

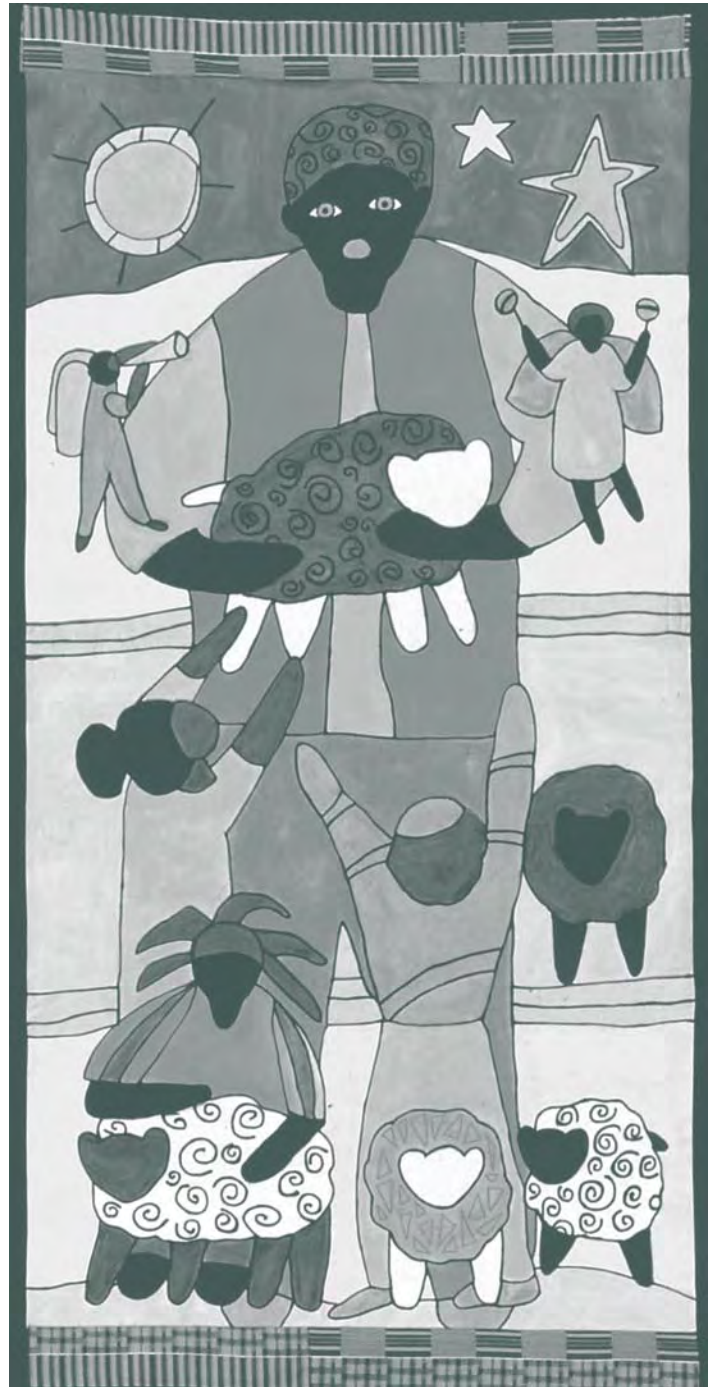
# This Season... Pentecost 2

**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. . .

**D**uring the second half of the Season after Pentecost, the children will be exploring what it means to be disciples in everyday life, both as individuals and as the church. They will celebrate what it means to be the church together and consider how to support and encourage each other in ministry and discipleship. The focus passages for this season come from a variety of sources. Mostly you will listen to excerpts from some of the letters sent to the very first church communities and explore some of the stories from the gospel of Luke. On two occasions you will enjoy a story from the Hebrew Scriptures.

