

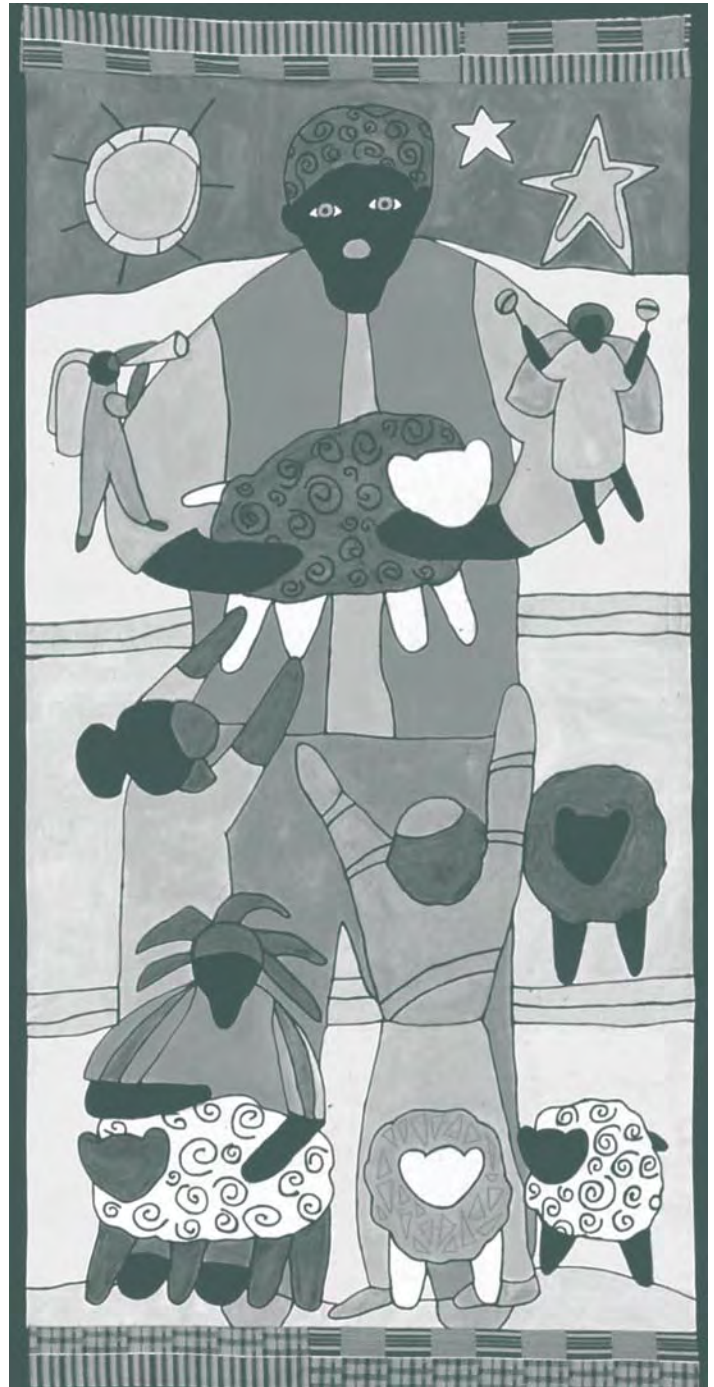
# This Season... Pentecost 2

**A**s we enter the second half of the Season after Pentecost, we continue to explore what it means to live as disciples of Christ. This continues to be a growing time for us, symbolized by the use of the colour green. Readings from the epistles are prominent in this season. The early Christian churches were beginning to realize that Jesus Christ was not going to return soon. They needed, therefore, to find ways to live together in community, supporting and encouraging each other. Jesus' message, which we also explore in some stories from the gospel of Luke, called them to live in a way different from the standards of the world around them. What is faithful living? Leaders, like Timothy, sought advice about how to deal with problems and questions from an experienced pastor. The question of what it means to be the church is as important today as it was in the first century. These texts still speak to us today as we explore what it means to live as disciples of Christ in everyday life. We can be confident through the challenges we face, knowing that God is already present in every situation we encounter.

In this season, we also remember our ancestors in the faith, those who have been our teachers and mentors, guides on our journey. We reflect on the ways in which we are mentors and guides for others, and are encouraged to share the faith with others. We rejoice in the hope that God is bringing about a reign of peace and justice for all people, and we celebrate that God's loving care is for all.

The art images this season are bright and colourful. Light breaks in at unexpected angles and in surprising ways. People support and care for each other. There are possibilities for transformation, moving from shadow to light, from isolation to community, breaking free of structures that confine.

