

4

Practice Joy in All Times

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9



GOAL

In focusing on the joy found in God's steadfast love, children learn that joy is not just in circumstance but is past, present, and future.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, may the children in my care be filled with joy by the knowledge of your steadfast love. Amen

THIS SESSION

Joy is not found in God's blessings in just the past or present; the greatest joy lies in God's promise for the future. By savoring joy in God's glorious presence, giving thanks for God's blessings to us, and rejoicing in others' blessings, we build a foundation for trusting that there is joy still to come. The encouragement to "rejoice in the Lord always" acknowledges that joy rises above circumstances and is found in God's steadfast love for us.

THE BIBLE STORY

Paul writes to the church at Philippi while he is in jail. His circumstances are far from joyful, yet he finds his joy in the community he loves in Philippi and the knowledge that he is held in God's hands. His words to this community are words of encouragement and perseverance. He urges them, as he probably speaks his own words to himself as well, to rejoice in the Lord, not in what may or may not be happening at present; rather, they are to turn to God in prayer, always giving thanks and setting their minds on the good.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children live in the moment, so present emotions likely will rule over past blessings or future hope. Paul's words are a precept or motto to learn to live by. Although they can remember the past and imagine the future, for the most part, children's focus and understanding is in the here and now. That said, children are predisposed to be hopeful, and so, in imagining the promise of joy, they can experience this practice in a different way—with hope, excitement, and anticipation of good things to come.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "A Joyful Noise!" (p. 38): Obtain plastic fillable eggs; small noise-making material such as pea gravel, pennies, paper clips, and so forth; and decorative washi or other adhesive tape.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Spreading Joy" (p. 41): Obtain river rocks, about 3 to 4 inches in size, and paint pens. Have at least one river rock for each child.



GETTING STARTED

- Plastic fillable eggs
- Small noise-making material such as pea gravel, pennies, paper clips
- Decorative washi or other adhesive tape

- Egg shakers from “A Joyful Noise!” (above)
- Internet-connected device (optional)

A JOYFUL NOISE!



Greet the children as they arrive. Invite them to make a rhythm instrument using a plastic fillable egg and noise-making material(s). Encourage the children to explore different sounds with the amount or type of noise-making materials you have provided. When they have decided on their sound, have them secure the two sides of the egg together with decorative washi or other adhesive tape.

REJOICING IN THE LORD



Sing together “Rejoice in the Lord Always,” using the egg shakers the children made in “A Joyful Noise!” (above). Sing all together, sing in a round, or sing with dancing.

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I say, “Rejoice!” (*repeat*)
Rejoice! Rejoice! Again, I say, “Rejoice!” (*repeat*)

If you need to provide the tune of the song, use one of the YouTube videos from the previous sessions:

- Session 1: “Rejoice in The Lord Always—Bible Songs For Children with Lyrics” (bit.ly/FMRejoiceSong, :38).
- Session 2: “Sing-along ROUND: Rejoice in The Lord Always—Dale Reichel” (bit.ly/FMRejoiceRound, 1:40).
- Session 3: “Rejoice in the lord always and again I say rejoice—BF KIDS—Bible songs kids—Action bible songs” (bit.ly/FMRejoiceDance, 1:07).

Set aside egg shakers for “Paul’s Letter of Joy” (p. 39).



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

BUILDING JOY!



Play a game to build on joy from the past and present to joy in the future. Have the children sit in a circle. Invite children to take turns around the circle telling about a joy.

Explain that, the first time around, everyone will share a joy from the past, something that has happened before today. For a challenge, have each child tell something that happened further in the past than the previous child’s joy. For example, have the first child share a joy from yesterday. Then the next child needs to share a joy from before yesterday, perhaps the past week. The next child may share something from a month or a year ago, and so on. After each person shares, invite the children to clap and say, “Rejoice always!”

The next round will start from the present and move to the future. Invite someone to start this round by sharing something joyful about the present moment or time. Proceed around the circle with each child sharing a possible joy that may come in the future, either real or imagined and hopeful. Something real may be that a sibling will be born in the next

month or a vacation will be taken in the summer. Something imagined or hopeful may be that a child may go to college, be an astronaut on a future space shuttle, or perform on Broadway in a play. Explain that each person's imagined joy needs to be further in the future than the person who shared before them. For example, the first person will share a present joy, then the next person needs to share a joy later in the day or week, the next person beyond that, and so on. Again, after each person shares, invite the children to clap and say, "Rejoice always!"