## **Create a worship focus area and simple rituals**

Most children aged six to eight have a natural ability to experience the awe and mystery of rituals. Place the items for the worship focus area in a special basket and invite children to help set up the worship table each week. Involving the children in this way will give them a sense of ownership and increase their interest. The table will be set with a green cloth (the colour of Pentecost) reminding us that this is a season of growth and new life. The candle is a symbol of Jesus' presence with us, the offering basket reminds us of the ways in which we show God's love to the world, and the Bible reminds us of God's love for us and helps us learn more about following Jesus. The children may wish to bring in items that are important to them or are appropriate to the season (such as shells, seeds, flowers...).

## **Gathering and closing rituals**

Each week at the start of the session, the children will gather in a circle beside the worship table, place their hands in a pile, and participate in a simple liturgy that reaffirms that they are the church. You will notice that the wording of the second line varies slightly each week to reflect the focus for the day. At the end of the session, the children will gather in a circle and place their hands in a pile as before to say a sending out blessing to one another.



## **Creating a welcoming atmosphere**

Creating a welcoming atmosphere is an important part of session preparation. If possible, try to provide meeting areas that are bright, clean, and inviting. Displaying attractive posters (use the images provided with this package), the children's artwork, and seasonal decorations are some of the ways to make your learning area look like a place where children want to be. No matter what facilities you have at your disposal, the most important welcome you give to the children of your group is the warmth of your smile and the way that you treat them with respect and love. Greeting each child by name, taking the time to listen to their joys and concerns, inviting their input, encouraging their participation, sending notes of affirmation, are all ways to help the children feel welcomed and included.

## **A word about reading and writing skills**

Reading and writing skills at this age level can vary greatly. Some children will read and write with no difficulty, while others may be just starting to master the basic skills. Invite children to read when appropriate, but avoid putting any child "on the spot." Always be encouraging and patient with any volunteered effort. Take the time to read written instructions aloud with the children before they begin an activity. Check to make sure the children understand what they are supposed to do before starting. If an activity requires writing, be available to act as a scribe for anyone who needs help.

## **Starting and ending your season**

For some churches in the Northern Hemisphere, September marks the beginning of a new church school year. Regular church school may begin any time in the first three weeks of September. If you will begin after September 2, it is important to look back at previous sessions for a description of rituals that carry on through the entire season. The supplement *From Start to Finish* is available through your curriculum distributor, or as a downloadable document from the Library at [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com). Here you will find more ideas for setting the sacred space, ideas for cooperative games and group building activities, strategies for leadership, ages and stages of faith development, starting and ending your year, and much more.



# 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 6–8

Most children aged six to eight years love being a part of a club, team, or special group. They are starting to value social interaction and relish the sense of security that comes from knowing they belong. At this age, most children are generally cooperative and have experienced the benefits of collaboration. They are used to working with others on school projects, sports teams, and community events. They have experienced what it is like to be helped and encouraged by others in a group. Exploring what it means to work out our discipleship in everyday life is celebrated as a theme in this Season after Pentecost. As the children continue to examine what it means to be the church, they will discover that they can help each other be disciples. Point out ways that they help each

other as they work together in their worship, story exploration, and outreach. Comment positively when you gain new insights or understandings as a result of their comments and questions. You will notice that we are focusing only on the first seven verses of the lectionary passage this week. The subject of slavery is completely outside the life experience and comprehension of most six- to eight-year-olds. For now, the children will concentrate on the words of encouragement in the first part of the letter. If this is your first week together, take some time to play some community building games (see p. 97) as a way of helping each person feel comfortable. Pray that the children will recognize that they can help each other grow as disciples of Jesus.

### 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

If this is your first week together, review the gathering ritual established on September 2.

### PREPARE

#### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Philemon 1–21, and biblical background material on page 9.
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (p. 93) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 5*, and *CD player*.
- ❑ Bring items for worship area: *green cloth, offering basket, candle, matches*, and *Bible with a bookmark at Philemon*.
- ❑ Display words to *opening and closing prayers*.

#### Gather

- ❑ Bring song "What If You Came to My Church" (pp. 101–102).
- ❑ Bring a *bag of items that could be used to help others* (such as an adhesive bandage, dusting cloth, garden trowel, pen, greeting card, book, hammer...).