As we move towards the end of the season and church year, we begin to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, the birth of Jesus the Christ, anticipated in Advent and celebrated at Christmas. In the birth of Jesus, God breaks into human history and creates a new heaven and earth. How will we recognize the new thing that God is creating? These are



the challenges the Pentecost season brings. We are encouraged by God's promise to be with us on our journey.



# This Season, So...

## Ideas for leading Ages 15–18 during the Season after Pentecost

**W**e are still in the Season after Pentecost, a time in the church year to focus on the themes of ministry and discipleship. Youth will be encouraged to reflect on what it means to work out their discipleship in everyday life. The scripture passages that they read this season speak of encouraging one another to learn and grow in Christ.

### The importance of ritual

Creating a sacred space for worship and learning is an important part of preparing for each session. Plan to review each session's Prepare section early in the week and decide what materials will be needed for the worship and learning experiences. The colour for the worship space during most of this season is green, symbolic of growth. As this season is also called "ordinary time," consider inviting youth to add some items to the worship space to symbolize the ordinary, everyday events of their lives.

### Reflecting on art

The six posters provided for this season offer splashes of colour and glimpses of light coming in at strange angles and places. There are images of people offering encouragement as well as consolation and compassion. The images reflect a variety of media and offer a window into the deeper meaning of the scripture passages. These images are also available for projection from the *Seasons Data CD* provided with *Congregational Life*. The posters, along with other images, can also be found in *Behold: Arts for the Church Year*, a booklet which explores the themes of the seasons through images and writings (available through your curriculum distributor).

### Using the Seasons website

Invite youth to take turns checking Spirit Sightings (connections between lectionary readings and current events) and Spirit Screenings (connections between lectionary readings and current movies) at [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) each week (using the password *linking*), and bringing information to the group. Many sessions also suggest further research by following Links on the *Seasons* website.

### Background resources and articles

The resource sheets "Suggestions for Leadership Preparation" (p. 93) and "Leading Sessions" (p. 94) provide ideas for preparing for and leading the weekly sessions during this season. "The Pastoral Epistles" and "Background for Timothy" (pp. 100 and 97) give some background information for the readings from the letters to Timothy. The article "To Be Christian in an Age of Pluralism" (p. 101) offers insights from the theologian Marcus Borg. Another article, "Being Church Together" (p. 99), explores the ways in which we can be in ministry "with" others, rather than providing ministry "to" others. There are many excellent articles in the *Congregational Life* resource. To review these, and get copies of the articles that interest you, contact your clergy or Christian education coordinator.

### Basic supply kit

Stock a container with basic supplies, such as newsprint, writing paper, clear tape, masking tape, scissors, glue sticks, white glue, felt markers, pencils, pencil crayons, stapler, hole punch, sticky notes, removable adhesive. Each week the Prepare section of a session will only list supplies not included in this kit.



# Freed to Be

What does it mean to be the church? Jesus and Paul call us to embrace both the cost and promise of living in a faith community shaped and transformed by the gospel. Because God is already present in every situation, we can work with confidence through the challenges we face, helping one another to live as faithful disciples.

## Focus Scripture: Philemon 1–21

Paul wrote many letters of encouragement and advice to the small communities of Christians throughout the Mediterranean world. But this letter is different. It is a personal business letter, written primarily to Philemon, though the letter mentions other Christians who meet at Philemon's home.

Paul, writing from prison, has a request for Philemon. In prison Paul has met Philemon's slave, Onesimus. Perhaps Onesimus is in prison as a runaway. Perhaps Philemon has sent this slave to minister to Paul in prison. However this slave happens to be in prison, through Paul's teaching Onesimus has become a Christian. Onesimus (meaning "useful") once seemed useless to Philemon, but now is beneficial to Paul and to the community.

Paul is sending Onesimus back, asking Philemon to forgive him and to receive him as a brother in Christ. Paul gently reminds Philemon that he owes Paul a debt, and suggests obliquely that Philemon might even consider freeing this slave.

Slavery was customary in New Testament times, and Jesus tells stories of servants and masters. But here we see how the gospel message from its earliest times is beginning to disrupt and transform accepted social structures. The early Christian communities had to face some challenges. Is it right to own slaves? What happens when the slave of a Christian becomes a Christian, too? Paul's word to them and to us is that, slave or free, we are all children of God. We are brothers and sisters in the faith, and equal in worth. What does it mean to be the church, a community so transformed in Christ?

Paul's words set a standard of behaviour, reminding disciples to be inclusive, hospitable, and forgiving. Disciples are called to exceed

the demands of the law in hospitality. Belonging to the Christian community will cost Philemon something, but obedience to the gospel brings a new and different freedom for him and for Onesimus.

