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See Joy in God's Creation

PSALM 65:1-13



GOAL

Through immersing themselves in nature, and exploring nature in different ways, the children make connections between their own understanding of God's creation and the words of Psalm 65.

- 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 I find inspiration for leading this session in the beauty of your world. Help me to bring joyful new eyes to this psalm as I seek to bring your word to the children today.

THE SESSION

This session aims to connect the children to the joy of God's creation and the connections and peace that can be felt in the beauty and wonder of nature. Although quietly savoring God's presence as experienced in nature might not be the first association with a word as exuberant as *joy*, entering into the practice of joy begins with noticing, experiencing, and savoring God's creation all around us.

THE BIBLE STORY

Psalm 65 is often associated with harvest or thanksgiving. Nature is personified as being crowned and clothed in the abundance of the bounty of God's provision, culminating in the description of all creation singing together for joy. The descriptions paint a picture of lush abundance, energy, and fullness of God's creation. The poetry and song of today's text invite participants to experience nature, and to be playful and creative in interpreting those experiences in the context of practicing joy.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

For many children, this text may give a framework for feelings that they have experienced but not named. Whether hiking in the woods, watching snow fall, or noticing a tiny ladybug on a leaf, all children have likely had the experience of being awed by creation. Children may have even heard parents or others say that they experience or feel closer to God in nature. Beginning our exploration of joy with something as simple, accessible, and universal as nature will set the stage for the many aspects of this practice.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Nature in the Palm of Your Hand" (p. 8): Gather a variety of items from nature, such as leaves, rocks, acorns, feathers, shells, flowers, bark, and so forth that children can hold in their hands, or pictures of nature items if nature items are not available.
- "Psalm of Joy in God's Creation" (p. 8): Consider locations near your church where you can connect with nature. Follow policies regarding taking children out of the building. If going outside is not possible due to location, weather conditions, or other factors, utilize some of the YouTube options listed in the session.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Nature's Paintbrush" (p. 9): Gather items from nature that can be used as a paintbrush: leaves, fir branches, flower heads, or moss.



GETTING STARTED

- Variety of items from nature, such as leaves, rocks, acorns, feathers, shells, flowers, bark, and so forth, or pictures of nature items

- Internet-connected device (optional)



To learn the song, invite the children to sing along with the YouTube video “Rejoice in The Lord Always—Bible Songs For Children with Lyrics” (bit.ly/FMRejoiceSong, :38).

- Bibles
- Concordance or internet-connected device
- Hymnals
- Paper and pencils

NATURE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND



As the children arrive, invite them to take (or look at) one of the items you have gathered that they are drawn to. Ask the children to use their senses to come up with three words to describe their object. When everyone has arrived, invite the children to show their item and share their three words. Set aside items for “Psalm of Joy in God’s Creation” (below).

REJOICING IN THE LORD



Sing together “Rejoice in the Lord Always.”

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

Rejoice! Rejoice! Again, I say, “Rejoice!” (*repeat*)



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

FINDING JOY



Tell the children that they will be thinking about all of the ways that they experience joy in their lives, and especially in their faith, in this unit on ways we *Practice Joy*.

Form two groups with the task of searching for ways that joy is found in worship and the life of the church. Provide paper and pencils as needed.

- Have one group use a concordance, either a hard copy or online (bit.ly/FMConcordance) to search for the word *joy*. Invite them to choose three or four passages that describe joy in a way that the group likes.
- Have the other group search for songs with the word *Joy* or *Rejoice* in the title, using the index in the hymnal used in your congregation, and choose three or four songs that the group feels best describe joy.

Have the groups share their findings and discuss the following questions:

- Where is God in the instances of joy that you found?
- What other words might also describe the feelings expressed in the songs or passages that you found?
- How does the joy expressed remind you of anything you have experienced?