#### Engage

- ❑ Bring poster "First Steps, after Millet."
- ❑ Bring today's *resource sheet "A Letter from Paul."* Make a simple *scroll* and print the letter (found in the story p. 13) on it. Roll up the scroll and tie with *ribbon or string*.

- ❑ Bring *basket of block people* (p. 98).
- ❑ Bring today's *resource sheet "Helping Each Other," a basket*, and *small ball*. Follow instructions on resource sheet for game preparation beforehand.

#### Respond

Choose the options you plan to use for this session. Prepare and bring the necessary materials.

- ❑ **Group booklet:** *paper strips* (11cm x 35.5cm/4in x 14 in)
- ❑ **Prayer anklets:** *pipe cleaners* and a *variety of items that can be threaded* (such as beads, buttons, charms...)
- ❑ **Group mural:** *mural paper* (or tape several large pieces of paper together), and a *variety of decorations* (such as self-adhesive stickers, felt shapes, sequins, buttons...). Print, "We are the church!" in the middle of the mural paper.

#### Bless

- ❑ Bring song "Everyday Loving" (pp. 84–85, also #24 *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 ways that we help each other be the church.

## GATHER

If this is your first week together, play some community building games (see p. 97) as a way of encouraging the children to share some information about themselves.

**Welcome the children** and introduce any newcomers. Bring out the basket of items for the worship focus area. Invite children to help prepare the worship table.

### Opening ritual

Gather in a circle beside the worship table. Light the candle. Extend your hand palm down in the middle of the circle as you say,

**Come, let us gather together in God's love.**

Each person, in turn, places a hand on top until everyone has one hand on the pile. Once all children have placed their hands in the pile, say,

**Together we will help each other be disciples.**

**Together we are the church!**

The children respond by raising their hands high in the air and shouting,

**We are the church!**

**Pray** (*repeat each line or read together*)

Dear God,  
as we gather in this circle today,  
help us to learn more about

following in the way of Jesus and showing your love. Amen.

**Sing** "What If You Came to My Church" (pp. 101–102).

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the gathering ritual has ended.

### Introducing the theme

Show the bag containing helpful items to the children. Ask each child, in turn, to close his or her eyes, reach in, take one thing, and guess what it is before removing it from the bag. Then invite everyone to describe how that object might be used to help others. Encourage creativity and humour by suggesting they let their imaginations go beyond the obvious. A dusting cloth could be used to help someone dust the furniture, or it could be used as a zany hat to keep hair dry in a rainstorm! Continue until all items have been taken from the bag. Invite children to name some things they do to help others. How do others help them?

## ENGAGE

**Poster First Steps** Look at the image together. Ask, "What catches your attention first?" Invite children to make up a story about the group of people. Encourage them to share stories about helping or watching a young child learn to walk. Who is helping the child grow and learn? What do you think they are saying? Recall that during this Season after Pentecost we are discovering some of the different ways in which the people in the early church encouraged each other to learn and grow.

**Bible story** Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to Philemon. Mention that when the church was just beginning, the early Christians would send letters to encourage and offer teaching. Today we are reading part of a letter that was written by a

leader called Paul. Use resource sheet "A Letter from Paul" to tell the story, encouraging the children's participation as suggested.

### After the story

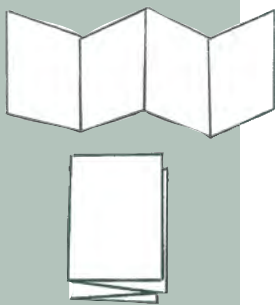
**Game** This activity helps children think about ways they might H.E.L.P. (**H**elp, **E**ncourage, **L**ove, and **P**ray for each other.) Sit in a circle facing the middle. Place the basket of game slips to one side. Choose one player to be the leader and give him or her the ball. The leader starts the game by throwing the ball to one of the players and then closes eyes. The other players continue to pass the ball randomly and quickly within the circle. After a short period, the leader calls out, "Freeze!" and opens eyes. The player who has the ball takes one of the slips from the basket and reads out the statement to everyone (assist

if necessary). Encourage the group to help each other by making suggestions and giving ideas. The player who has the ball becomes

the new leader. Repeat the game using the other game slips.