Accustomed structures and customs are being transformed by Christ, and disciples are freed to respond to God's call. The crowds described in **Luke 14:25–33** follow Jesus because many think he is on a victory march to Jerusalem to reveal himself as Messiah, God's anointed saviour. But Jesus tells them the high cost of discipleship. Following Jesus means giving up possessions. It means putting first things first and giving as much attention to the gospel message as to business or politics.

Jeremiah speaks God's transforming message not only in words, but in dramatic actions. In **Jeremiah 18:1–11**, the prophet visits the potter's house and tells of God as the potter, reworking the clay (Israel) when the vessel is spoiled. Israel is called to repent and change. As Onesimus and Philemon are transformed by the gospel, as the disciples are set free to serve, so Israel is being shaped and changed by obedience to God.

**Psalm 139:1–6, 13–18** celebrates the way in which God has formed and shaped us in a wonderful way, even from before our birth. Inside each of us there is great potential, and God is at work in us before we recognize it.

•••••

There is both cost and promise in following Jesus. As we continue in our discipleship, God is present in our lives, shaping and transforming us. Through us, transformation comes to the Christian family and to all those communities of which we are part. How can we help one another be good and faithful disciples?



September 9, 2007

Focus Scripture  
Philemon 1–21

Additional Scriptures  
Jeremiah 18:1–11  
Psalm 139:1–6, 13–18  
Luke 14:25–33

God, you know us inside and out. You created us, and you continue to shape us. Be present with us as we learn what it means to be faithful disciples, and help us respond to the transforming power of your love. Amen.

Go to [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) and use the password *linking* to access Spirit Sightings for international current events links to this week's theme.

## The Focus for Ages 15–18

**W**hile it's true that young people have more options open to them than any other generation, they generally feel that their lives are tangled up in expectations from those around them. Even when they are given the opportunity to make their own decisions, youth often feel overwhelmed by the expectations of family and society. It seems that there are very few spaces where youth are able to express or even discover their individuality and uniqueness. They are longing to be set free to discover what it is they can offer the world.

One of the most bewildering things for young people is how the goal posts tend to shift as they try to make decisions about their lives. Just when they think they understand

what is expected and where they are heading, someone comes along and moves the goal post – the rules are changed. They often feel as if their lives are subject to others' whims and fancies.

It's commonly said that young people today have more freedom than ever before, but most young people would probably disagree. Today's reading invites youth to hear about the church as a place where there is potential to be set free to make their unique, individual contribution, and not to have their path determined by others. Pray that youth will encounter today a space where they can experience God's promise of freedom and transformation.

### From Start to Finish

Ideas for building community, strategies for discipline, and suggestions for setting up meeting spaces and integrating technology can all be found in the booklet *From Start to Finish*, available from your curriculum supplier and/or on the *Seasons* website.

September 9, 2007

### PREPARE

#### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- Prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Psalm 1 or Psalm 139:13–18, Philemon 1–21, and biblical background material (p. 9). Practice the discipline of praying this scripture as described on the resource sheet "Lectio Divina."
- Review article "The Pastoral Epistles" (p. 100).
- If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) and use the password linking to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.
- Set a worship space with green fabric, large white candle, and the poster "From Darkness."
- Bring Bibles, matches, offering basket, basic supply kit (see p. 2), and, if possible, the *Seasons Music CD, vol. 5*, and CD player.

#### Gather

- Option: review the section "Ideas for Building Community" in the booklet *From Start to Finish* (available from your curriculum distributor or can be downloaded from the Library at [www.spiritseason.com](http://www.spiritseason.com)).
- Bring song "Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Emimimo," (p. 83, also #10 on *Seasons Music CD*).

- Bring long strips of paper.

#### Engage

- Bring copies of this week's resource sheet "Lectio Divina."
- Bring copies of this week's resource sheet "Meditation" and copies of resource sheet "Where Is the Good Shepherd?" (p. 96).

#### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- Letter writing:** cards or writing paper, envelopes, stamps
- Sculptures:** (three-week project) sculptures from previous week, poster "Breaking Free," small blocks of wood, carpenter glue, acrylic paints, brushes
- Guest speaker:** arrange for a speaker from an Amnesty International group, or equivalent; visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) and click on Links, P2 2007, Sept. 9, Ages 15–18 and bring information about Amnesty letter-writing campaigns.

#### Bless

- Bring song "The Heart of Your Dreaming" (pp. 88–89, also #6 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Visit the seasonal online activity in the Action Zone at [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com).





# Freed to Be

Scripture

Philemon 1–21

**FOCUS** To explore the spaces for transformation offered in Christian community.

## GATHER

**Welcome** youth and spend some time talking about how the week has been. If this is the beginning of your church year, and a new group of youth, spend some time getting to know each other and building community.