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

PAUL'S LETTER OF JOY



Recall the song sung in "Rejoicing in the Lord" (p. 38), which has been sung each session in this unit. Ask the children if they know where the song is from, or if they have guesses as to who wrote it or when it was written. After some time for conversation, tell the children these facts about the text:

- The words to this song are from a New Testament book of the Bible—Philippians. (You may want to introduce the word *epistle*, explaining that an epistle is a letter.)
- This book, or letter, was written by an early follower of Jesus named Paul. (You could ask the children what else they know about Paul.)
- Paul's letter to the Philippians was likely written while Paul was in prison in Rome, about fifty to sixty years after Jesus' birth, or about twenty to thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection.
- In this letter, Paul sends encouragement to a new church community that was dealing with struggles and conflict, reminding them to be joyful in God's promises!

Read Philippians 4:4–9, or invite one or more children to take turns reading a verse at a time, having the children use their shakers every time they hear the word *rejoice*.

Verse 4 should be well known to the children by this point. Invite the group to brainstorm some different words or phrases for the word *rejoice*. Some examples: *be happy*, *delight*, *celebrate*, and so forth. As a group, sing and move to the song "Rejoice in the Lord Always" ("Rejoicing in the Lord" [p. 38], replacing the word *rejoice* with some of the other words that the group has chosen.

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- Bibles
 - Shakers from "A Joyful Noise!" (p. 38)
 - Internet-connected device (optional)



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

FAITH IN THE FUTURE



Share the following Greek proverb with the children: "Society grows great when old men [and women] plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."


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- Newsprint
 - Marker

Ask the children to think about the proverb and what it might be saying. Invite them to share their insights on what it might mean and how it connects to the practice of joy. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions. Write down answers on a sheet of newsprint.

- ✦ What emotion do you think an old man or woman planting a tree might be feeling? (*hope, optimism, peace*)
- ✦ Who might feel joy in this proverb? (*the person planting, future people who will sit under the tree, the earth, animals*)
- ✦ When you hear this proverb, what things does it make you think of in your life that were created by people who may have never gotten to experience them?
- ✦ What might be something that you and your generation might do for a future generation?

Form two groups, or work together as one. Invite the children to consider the responses to the last question and create a proverb with a similar message using imagery that connects to the shared experiences or context of the group. Have the groups make up a skit depicting their proverb.

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- Bible
 - Newsprint
 - Construction paper
 - Magazines
 - Glue sticks
 - Scissors
 - Markers, crayons

 From The Message: true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious, the best (not the worst), the beautiful (not the ugly), things to praise (not to curse).

From the CEB: excellent, admirable, true, holy, just, pure, lovely, worthy of praise.

WORDS OF JOY

C **A**

Invite a volunteer to read the words from Philippians 4:8 that Paul wrote to encourage the people in Philippi and us to keep in mind as a way of finding joy. Have a volunteer write the key words (from the NRSV: true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellence, worthy of praise) on the newsprint. Check for understanding and define words as necessary, adding synonyms to the list. If you have other Bible versions available, add any different words from Philippians 4:8 to the list.

Talk together about Paul's advice to think about these things. Wonder why Paul might have made this suggestion and how it might help us find joy in difficult circumstances.

Invite the children to make a collage to help them remember to think about or focus on these qualities. Have them choose three words and use magazine pictures, words, and/or letters to make words for their collage. Suggest that the children might want to use definitions and/or synonyms for words as well as pictures. Children may draw pictures to add to their collage as well.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Copies of Resource Page 1
 - Markers, colored pencils
 - Bibles (optional)

RECIPE FOR JOY

C **QC**

Wonder together who has helped their parents or other adults with cooking or baking projects and what they have made. Talk about the anticipation, excitement, and sometimes even worry about the finished product when cooking. Suggest that there is a joy to cooking (even a cookbook named *The Joy of Cooking!*) as different ingredients come together to make something new and delicious. Comment that not all of the ingredients may taste good on their own, but when they are mixed together, they make something wonderful. Wonder together how joy is like that, how good things as well as maybe bitter or difficult experiences may be mixed together with the end result being joy.

Tell the children that they are going to create their own recipe for joy. Provide copies of Resource Page 1 and drawing materials. Encourage them to think about what creates joy, much like ingredients that make up a recipe, and the cooking techniques used such as stirring, adding, baking, cooling, and so forth. Children may want to look at Paul’s words to the Philippians (4:4–9) for some ideas about ingredients Paul considered necessary to rejoice always.

SPREADING JOY

A

Invite the children to help others rejoice always by making painted rocks that will be used to remind others of joy and help them spread it as well. Provide river rocks and paint pens. Have the children write the word *JOY* in large letters in the center or bottom two-thirds of one side of the rock. Above the word *JOY*, have them write the words *Pass along*. Encourage them to decorate their rock(s). As the children work, tell them that they will take their rocks with them and place them in spots around their neighborhood for others to find. Make up stories about who might find one of their rocks, how that might make the person feel, what they might recall, and what they will do with the rock next.