# 3

**RESPOND**



Choose from the following activities.

- ❑ **Group booklet** Paul's letter reminds us to pray for one another. Sit around a table. Distribute strips of paper. Fold into four equal pages accordion style. Each strip will fold to make one cover and three pages. Each child will need one page for each person in the group, so several folded strips may need to be joined together with tape. Invite children to print their names on the first pages (not the covers) of the booklets. Then, instruct children to move one place to the right at the table, and print their names in the second pages of the next booklets. Then, move one place to the right and repeat again. Continue until children have printed their names into every booklet. If time, decorate the book covers. Invite children to take their booklets home and use the information to pray for each other during the week.
- ❑ **Prayer anklets** Just like the followers of Jesus that met in Philemon's house, we can pray for each other. Invite children to thread beads or buttons onto pipe cleaners. They will need one item for each person in

the group. As they thread each item on the pipe cleaners, encourage children to name silently one person in the group and ask God to bless her or him. Fold in tips of pipe cleaners to hide sharp points. Wear by twisting the two ends of the pipe cleaner comfortably around the ankle.



- ❑ **Group mural** The people in the story discovered that together they could help each other follow Jesus. Gather around the mural paper and read the words "We are the church!" Have children trace around their hands on coloured construction paper. Decorate hands with lines, dots, and swirls to create interesting patterns and textures. Cut out hand shapes and arrange on the mural paper. Add colour and sparkle by gluing on extra decorations. Leave some spaces to add hands of children not present today. Invite children to choose a title for their mural and display where others can enjoy it.

# 4

**BLESS**

Gather in a circle beside the worship table. Light the candle.

- Pray** Loving God,  
thank you for our learning  
community.  
Help us as we learn more about being  
the church together. Amen.

**Listen** "Everyday Loving" (pp. 84–85, also #24 *Seasons Music CD*)

Encourage the children to sing the chorus each time. After the song, pile hands in the middle of the circle. Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), go and follow in Jesus' way this week." Lift hands off the pile all together, shouting, "We are the church!" Extinguish the candle.

# REFLECT

What do you think the children discovered about being the church in this session? In what ways did the children help and encourage each other? How did they help and encourage you? How might you continue to encourage them and help them to grow as disciples?



# A Letter from Paul

(based on Philemon 1–7)

## Story Tip

Most young children love to hear stories. Don't worry about making a mistake. It probably won't be noticed unless you get upset. Just carry on with the telling.

A long time ago there were three followers of Jesus named Philemon (fih-LEE-muhn), Apphia (AF-ee-uh), and Archippus (ahr-KIHP-uhs). These three disciples loved Jesus and wanted to share God's love with everyone. People would come to their house to sing, pray, and tell stories. Eventually the house became a place where the followers of Jesus gathered as part of God's church. *(Invite each person to pick out a few block people and place them in a circle.)* One day when the people arrived at their house church, they heard some wonderful news.

*(Choose three of the blocks to play the story characters. Hold each one up as you say the following dialogue.)*

**Philemon:** Guess what? A letter from Paul has arrived!

**Apphia:** It's been so long since we have seen our good friend Paul.

**Archippus:** Everyone is here. Let's open the letter now!

Philemon slowly opened the letter. Everyone was very quiet, waiting to hear what Paul would say.

*(Unroll the scroll and read the following letter.)*

To Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, and the church that meets in your house.

Greetings!

When I remember you in my prayers, I always give thanks to God. I keep hearing about the love you have for each other. Brothers and sisters, did you know that the way in which you welcome and love others brings great joy to the people? I

want the best for you, so I have been praying for you. When you love and help each other become good disciples, everyone sees God's love.

Don't forget that God is always with you and will help you.

From your friend,  
Paul

Philemon put down the letter and looked at everyone. "That is a good reminder from Paul," Philemon said.