**Gather** around the worship space and light the candle. Invite youth to take strips of paper and to write or draw a symbol of a situation this week that has made them feel trapped. Join the strips together to make a paper chain and have youth lay it around the candle as you read **Psalm 139:13–18** or **Psalm 1:1–3**.

**Pray** O God, you create each of us as unique, remarkable individuals. Help us to discover the space where we can be set free to live in that way. Amen.

**Sing, listen to, or read** the lyrics for the song “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/*Wa, Wa, Wa, Emimimo*” (p. 83, and #10 on the *Seasons Music CD*).

### Making connections

Invite youth to think of completely ridiculous favours to ask another person in the group. Brainstorm a couple together first (such as, “I want you to give me your iPod,” or “I’d like you to take my parents out for the day”). Form pairs and have each person take 30 seconds to try to convince the other person why they should do the favour. Explain that today’s story is about someone who was asking a potentially life-changing favour of another person.

## ENGAGE

### Setting the scene

Paul wrote many letters of encouragement and advice to early Christian communities and these letters give us a glimpse into some of the issues these churches dealt with in the first years of their existence. The letter to Philemon, written by Paul from prison (Paul had been imprisoned for speaking about his faith in a hostile country), is different in that it is more like a personal business letter to Philemon, and the Christian community that meets in his house. It is about a slave named Onesimus, whom Paul has met in prison. We’re not sure why Onesimus was in prison. Perhaps he was a run-away slave looking for Paul to advocate for him, or Philemon may have sent him to minister to Paul. Through Paul’s teaching, Onesimus had become a Christian.

### The potential of freedom

**Lectio Divina** Distribute Bibles and copies of the resource sheet “Lectio Divina.” Explain that this is a method of biblical reflection that explores how God might be speaking to us individually through a Bible passage. Have youth find a

space on their own and participate in the activity described on the resource sheet.

■ **What was a word or phrase that stood out for you in the reading?**

■ **Which parts of the reading would you like to know more about?**

**Different way of leading** Paul had enough influence and status in the early church to be able to ask for what he wanted, and to get it in response. Yet he didn’t demand that Philemon do as he requested.

■ **What sort of leadership was Paul showing in this letter?**

■ **In what ways was Paul offering a freedom to choose to the early church?**

**Slavery** Slavery was a fact of life in New Testament times. Slaves had no rights and were considered to be the property of their “owner.” In this case Onesimus was the property of Philemon. The desires of a slave, or the unique things they might offer, would not have been thought worthy of consideration.

- **What attitude does Paul show about slaves in this letter?**
- **What would it be like for Onesimus to return to Philemon's household after this experience?**

Invite youth to think about this story from four different perspectives: Philemon, Onesimus, Philemon's household, and the wider Christian community. (If your group is large, have youth form four groups.) Talk together about how Paul's advocacy for Onesimus would have transformed the world of each of these people or groups.

- **How would each of these individuals or groups describe the challenge and promise of Christian community?**

### Connecting scripture with life

Sharing God's love and God's way, or imagining God's alternative way, can transform our own lives, the community, and the world around us. Because of his Christian faith, Paul was able to see the promise of freedom and transformation for Onesimus. Our faith offers us that same promise too. Distribute copies of the drawing on the resource sheet "Where Is the Good Shepherd?" (p. 96). Invite youth to look at this drawing as you read the meditation on resource sheet "Meditation."

- **What's it like when someone sees our potential and helps us to realise that?**
- **From what would you like to be set free in order to live differently? How might this transform your life?**

# 3

**RESPOND**

Choose one or two of the following options.

- **Letter writing** Paul's letter shows how the faith community can support one's journey of transformation. Distribute cards and invite youth to write to someone in their Christian community to ask for help and support.
- **Sculptures** (*week two*) Invite youth to look at the poster *Breaking Free* and talk about situations in the world where people are longing to be set free from poverty, violence or abuse, war, and other things that enslave. Have youth prepare bases for their

sculptures begun last week by gluing their shapes to blocks of wood. Use paints to add symbolic designs of transformation and "breaking free."

- **Guest speaker** There are many who, like Paul, advocate for those who need to be set free. Invite the guest to speak about how Amnesty International advocates for prisoners of conscience. Invite youth to write letters in response to the situations provided, and to consider starting an Amnesty International group at school or church.

# 4

**BLESS**

**Gather** around the worship space and the poster *From Darkness*. Explain that the artist, Darab Shabahang, was born in Iran and moved to Canada in 1996 to escape social and political oppression. Invite youth to share thoughts about how this painting might speak about freedom and transformation.