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

PSALM OF JOY IN GOD’S CREATION



Find a place outside to read the psalm. Ideally, bring your group outside and sit in grass, by a tree, or in a small garden area. If this is not possible, set up an area in your room with a blanket, sit on the floor, and play a portion

- Bible
- Internet-connected device (optional)
- Items from “Nature in the Palm of your Hand” (above)
- Paper, pencils

of the YouTube video “Sounds of nature, birds singing, Sounds of Forests, for relaxation, sleep, Meditation, Relax 8 hours” (bit.ly/FMNatureSounds, 8:00).

Have the children retrieve the nature item they held in “Nature in the Palm of Your Hand” (p. 8) while you read Psalm 65. Allow a few moments of quiet at the conclusion of the reading.

Read the psalm again, this time asking the children to close their eyes and imagine a favorite place in nature as they hear the words again. This could be anywhere from their own backyard, to a beach where they once vacationed, to a familiar park or trail.

Before you read the psalm for a third time, ask the children to choose a word or phrase that makes them feel joyful as they listen.

Following the three readings, invite any children who wish to share their thoughts on the experience, including their joyful word or phrase.

Bring the children’s attention back to the nature item they are holding and to remember the three words they came up with to describe the item. Invite the children to write down their three words. Encourage children to assist those who need help with writing.

Discuss the following questions:

- What were your three words?
- What sense or senses do they represent? What sense did you use to come up with the words?
- Using one or more different senses for each word, other than taste, describe your item again.



If leaving the building, have enough adults to supervise the children safely and be in compliance with your church’s child-protection policy.

FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Tell the children that they may be able to think of many ways that joy has been present in their lives, but today they are exploring a specific kind of joy. This may be a quieter, more inward joy than they might typically imagine when they hear that word. Some other ways of understanding the specific joy that this session is about might include *wonder* at creation, *peace* in God’s presence, or *awe* at the unique beauty in nature.

Choose one or both options.

NATURE’S PAINTBRUSH



Using items that you have found in nature, ask the children to select an item to clip into a clothespin and use as a paintbrush. Encourage the children to create a picture that evokes a feeling of joy in God’s creation for them. Suggest that they could paint something specific such as a tree or the beach, draw words (such as the word *joy* or one of the words that they came up with while listening to the Bible story), or create something abstract, allowing the colors and textures to make a beautiful picture.

Encourage conversation among the children as they work. Play a portion of the YouTube video “Sounds of nature, birds singing, Sounds of Forests, for relaxation, sleep, Meditation, Relax 8 hours” (bit.ly/FMNatureSounds, 8:00).

Set aside art to dry. It can be used in “Reminders of Joy” (p. 11), if you choose.

- Nature items, such as leaves, fir branches, flower heads, or moss that can be used as paintbrushes
- Spring-loaded clothespins
- Washable tempera paint
- White or manila construction paper
- Internet-connected device (optional)

- Copies of Resource Page 1
- Pencils, colored pencils

REMEMBERING A JOYFUL PLACE HAIKU



The Japanese poetry style of *haiku* often uses themes of nature. Haiku poems consist of three lines with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. These simple poems often focus on the joy or beauty of a single moment, and can be easily memorized and recited. An example of a haiku would be:

*The forest is still
Wait, what is that rustling?
Scampering bunnies*

Encourage the children to think of a moment in time when they were in nature that could be captured in a haiku poem. Hand out copies of Resource Page 1 and pencils. Allow children to work alone or form pairs if they would like to work quietly with a partner. Children who need help reading or writing may want to partner with another child or adult. Encourage the children to try to capture a moment of simple joy.

Another option would be to use Psalm 65 as a basis for creating the haiku, focused on a specific verse to restate it in this specific poetic form, for example:

*Pastures overflow
The hills are covered in joy
Sheep—like coats on land (vv. 2, 13)*

Provide colored pencils if children would like to add an illustration to their poem. Invite any children who would like to do so to share their poem with the group.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Resource Page 2

GUIDED MEDITATION



So much about finding joy in God's creation involves quieting the outside world to experience nature without the distractions, interruptions, and noise of daily life. The practice of meditation goes hand-in-hand with prayer and is used in many faith traditions around the world. Lead the children through a meditation using the following guidelines and Resource Page 2:

- There is no right or wrong way to meditate. While you don't have to be frozen in place, it is helpful to be somewhat still so that your movement or noise is not distracting to you or others.
- Sit in a comfortable position, perhaps on a chair with your feet flat on the ground or on the floor against a wall with your legs folded and your back comfortably supported.
- If you feel uncomfortable closing your eyes, it is fine to keep them open; to avoid distraction, try to lower your gaze and keep your focus on something unmoving in your lap or on the ground.
- Breathe gently throughout the exercise, keeping your body relaxed.

