group into two teams.
- Direct both teams to gather together.
 - Each team will need at least one of the Bibles to use with their teammates.
- Give each team a roll of party streamers, a few index cards, a marker, and tape.
- Instruct the kids to work together with their team to copy each word of the Memory Verse from a Bible onto separate index cards.
 - Direct the kids to list the reference on one card too.
- When teams have finished writing out the Memory Verse, instruct them to shuffle their cards.
- Encourage each team to choose one kid to decorate—a kid on the team who will not mind the rest of the team wrapping them in streamers and taping the index cards to them.
- Once each team has chosen their kid to decorate, direct them to wrap that kid in streamers like a Christmas tree and tape the index cards with the Memory Verse on them in order from the top of the tree to the bottom.
- The first group to assemble their tree completely and correctly, wins!

What You Say:

"It may be July, but you all still have the Christmas spirit when it comes to decorating! Solid work on your trees. Having a little holiday fun with you today has reminded me of the everyday opportunity we have to celebrate.

"Our verse tells us that because we belong to the Lord, we truly have a reason to always be joyful. This doesn't mean we always have to be happy, or that we're never disappointed when we're facing challenges. It means that even when we're down, we see that there is goodness to be grasped because of Jesus. There is always something to celebrate because **[Bottom Line] Jesus brings joy to the world.**"

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Say:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember?
- How do they help me trust and love God?

What You Need: Noisemakers, ribbon or string, hole punch, and "Bottom Line Tag" Activity Page

What You Do:

- Give kids their noisemakers.
- Give each kid one strip from the "Bottom Line Tag" Activity Page and a piece of ribbon or string.
- Show kids how to punch a hole at the end of their "Bottom Line Tag" Activity Page strip, then pass the hole punch around for them to use.
- Direct kids to loop the ribbon or string through the hole on their "Bottom Line Tag" Activity Page strip and tie it around their noisemaker.
- Say: "No matter what you face this week, you can find something to celebrate."
- When the kids find something to celebrate, encourage them to sound off their noisemaker and remember the joy Jesus brings.
- Close your group time in prayer.

What You Say:

"God, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus. Because **[Bottom Line] Jesus brings joy to the world**, we know that no matter what, we can choose to celebrate what You are doing in the midst of our every day. We are thankful that we can bring our everyday moments to You—our sadness, our frustrations, our anger, our happiness, our laughter, and even our hurt. We trust that no matter what our days look like, You are working out something good. And because of this truth, we can choose joy. We can choose to celebrate knowing You are always doing something good behind the scenes. We love You and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

As adults arrive to pick up, encourage kids to sound off their noisemakers one last time! Ask the question: "Who brings joy to the world?" After they share their answer, encourage kids to look for moments this week to share God's love and spread joy.

GETTING READY

Here's everything you need to know to get ready for this week.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Create a safe place to connect and learn how the Bible Story applies to real-life experiences, through interactive activities and discussion questions.

(Choose as many of these activities as you like.)

** If you don't have time to do all these activities, be sure to do activity #2.*

1. Sleeping Sheep

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need:

- No supplies needed

*** 2. Inflating Joy**

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Explore: an activity that extends learning through hands-on experimentation and discovery

What You Need:

- Disposable tablecloth, one for each Small Group
- Empty bottles (water or soda bottle with small neck opening), three for each Small Group
- Baking soda, one container for each Small Group
- Plastic sandwich bags, three for each Small Group
- Bottle of vinegar, one for each Small Group
- Funnels, at least one or up to three for each Small Group
- Balloons, three for each Small Group
- Food coloring, at least one or up to three for each Small Group
- Before group time:
 - Measure 2 Tbsp of baking soda into each plastic sandwich bag.

3. OH, JOY-FILLED TREE

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Create: an activity that explores spiritual ideas through the process of drawing, building, and designing

What You Need:

- Bibles, one for each kid
- Green party streamers/crepe paper, two rolls for each Small Group
- Clear tape, two rolls for each Small Group
- Index cards, several for each Small Group
- Markers, two for each Small Group

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Need:

- Noisemakers, one for each kid
- Ribbon or string, a 1" piece for each kid

- Hole punch, one for every three to four kids
- Print “Bottom Line Tag” Activity Page on paper and cut apart, one strip for each kid

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

- Print on cardstock or email this week’s devotionals and Parent Cue cards.
- Tell parents about our additional family resources: **Parent Cue app**