**Sing, listen to, or read** the lyrics for the song "The Heart of Your Dreaming" (pp. 88–89, and #6 on the *Seasons Music CD*).

**Close your session** by inviting youth to cut apart the paper chain created during the gathering activity and take a section each (not necessarily the one they wrote on). Have them write words of freedom or transformation on the backs of the strips of paper and then give these strips to another person in the group. Send youth out with this blessing: "This week, and every week, you are given the chance to taste the freedom that God offers. Let this be part of everything you do. Amen."

# REFLECT

In what ways were youth able to see how living in the way of Christ can bring freedom and transformation? Where do you see God's

transformation at work in the lives of these youth?



# LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an ancient prayer discipline, in which a faithful person prays using a reading from the Bible and allows God to speak through these words of scripture. The process outlined below is one way to practice this way of praying.

## **Step one: Focusing**

Prayer requires that you set aside the worries, concerns, schedules, and issues of everyday living. One way to do so is to focus your attention on your breathing.

- Sit in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent.
- Breathe deeply, taking your time to inhale and exhale.
- Try saying a simple prayer as you breathe: for example, as you inhale pray, "Spirit of God, come into my life." As you exhale pray, "Spirit of God, flow through me into the world."
- Give yourself a couple of minutes to just focus on your breathing.

## **Step two: Pray the scriptures**

- Turn to today's scripture reading, the Letter to Philemon, and read silently verses 1–21.
- Pause for a moment to reflect on the words.
- Read these verses again. This time, listen and wait, as you read, for words or phrases that somehow say, "This is what you need to hear today." Don't force this; wait for the words to show themselves to you, rather than looking for which they might be.

## **Step three: Identify key words**

Read the scripture passage for a third time and write, in the space below, some of the key words and phrases that have shown themselves to you.

## **Step five: Speak with God**

Then speak about this with God, in whatever way comes most naturally to you...

## **Step four: Identify connections**

- Choose one or two words or phrases, and slowly repeat these to yourself, pausing in between each one, letting one word flow into the other.
- Look for connections between your life and these words.
- Let these words speak to your life at the moment.
- Let your memories and thoughts take shape around them.

*Finally, let God speak to you...*



## Where is the Good Shepherd?

*Read the following meditation slowly and clearly, with pauses between each section.*

I'd always been put somewhere.  
Someone else had made all my decisions for me.  
They'd chosen what I should do  
who I should belong to  
where I should be put...

It's my lot, really. I've had no choice.  
No point complaining...no one is listening.  
No point resisting...they hold all the cards.  
May as well just live with it, and make do with it...

But then faith comes, and says maybe there's another way...

It treats me as me.  
It offers a way to set me free,  
lets me step out from the crowd,  
become a person rather than an object that's lost in the midst of a  
thousand others.  
It lets me see over the top to another reality...

Faith recognizes just who I am, and respects that...  
even loves that. It calls me by name, not by role.

But faith doesn't stop there.  
Alongside freedom, it brings the possibility of transformation, of living differently  
in the world.  
For the first time it's possible to find the spaces where I can make a difference,  
and to point others to the promise of life that's offered to them.

This is faith I want to know.

Forever.



# Of Great Value

The God we follow showers us with blessing each day. Through a lost sheep and a lost coin, Jesus teaches about God, who can be trusted to seek us always, pursuing us with steadfast love. God's intention is to save. God's people are called to live within this treasure and gift, rejoicing as the faith community grows.

## Focus Scripture: Luke 15:1–10

In chapter 14 of Luke, we learn that large crowds were following Jesus to hear him teach. Among them were tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and scribes. As chapter 15 opens, we hear grumbling among the Pharisees and the scribes: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Jesus responds to their complaint with parables. Imagine the response of the crowd who listens to these stories: Who puts 99 sheep in jeopardy to risk that one might be found? No one who is trying to run a livestock business! Who turns the whole house upside down – lighting a lamp and using precious oil – to search for a small amount of money and then, when it is found, throws a party? No one! But we might hear in these parables how God acts. God can be trusted to seek us and love us. Through these parables, we sense that the flock of sheep and the set of coins were not complete until the lost members were found.

The Pharisees and the scribes perhaps understood, in keeping with many in first-century Middle Eastern cultures, that wealth and good fortune were signs of God's blessing and that poverty was a sign of a person's sin. Not only does Jesus upset this understanding, in the parables God first is cast in the role of a shepherd, a class of labourers held in low esteem within first-century Jewish culture. Then, even more shockingly, God is cast as a woman, the least powerful group in their culture. No wonder the gospel that Jesus proclaimed was seen as good news to the poor (Luke 4:18).