"Yes, it is, and we can make up a chant to help us remember that. Let's do it together now!" said Archippus.

*(Present the following conversation as a chant.)*

**Archippus:** Now we know just what to do.

**Apphia:** Help each other. Yes, it's true!

**Archippus:** Help, encourage, love, and pray.

**Apphia:** We can do this everyday!

*(Encourage the children to join in the following cheer.)*

**Philemon:** Give me an H.

**Together:** H.

**Philemon:** Give me an E.

**Together:** E.

**Philemon:** Give me an L.

**Together:** L.

**Philemon:** Give me a P.

**Together:** P.

**Philemon:** What have we got?

**Together:** HELP!

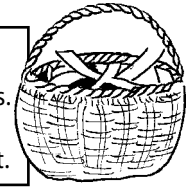
Everyone was very excited. "We can do this together," they said to each other. "We are the church and we can help each other be disciples."



# Helping Each Other

### Preparations

- Cut out the game slips.
- Fold each slip and place in a small basket.



Say something encouraging to your group. You might say,  
 "We are the church and we are \_\_\_\_\_."

*Here's a tricky situation. Ask the group to help you figure out what you could do.*  
 You're at school. Someone grabs your artwork as a joke and accidentally tears it in half. Now you're upset. What could you do?

What encouraging words could you say to someone this week?

*Here's a tricky situation. Ask the group to help you figure out what you could do.*  
 Your new birthday gift is missing. Last time you saw it, your brother was using it. Your brother says he doesn't have it. What could you do?

Who could you pray for this week?

*Here's a tricky situation. Ask the group to help you figure out what you could do.*  
 Some of the children at school are teasing the new student. If you do anything, they might tease you too. What could you do?

*Here's a tricky situation. Ask the group to help you figure out what you could do.*  
 A group is organizing a morning to wash the toys in the nursery at your church. You want to help, but your friend asks you to go to her house for a sleep-over on that day. What could you do?

How could you show God's love at school this week?

*Here's a tricky situation. Ask the group to help you figure out what you could do.*  
 Your friend's mother is quite sick and your friend is very upset. What could you do?

How could you show God's love at home this week?

*Here's a tricky situation. Ask the group to help you figure out what you could do.*  
 You know there are people in your community who do not have enough food to eat. You want to help. What could you do?

How could you show God's love at church this week?

# 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 6–8

Children at this age may relate easily to today's theme of lost and found. They may, themselves, have experienced being lost and know first-hand the feelings of fear/sadness, and the joy at being "found" or reunited with a parent. They will enjoy hunting for a treasure at the beginning of today's session and may be able to share stories of losing something important to them and how it felt when it was found. Still largely literal thinkers, six- to eight-year-olds will need help to understand that these are stories that Jesus told to help us understand how much God loves us. Just as the woman and the shepherd rejoice in finding what was literally lost,

God rejoices when those who feel separated from God or from others are reunited again. For concrete thinkers, this can be a difficult concept. We can help them see the stories of the lost coin and the lost sheep as examples of God's steadfast love. We hope that children have had enough experiences with trusted adults to recognize the steadfastness that is shown by the shepherd and the woman. If you discover children in your group who have not had those kinds of experiences, pray that you will be an example of this kind of love for them. Also, take time to pray that the children in your group may feel sure of God's unconditional love for them.

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 on page 15.
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (p. 93) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 5*, and *CD player*.
- ❑ Bring items for worship area: *green cloth, offering basket, candle, matches*, and Bible with a *bookmark* in the gospel of Luke.
- ❑ Display words to *opening* and *closing prayers*.

#### Gather

- ❑ Bring song "What If You Came to My Church" (pp. 101–102).
- ❑ Hide *treats* (such as foil-covered chocolate coins) around the learning space for the children to find.

#### Engage

- ❑ Bring today's *resource sheet "Lost and Found."*
- ❑ Bring *poster "First Steps, after Millet."*
- ❑ Bring a toaster, bread slices, food colouring/dye, milk and small clean brushes. Read recipe "Toast Faces" (p. 95).

