



**PRETEEN**

JUNE 2024

## FOR LEADERS ONLY

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### **GOD VIEW:** THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JOY AND GOD'S CHARACTER, AS SHOWN THROUGH GOD'S BIG STORY

Choose joy! This may be a commonly used phrase you've heard, but what does it *actually* mean? Joy is more than being excited about the good things that happen to us. Joy is an attitude—a decision to trust God no matter what is going on in our lives. From the very beginning, God had a plan for the world. As we dive into the Bible, we'll discover God's plan for us and how God has been at work through it all. When we see and celebrate what God is doing, we can find true joy!

### **CORE INSIGHT:** The theological foundation for JOY

**Faith** in God's Son. I believe in Jesus and will continually trust Him even when life doesn't make sense.

Jesus never promises that life will be easy or perfect, even when we follow Him. Though we may experience hurt and see pain all around us, God is still at work. Because of Jesus, we can experience a relationship with God and learn how to trust God no matter what.

### **JOY is choosing to celebrate what God is doing.**

### **HEADS UP:** IDEAS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU TALK ABOUT JOY WITH KIDS

As you talk about joy this month, keep in mind that kids are concrete thinkers and need a solid starting point before they dive into bigger concepts and ideas. Kids may naturally equate joy with their circumstances or with their possessions . . . which can cause those who don't have as much to feel out of place or feel badly about themselves and their family. This is an opportunity to help kids see how joy is about more than the things we have. Explain how you can have joy whether you're having a good day or a bad day because God gave us Jesus. Guide the conversation to help kids find joy because of what God has done in their lives or in the life of someone they know.

Be sensitive to those kids or volunteers in your environment who may be experiencing more acute mental health-related illnesses. Clinical depression, anxiety, or PTSD will make it more difficult for people to experience joy or identify how God is at work. Enter those conversations with a posture of listening and encouragement. Don't rush in and try to fix anything with a quick answer or Bible verse. Connect with families impacted in this way and find out the best way you can help. And if your environment turns out to be the first point of contact for this family's experience, be sure to have a plan to connect that family to the help they need to ensure the child's safety.



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### WEEK 1

**Key Question: What does joy mean to you?** Preteens have greater access to technology than ever before. Because of this, they're often bombarded with negative messages, and joy can seem hard to find. That's why we're starting the month by helping our preteens think about what joy is . . . and where true, lasting joy really comes from.

We start the month with **Luke 15:1-7**, where we find Jesus telling a parable about a shepherd who goes to find his lost sheep. Jesus explains that the shepherd cares so much about the missing sheep that he leaves the other 99 sheep to go look for it. After the shepherd finds his sheep, he invites his friends to help him celebrate!

**Bottom Line: We can have joy because of Jesus.** In Jesus' story, the shepherd is full of joy when he finds his lost sheep. He rejoices with his friends. When we recognize that we are like the lost sheep, we can have joy because we know that God sent Jesus to rescue us! And this joy isn't just something we keep to ourselves. We can share the good news about Jesus and celebrate when others put their faith in Him too.

### WEEK 2

**Key Question: How can you remember to be joyful?** There's nothing better than getting together with other people and celebrating everything that God has done—in your life and in the lives of the people around you. We hope this question allows kids to share ideas and think about ways they can make joy a part of their everyday lives.

In week 2, we see how God set aside times and rhythms for the Israelite people to reflect on and remember everything God had done for them. In **Deuteronomy 16:13-17**, we read about one celebration in particular called the Feast of Booths. We see in Scripture how God's people celebrated this feast on several important occasions throughout their history.

**Bottom Line: Make a habit of choosing joy.** Whether it's a birthday party, slumber party, or festive holiday, kids love celebrating with their family and friends! Just as those celebrations are a part of our everyday rhythm, we hope that kids will learn how to find moments of celebration throughout their lives that will help them remember what God has done for them.



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### WEEK 3

**Key Question: What is something that took longer than you wanted it to?** Joy is something that we choose every single day. And we can still choose joy even when the things we hope for end up taking longer than we would like or expect. As preteens think through this question, they can begin to see that no matter how long the journey might be, they can still choose joy along the way.

For week 3, we head to **Ezra 3:10-13**. At the time, God's people were living as captives in Persia, when the new king, Cyrus, allowed them to return home to Jerusalem. However, when they returned, everything was broken down and destroyed. The people got to work rebuilding the temple . . . but before they got far, they stopped to worship God and celebrate the ways that God had helped them.

**Bottom Line: Celebrate each step of the way.** Some tasks seem to take longer to complete than others. Whether kids are learning how to ride a bike, bake a cake, solve a math problem, or talk to new people, they learn that each step is important. The same thing is true about our relationship with God. We can choose to trust God and find joy, even when we can't see the whole picture. We can celebrate how God is working in our lives with every step we take.

### WEEK 4

**Key Question: When is it hard to find joy?** Kids are facing a lot of hard things these days—so much so that it can be difficult for them to find joy. As our kids discover more about our true source of joy—our relationship with God—we hope that they'll begin to discover different ways to look for joy in what they see and experience each day.

In week 4, we take a look at some of David's Psalms—specifically, **Psalms 8, 16, and 19**. David wrote a lot about the things he observed in nature and the world around him that God had created. Through creation, we notice how God is at work—even if sometimes we struggle to see God's work in our own lives. Joy is all around us. We just have to look.

**Bottom Line: Find joy in what you see around you.** God has given us the amazing ability to use our senses so we can find joy through the beauty of God's creation. When kids tap into these senses, they can discover God in a whole new way. Even if not all of our senses work perfectly, we can find ways to see how God is at work in the world around us.



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### WEEK 5

**Key Question: What can you celebrate today?** This question can help preteens reframe their circumstances and look at their world a little differently. It can help them discover ways that God is working in their lives in ways they maybe hadn't noticed before. We hope that our kids will discover that they always have the best reason to celebrate because of their faith in God—even if nothing else in their lives seem to be going right.

We finish the month in **Habakkuk 3:17-18**. Habakkuk wrote these words as God's people were about to be taken captive. Everything was going wrong in Habakkuk's world . . . but still, he chose to trust God and choose joy. Habakkuk ultimately found joy because of God's faithfulness and love that nothing could take away.

**Bottom Line: There's always a reason to celebrate.** Even when we face tough challenges in life, we can celebrate because we know that God sent Jesus to be our Savior. That doesn't make our current troubles any less difficult. But it does mean that we can find peace and joy in the midst of them. We can find joy in knowing that God is ALWAYS up to something good—even when we can't see it.