Once everyone has found a place to sit, begin the guided meditation. Speak in a slow and even tone, taking a full breath in and out at the end of each sentence to keep your pace slow.

At the conclusion of the exercise, if you would like, you may reflect on the experience with the children using these questions or some of your own:

- During the meditation, did your mind take you to a familiar place? If so, where?
- How did you feel during the meditation?
- Is nature a place where you naturally feel close to God? Why or why not?

REMINDERS OF JOY

A

Invite the children to create a reminder of joy using the art that they created in “Nature’s Paintbrush” (p. 9) or pictures of nature from magazines. Give the children the following options:

- Mat the painting, or a picture of nature, onto larger construction paper for display at home.
- Cut out a strip of the painting, or a picture of nature, to make a bookmark. Cover with clear contact paper.
- Fold the painting or picture in half to make a cover, and add two or three sheets of paper in the middle to create a small journal. Staple papers together.

- Paintings from “Nature’s Paintbrush” (p. 9) or magazines
- Construction paper
- Clear contact paper
- Plain white paper
- Stapler



FOLLOWING JESUS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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 lift in prayer to God a joy in their lives that they are grateful for. The second time around, they are invited to celebrate something in nature that brings joy to our world. When all who would like to have shared, close by saying “Amen” together.



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.



HAIKU

Haiku is a Japanese form of poetry that often is written about nature and involves using your senses in describing nature. A haiku usually has a total of 17 syllables spread over three lines: five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second line, and five in the last line. The words of a haiku do not have to be a complete sentence, a complete thought, or rhyme!

Using the lines below, create a haiku describing a place in nature where you have felt joy at being in God's creation.

Guided Meditation

Imagine that you are outside on a sunny, warm morning. There is a light breeze that feels gentle and cool on your face, and you can feel the sun warming your arms. You are walking toward a wide, open field. The grass is soft under your feet, and you can smell its fresh scent.

Pause for a moment to hold a prayer of thanks in your heart to God for your body and for each of your senses, imagining the things that you can touch and smell and see and hear as you walk through this meadow in your imagination. Hold that prayer in your mind and your heart for a moment.

As you continue to walk, you hear voices up ahead. As you come closer, you see that some of your favorite people are walking in your direction. Who are they? Friends? Family? Classmates or neighbors or teammates? Their faces break into big smiles as they see you, and soon you are all walking together.

Pause for a moment to hold prayers in your heart for these people. Imagine their faces while offering God a prayer for each of them in the silence of this moment.

Together, as you travel with this group of special people, you notice that you are coming to the shore of a lake. You can hear the sounds of the water gently splashing and lapping against the shoreline. The sun sparkles as it reflects off the surface of the water, and you feel safe, contented, and at peace in the company of these people in this place.

Pause for a moment and hold prayers in your heart for the things that may be of concern to you for yourself, your community, or your world. With this peaceful image in your mind, offer prayers to God for any things that worry you, knowing that God is always with you, even when you don't feel aware of God's presence.

You see a nice big rock, warmed by the sun nearby, so you decide to sit for a moment. As you close your eyes, notice what you see, (*pause*) what you feel, (*pause*) what you hear, (*pause*) and what you smell (*pause*). Look out at the beauty of creation nearby. What do you see that is beautiful? Plants? Animals? Water? Sky?

Come back to this room slowly. Feel where your feet or legs or bottom or back is touching the ground or the chair. Notice the temperature of the room. Slowly begin to move your fingers. Move your shoulders and head, taking a little stretch if that feels good. Gently open your eyes, or bring your gaze up, blinking a few times to bring your attention back into this room. Take a deep breath and slowly release it.

Amen.