In these parables we can glimpse God's way, God's searching love. The Pharisees and the scribes have been shocked by how Jesus seeks out those whom they perceive to be of

little value. God, however, is persistent in love for all. The reign of God that Jesus proclaims is an upside-down world where one sheep is worth spending the energy normally reserved for 100, where one coin is worth domestic disruption and expenditure, and where one repentant sinner is cause for rejoicing. Jesus' parables challenge all who listen to grow in understanding of what it means to be foolish, to be wise, to be lost, and to be found. Who will join in the celebration of God's mercy?

Even when hope is dim, God can be trusted. In the barren land described in **Jeremiah 4:11–12, 22–28**, a wasteland of the people's own making, there is little hope. But even in such a place of desolation and among those who have sinned greatly, God – who seeks all who are lost – will be present and will not give up.

The psalmist, in **Psalms 14**, trusts that God will restore God's people. God will not forget those who are poor and who have been mistreated by those in power. Sin will not have the final word in God's reign.

Paul knows that he has received undeserved mercy, and gives thanks for this blessing in **1 Timothy 1:12–17**. The good news for all is that, like a shepherd searching for a lost sheep and a woman a lost coin, God can be trusted to seek, to save, and to love.

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From Jesus' teaching, we learn that God's determination to seek us and to love us is beyond what humankind would consider wise or even rational. Jesus risked all to reach those in need of God's saving grace. When have you felt most "lost" and most "found"? In what ways might you and your church be as relentlessly loving as God?



September 16, 2007

Focus Scripture  
Luke 15:1–10

Additional Scriptures  
Jeremiah 4:11–12,  
22–28

Psalms 14  
1 Timothy 1:12–17

We praise and trust you, O God, for your gift of relentless and everlasting love. Kindle in us the zeal to guard the treasure of faith you have given, and to reach out to others with joy. Amen.

Go to [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) and use the password linking to access Spirit Sightings for international current events links to this week's theme.

## The Focus for Ages 15–18

**M**ost youth probably have vivid memories, possibly from childhood, of being lost themselves, or losing a pet, and of the emotions that they experienced during that time. As they grew older they may have experienced other times of feeling psychologically lost, for example in moving to a new school, or going on an exchange trip. In the ups and downs of their emotions during adolescence they may have had experiences of feeling so lost that it seemed that no one was looking for them or cared about them. Older youth are also at an intensely searching stage of their lives – searching for acceptance in peer groups, searching for new ways to relate to parents as they move into young adulthood,

seeking career and education goals, searching for spiritual direction and meaning, and perhaps a closer relationship with God.

Consider the youth in your group. In what ways do they seem “lost” because of family circumstances, or social issues, or changes in school? For what are they searching? In what ways might the message of God’s searching and restoring love be good news for them? Today’s teaching from Jesus will help youth learn more about God’s faithfulness, and that God’s love and care is beyond what humans might consider wise or even rational. Pray that youth may experience the assurance of God’s searching and restoring love and know their place in the circle of God’s love.

September 16, 2007

**PREPARE**

### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Luke 15:1–10, and biblical background material (p. 15).
- ❑ If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) and use the password *linking* to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.
- ❑ Set a worship space with *green fabric* and *large white candle*.
- ❑ Bring *Bibles, matches, offering basket, basic supply kit*, and, if possible, the *Seasons Music CD, vol. 5*, and *CD player*.
- ❑ Bring *copies of this week’s resource sheet “The Listeners.”*

#### Gather

- ❑ Bring *song “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa, Emimimo,”* (p. 83, also #10 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring *tealights* and a *coin*.

#### Engage

- ❑ Bring *posters “The Good Shepherd” and “Solace.”*
- ❑ Bring *copies of resource sheet “Where Is the Good Shepherd?”* (p. 96).
- ❑ Bring *copies of this week’s resource sheet “The Circle of God’s Love.”*

#### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Spiral prose:** *sheets of white or coloured paper*
- ❑ **Lost and found posters:** *poster board, art materials, craft supplies, used magazines*
- ❑ **Sculptures:** (three-week project) *sculptures from previous week, poster “Breaking Free,” craft knives, strips of paper, modelling clay*

#### Bless

- ❑ Bring *song “Never Give Up/Bambelela,”* (p. 81, also #9 on *Seasons Music CD*).



Visit the seasonal online activity in the Action Zone at [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com).



# Of Great Value

## Scripture

Luke 15:1–10

**FOCUS** To be assured of God’s searching and restoring love.

## GATHER

# 1

Welcome youth and spend some time talking about how the week has been.