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- 3"–5" river rocks
 - Paint pens



FOLLOWING JESUS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

M T

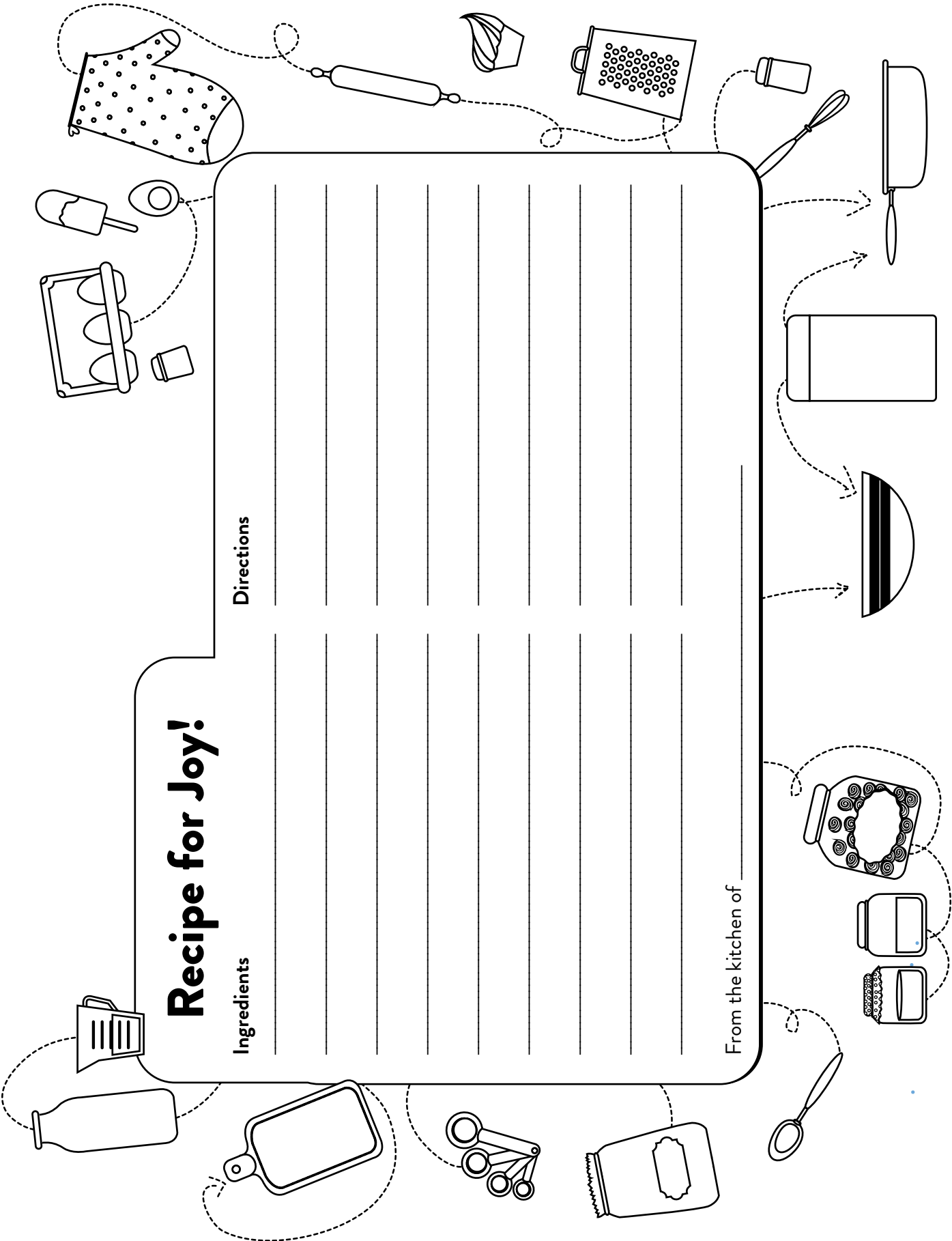
Gather in a circle and invite the group to hold hands. Tell the group that they will send a prayer around the circle two times by squeezing the hand of the person next to them when they have offered a prayer or passed when it is their turn. The first time, the children are invited to share a concern. As each person shares, prompt the group to respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.” The second time around, they are invited to share a joy. As each person shares, prompt the group to respond, “Praise God!” When all who would like to have shared, close by saying “Amen” together.

Close by singing together a version of “Rejoice in the Lord Always” from “Rejoicing in the Lord” (p. 38).

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- Internet-connected device (optional)



Participants who do not wish to share can be invited to simply squeeze the hand of the person next to them when their turn comes. Leaders should emphasize the choice to share or not.



Recipe for Joy!

Ingredients

Directions

From the kitchen of _____