

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 Key Question: Who do you know who could use some joy?

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 (Communicator Script)

Key Question

Prayer

SMALL GROUP (25 minutes)

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect

Story Exploration

Application Activity: Take a Snapshot

Bible Story Review: Bible Story Extension and Discussion Questions

Memory Verse Activity: Verses to Take with You

Prayer Activity: Make It Personal with Prayer

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. Take a Snapshot

[Live for God | Application Activity]

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

What You Need: Small blank canvases (or watercolor paper), paint (watercolor or acrylic), paint brushes, cups of water, paper towels, washi or masking tape, tablecloth

What You Do:

- Set out the tablecloth to cover the work area the kids will be working on.
- Give each kid a canvas (or piece of watercolor paper) and a paint brush.
- Set out the rolls of washi (or masking tape) and cups of water.
- Direct kids to take turns with the tape, tearing off pieces to place on their canvas or paper to form the word “JOY.”
- Once everyone has finished forming the letters, ask kids to think of things that can get in the way of having joy (*For example: disagreements with siblings, having to do chores, a bad grade on a test, etc.*).
- Explain that as kids are sharing, the others can use the paint to decorate their canvas or paper.
 - Encourage them to be creative and colorful and to cover up every part of their page (including the tape).
- Continue to invite responses about things that can get in the way of having joy.
- When everyone has finished covering their canvas (or paper), direct the kids to place their brushes in the cups and leave their pages alone to dry.
- While you wait, ask:
 - Why is it challenging to have joy sometimes in our ordinary, everyday situations?
 - What can help you choose joy?
 - Are you more likely to feel joyful when you focus on spreading joy or God’s love with others around you? If so, why?
- Once the paint has had a few minutes to dry, invite kids to carefully and slowly peel the tape off to reveal the word JOY.
- Encourage kids to take their paintings home as a reminder that Jesus brought joy to the world, and because of that, they can have joy, no matter what else may be going on.

2. Bible Story Extension

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need: “Jingle Bell Review” Activity Page, large dowel rod (or stick), jingle bells, ribbon or twine, scissors

What You Do:

- Invite kids to sit in a circle.
- Place the prepared “Jingle Bell Review” Activity Page pieces in the center in a random order.
- Set out the spool of ribbon (or twine), small bells, and scissors.
- Choose a kid to go first.
 - Instruct that kid to pick up the “Jingle Bell Review” Activity Page piece that happened at the beginning of today’s Bible story.
 - Give that kid the dowel rod (or stick).
 - Help them cut a piece of ribbon (or twine) to string the paper and one bell through, then tie it to the top of the dowel rod (or stick).
 - Invite the kid to carefully pass the dowel rod (or stick) to someone else in the circle to go next.
- Repeat so kids continue to place the pieces of the story in order from top to bottom on the dowel rod (or stick).
 - Be sure to leave some space at the end of the dowel rod for holding.
- Explain that everyone worked together to make a jingle stick!
- Ask kids to think of ways they can share joy with someone this week. Direct them to raise their hand to share so you can hand them the jingle stick.
 - Tell them to shake it after they share their idea.
- Continue allowing kids to share as time allows.

3. Discussion Questions

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share with others and build on their understanding

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

Ask:

- How did Jesus bring joy to the world?
- How can you have joy when things aren't going your way?
- Who do you know who could use some joy?
- How can you help others have joy?
- How is the joy that comes from knowing Jesus different from happiness based on our circumstances?
- Can you think of a time when you felt joy because of your relationship with Jesus, even if your situation wasn't ideal?
- How can prayer, worship, and reading the Bible help you experience more of this joy?

4. 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.**"

5. Make It Personal with Prayer

[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: Index cards, pens or pencils

What You Do:

- Remind kids that at Christmas time there tends to be a big focus on giving and helping others but that we can and should be doing that all year long.
- Tell kids that today's "Christmas in July" celebration is a great reminder that Jesus brought joy to the world and still brings joy to the world.
- Give each kid an index card and a pen or pencil.
- Encourage them to think of someone in their lives who could use some joy. Tell them to write the name of that person on the index card.
- Ask kids to think about ways they can share joy with that person and list their ideas on the index card.
- Close your group in prayer.
- Challenge kids to take their cards home as a reminder to pray for the person they thought of throughout the week. They could pray for opportunities to share joy with them.

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.)**

1. Take a Snapshot

[Live for God | Application Activity]

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

What You Need:

- Small blank canvases (or pieces of watercolor paper), one for each kid
- Assorted paints (watercolor or acrylic), several colors for each Small Group to share
- Paint brushes, one for each kid
- Cups of water, 2-5 for each Small Group (depending on group size)
- Paper towels, one roll for each Small Group
- Assorted washi tape (or masking tape), a few rolls for each Small Group
- Tablecloth (disposable), one for each Small Group

2. Bible Story Extension

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need:

- Print "Jingle Bell Review" Activity Page on cardstock, cut apart, and hole punch; one set for each Small Group
- Large dowel rod (or stick), one for each Small Group
- Small craft jingle bells (like these: <https://bit.ly/3vma92H>), 11 for each Small Group
- Ribbon or twine, one spool for each Small Group
- Scissors, one pair for each Small Group

3. Discussion Questions

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share with others and build on their understanding

What You Need:

- No supplies needed

4. 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

5. Make It Personal with Prayer

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

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

What You Need:

- Index cards, one for each kid
- Pens or pencils, one 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**