**Gather** in the worship area and light the candle. Invite youth to take turns lighting tealights as they share stories of times when they have experienced being lost and being found. What happened? How did they feel? Have them place their tealights in a circle around the central candle. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “The Listeners” and lead the group in the “Gathering prayer.”

**Sing, listen to, or read the lyrics** for the song “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/*Wa, Wa, Wa, Emimimo*” (p. 83, and #10 on the Seasons Music CD).

### Making connections

Gather in a circle and invite youth to recall times when they have lost something very important to them. How did that feel? What did they do to try and find the lost item? Then invite them to think of times when they have felt lost or have actually been lost. How did that feel? What did it feel like to be found?

## ENGAGE

# 2

### Setting the scene

In today’s scripture reading from the gospel of Luke, the gospel writer sets the scene by naming some people who were present for this particular teaching of Jesus. Explain that Jesus had become a popular leader and was attracting an unexpected following. Invite a volunteer to read **Luke 15:1–2**.

#### ■ What do these verses tell us about Jesus’ attitude to “tax collectors and sinners”?

Jesus’ acceptance of “tax collectors and sinners” drew some opposition from some of the religious leaders. Invite youth to look at the first section of the resource sheet “The Listeners” and read the information about those who were with Jesus when he told some parables.

### God’s faithfulness

**Drama** Form two groups, if possible, and have one group prepare a dramatization of the parable **Luke 15:3–7**, portraying it as a first-person story from the perspective of the shepherd and using the poster *The Good Shepherd* in some way. Invite the other group to prepare a first-person dramatization of the parable in **Luke 15:8–10**, from the perspective of the woman, using the poster *Solace* in some way. (If your group is small, everyone can participate in creating both skits.) Invite groups to read their passages and discuss thoughts about the stories behind the story. How did the sheep/coin

come to be lost? Why does the shepherd/woman search so intensely? Prepare and present the skits, encouraging youth to portray all of the emotions of the search. After the presentations, ask:

#### ■ Why is there such a great celebration in each case when the lost is found?

Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Where Is the Good Shepherd?” (p. 96) and invite youth to compare this image with that in the poster *The Good Shepherd*.

#### ■ In what ways does the drawing present another vision of what it means to be lost?

#### ■ What details in the poster *The Good Shepherd* speak to you about the joy of being loved by God?

**Parables** Jesus often used parables as a way of teaching. Parables are stories that use objects or events from everyday life in surprising ways in order for people to discover these deep truths.

#### ■ Why do you think Jesus told these two parables in response to the grumblings of the Pharisees and scribes?

#### ■ What might these parables say about God’s mercy and goodness?

**Images of God** These parables also invited the scribes and Pharisees to discover something about

the nature of God. Jesus tells a story that first puts God in the role of a shepherd (a sometimes despised class of labourers) and then, even more shocking, in the role of a woman (an inferior class in that day).

■ **In using these images of God, what might Jesus be saying to those listening?**

Invite youth to talk together about some of their own images and understanding of God's way.

■ **What do these images express about the nature of God's love?**

**Connecting scripture with life**

The parables of the lost sheep and coin help us to see the depth of God's love, grace, mercy, and searching love. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "The Circle of God's Love" and read this story. Recall together the stories of being lost or losing something that were shared during the gathering time.

■ **In what ways have you experienced God's searching, restoring love?**

■ **To whom, and in what ways, might we show God's searching, restoring love to others?**

**3**  
**RESPOND**

Choose one or two of the following options.

□ **Spiral prose** Jesus' parables offer insights into the nature of God's searching, restoring love for all. Distribute sheets of paper and invite youth to draw the image of a coin or a sheep in the middle of their papers. In a spiral, moving from the drawing out to the edges of the paper, have them write some free-flowing phrases which reflect their thoughts as they consider how much God cares for and loves them.

□ **Lost and found posters** Jesus helped his listeners come to a new understanding of what was of great value. Recall posters that ask for help in finding a lost pet or a missing person. Invite youth to make a list of things or people or groups that are "lost" (for example, sections of the ozone layer, an indigent language, the homeless) and identify ways to search for and restore what has been lost. Have each person choose an item or group and use art and craft materials to

create "lost and found" posters naming that which is lost, why it is of great value, and how it might be found and restored. Display posters in the church hall.

□ **Sculptures** (*last week*) Jesus spoke of God's searching and restorative love. Invite youth to look again at the poster *Breaking Free* and talk about how God's love and mercy can help us to "break free" from the places of alienation, loneliness, helplessness, and confusion. Invite youth to complete their sculptures by using the craft knives to open up a crack in the surface of their papier mâché shapes. Have them write, on strips of paper, ways in which they have felt alienated, lost, alone, and place these inside their shapes. Then have them use the modelling clay to create shapes to place in the cracks of their sculptures, representing being drawn out of the lost places and restored by God's love.