#### Respond

Choose from the following activities. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Puzzle:** *copies of today's resource sheet "Find the Message"*
- ❑ **Coin pouch:** *felt, large darning needles, embroidery thread, glue, buttons, yarn or cord, and foil-covered chocolate coins (optional).* Read instructions on page 93.
- ❑ **Comic strip:** *white sheets of paper*

#### Bless

- ❑ Bring song "Everyday Loving" (pp. 84–85, also #24 *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 rejoice in God's persistent love for us.

## GATHER

**Welcome the children** to the group and to the Season after Pentecost.

### Opening ritual

Gather in a circle beside the worship table. Light the candle. Extend your hand palm down in the middle of the circle as you say,

**Come, let us gather together in God's love.**

Each person, in turn, places a hand on top until everyone has one hand on the pile. Once all children have placed their hands in the pile, say,

**Together we will help each other learn more about God's love. Together we are the church!**

The children respond by raising their hands high in the air and shouting,

**We are the church!**

**Pray** (*repeat each line or read together*)

Dear God,

as we gather in this circle today,  
help us to learn more about  
following in the way of Jesus and showing  
your love. Amen.

**Sing** "What If You Came to My Church" (pp. 101–102).

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the gathering ritual has ended.

### Introducing the theme

Invite children to hunt for the treasure you have hidden. When they have found it, gather in a circle to share the treat. Talk about how it feels to look for something that is hidden or lost. Invite them to share stories of times when something important to them was lost. How did it feel? Did they search for it? Did they find it again? What did that feel like, or how would they feel if they did find it?

## ENGAGE

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of **Luke**. Remind the children that Jesus often told stories about everyday things to help the people understand what God is like. These stories were called parables. Sometimes the meaning of Jesus' parables was not always understandable. Sometimes Jesus' message was hidden in the story. Use resource sheet "Lost and Found" to tell the story.

### After the story

Encourage children to talk about these two parables by asking questions such as:

- How did the shepherd and the woman feel when they discovered their loss?
- How did they feel when they found them?
- Why do you suppose they called their friends and neighbours together?

- What do you think these parables tell us about God?

**Poster First Steps** Look at the poster together and talk about what you see. Make up a conversation between the two adults in the painting. What might the man be saying to the child? Do you think the child is listening? How does the artist show that? Where do you find love in this picture? What do you think will happen next? Reinforce the idea that God is just like these parents – loving and caring and always looking out for us.

**Celebration snack** Jesus wants us to celebrate God's persistent love for us. God rejoices when everyone is included. Make happy toast faces together. See page 95 for recipe.



# 3

**RESPOND**

Choose from the following activities.

- ❑ **Puzzle** Jesus wanted us to know about God's love. Hand out resource sheet "Find the Message," read the parable together, and invite children to help each other decipher Jesus' message. (*Answer: God never gives up on people. God never stops loving us. God rejoices when everyone is included.*)
- ❑ **Coin pouch** Making and using a coin pouch can be a reminder of today's story. Explain to the children that felt is made from sheep's wool. Follow instructions on page 93 to make the coin pouches. Provide foil-covered chocolate coins or encourage children to carry their offerings to church in these pouches.
- ❑ **Comic strip** Recreate Jesus' two parables in a large comic book that can be shared with the congregation. Invite children to recall the story of the lost sheep. Record the events on newsprint and then decide together which scenes will be illustrated. Do the same for the story of the lost coin. Encourage the children to decide which comic book story they would like to create. Form two groups and suggest they write down the main events and draw cartoon illustrations for each. Attach a construction paper cover with both titles written on the front. Encourage the two groups to read their stories to each other.

# 4

**BLESS**

Gather in a circle beside the worship table. Light the candle.

- Pray** Loving God,  
thank you for our learning  
community.  
Help us as we learn more about being  
the church together. Amen.

**Listen** "Everyday Loving" (pp. 84–85, also #24 *Seasons Music CD*)

Encourage the children to sing the chorus and first verse. After the song, pile hands in the middle of the circle. Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), go and celebrate God's love." Lift hands off the pile all together, shouting, "We are the church!"