**4**  
**BLESS**

**Gather** again around the lit candle. Look again at the painting *The Good Shepherd*, noticing the joyful mood and colours. Invite youth to recall times of celebration when something that was lost is found. Call out words that describe that kind of joy and celebration.

**Sing, listen to, or read the lyrics** for the song "Never Give Up/*Bambelela*" (p. 81, and #9 on

the *Seasons Music CD*).

**Close your session** by inviting youth to gather in a circle facing outward. Form two groups and lead youth in the first half of the "Blessing prayer" on the resource sheet "The Listeners." Invite youth to turn to face the centre of the circle and lead them in the last half of the prayer.

**REFLECT**

Reflect on how youth experience God's searching and restorative love in their own lives and in the church. How might the faith community help youth experience the circle of God's love?



# THE LISTENERS

Jesus came into contact with many different groups of people during his teaching ministry. Here is some background information about some of the people who were listening to Jesus on the day he told a parable about a shepherd looking for a lost sheep and a woman searching for a lost coin.

## Tax collectors and sinners

Tax collectors earned their living by collecting taxes for the Roman government that occupied the land. The writers of the gospels in the New Testament use the word “sinner” to describe those people who deliberately broke God’s commandments and did not repent. Certain ways of living, for example, as a tax collector or prostitute, involved breaking the rules or regulations about purity.

## Pharisees

The Pharisees were religious leaders who put a lot of emphasis on learning scripture and following religious practices (such as those described in the Law of Moses). They worked hard to follow the Law in their daily lives, especially the food laws and other laws about ritual purity. The Pharisees ate only with those who, like them, observed the purity laws or regulations. They seemed to be followers of Jesus because there are many stories in the gospels that mention the presence of Pharisees who would listen to Jesus and discuss ideas with him. Some gospel writers show the Pharisees as being critical of Jesus but others describe a more friendly relationship.

## Scribes

These were people who could read and write and were trained in the Law. They helped religious and other leaders to write down, record, and keep track of important information. They were also responsible for helping to interpret the Law, and they worked closely with the priests.

## Gathering prayer

**One:** Loving God,  
**All:** **Open our eyes to see you here.**  
**One:** Loving God,  
**All:** **Open our ears to hear you here.**  
**One:** Loving God,  
**All:** **Open our hands to receive you here.**  
**One:** Loving God,  
**All:** **Open our lives to experience you here. Amen.**

## Blessing prayer

**Leader:** God, who searches for all who are lost,  
**Group 1:** we remember times when we’ve felt lost...  
**Group 2:** we remember those in the world who feel lost...  
**Leader:** God, who offers a restoring and never-ending love,  
**Group 1:** thank you that you never give up searching.  
**Group 2:** Thank you that you never give up loving.  
**Leader:** Be with us as we go from this place.  
**All:** **Be with us as we go from this place.**



# The Circle of God's Love

I would like to share a story. It is a story about being lost. I do not remember being lost because I was very little, about two years old. I grew up on a pony farm in Canada. There were many places to wander, and at two years old, lots of places to get lost.

The story goes like this. We had a huge vegetable garden behind our home. We grew many kinds of vegetables such as corn, peas, carrots and potatoes. There was also a strawberry patch and raspberry bushes. My great-grandfather loved to spend time in the garden. On this particular day my great-grandfather was hoeing the garden. I wanted to help and so he had given me a small child's rake.

My great-grandfather was busy weeding the garden and when he turned around to check on me I had disappeared. He walked to the house as fast as his ninety-year-old legs could carry him and called to my parents, "I cannot find Vicki! She's gone. I've lost her!"

My father and my mother and my great-grandfather looked frantically for me. They called my name. They looked in the every place they could think of, including behind the raspberry bushes, under the picnic bench, inside the dog house, but no Vicki. They were very worried. A pony farm is a big place.

Then my father looked out into the field of ponies. The ponies had formed a circle. That is what they do when they want to protect their colts from danger. My father suddenly knew where I was. He very carefully and slowly climbed the wire fence that was beside my home and the garden. He entered gently into the circle of ponies, speaking to them in a very soft voice. When he reached the centre, my father found me sitting on the grass enclosed within a protective circle of ponies. The ponies knew that I was in danger and so they protected me.

My parents told me this story when I was older. "You were not afraid," they said. "You didn't even know that you were lost." I remember this story during the times that I do feel lost and alone. It is then that I remember that we are always surrounded by the love of God. God's love is like a big circle of ponies.

Rev. Vicki Cousins  
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Source: *Women's Concerns*, Issue Two, 2004, p. 40