Extinguish the candle.

# REFLECT

In what ways did children express their understanding of God's love for them and for others? How can you continue to encourage children to know that God's love includes all people?



# LOST AND FOUND

(based on Luke 15:1-10)

## Story Tip

Don't hesitate to adlib. Add or take out words as you feel the need. Tell the story with your personal touch, using the written story as a base.

One day Jesus was sitting and eating with some people that no one else liked. When the church leaders saw this, they shook their heads and clucked their tongues. "Just look at who Jesus sits and eats with," they said to each other. "Why would you treat people like that as your friends?"

Jesus could see that they didn't understand, so he told them a parable:

Once there was a shepherd who owned a herd of 100 sheep. This shepherd loved the sheep and knew each one by name. Every morning the shepherd would lead the sheep up the hillside to eat the green grass and drink the cool water. And every night the shepherd would lead the sheep down the hillside to a safe place where they could sleep and be protected from wild animals. One night, as the shepherd was counting the sheep, he counted only 99 sheep. The shepherd counted again. "One, two, three...", all the way up to 98, 99... One sheep *was* missing! Where could that sheep be?

Quickly the shepherd went out to look for it. He searched the hills and the slopes. He called and called the sheep's name. He listened for the sound of a sheep's cry. And then... and then... the shepherd heard a little "baaa baaa." There,

caught in a huge thicket, was the little animal. The shepherd reached down and lifted the sheep onto his shoulders and carried it home. What joy and relief! "Come!" the shepherd called to his friends and neighbours. "Come and rejoice with me! I have found the sheep which was lost!"

And then Jesus told the people another parable to make sure the people understood:

Once there was a woman who had ten very precious silver coins. One day she noticed one coin was missing. "Six, seven, eight, nine... dear me, I must have miscounted!" But, no, when she counted again: "Six, seven, eight, nine..." one coin *was* missing! "These coins are so important to me!" the woman said. "I must find that missing coin." So the woman searched every nook and cranny of her house. She looked under things, she looked on things, she looked in things. She lit a lamp and swept her house carefully. Finally, she found it! What joy and relief! "Come!" the woman called to her friends and neighbours. "Come and rejoice with me! How happy I am to have found the coin that was lost!"

Jesus turned to the people and said, "Now do you understand? God is just like that shepherd, and just like that woman. God never gives up on people. Even if others give up on them, God will not. God never stops loving us. God rejoices when everyone is included."



# Find the Message

Find a message that Jesus wanted the people to hear about God's love. Put the letters that are missing from the numbered blanks of the story into these numbered blanks.

5 1 6    7 2 8 2 3    5 9 8 2 10    11 12    1 7    12 2 1 12 13 2

5 1 6    7 2 8 2 3    10 15 1 12 10    13 1 8 9 7 5    11 10

5 1 6    3 2 14 1 9 4 2 10    16 17 2 7    2 8 2 3 18 1 7 2

9 10    9 7 4 13 11 6 2 6

Once there was a w<sub>1</sub>man who had t<sub>2</sub>n very precious silver coins. One day she noticed one <sub>4</sub>oin was missing. "Six, se<sub>8</sub>en, eight, nine... dear me, I must have miscounted!" But, no, when she counted again: "Six, seven, eight, ni<sub>7</sub>e..." one coin was m<sub>9</sub>issing! "These coins are so im<sub>12</sub>ortant to me!" the <sub>16</sub>oman said. "I must find that missin<sub>5</sub> coin." So the woman <sub>10</sub>earched every nook and cranny of her ho<sub>11</sub>se. She looke<sub>6</sub> under things, she looked on things, she looked in things. She <sub>13</sub>it a lamp and swept her <sub>17</sub>ouse carefully. Finally, she found it! What <sub>14</sub>oy and relief! "Come!" the woman called to her friends and neighbours. "Come and <sub>3</sub>ejoice with me! How happ<sub>18</sub> I am to have found the coin that was los<sub>15</sub>!"