

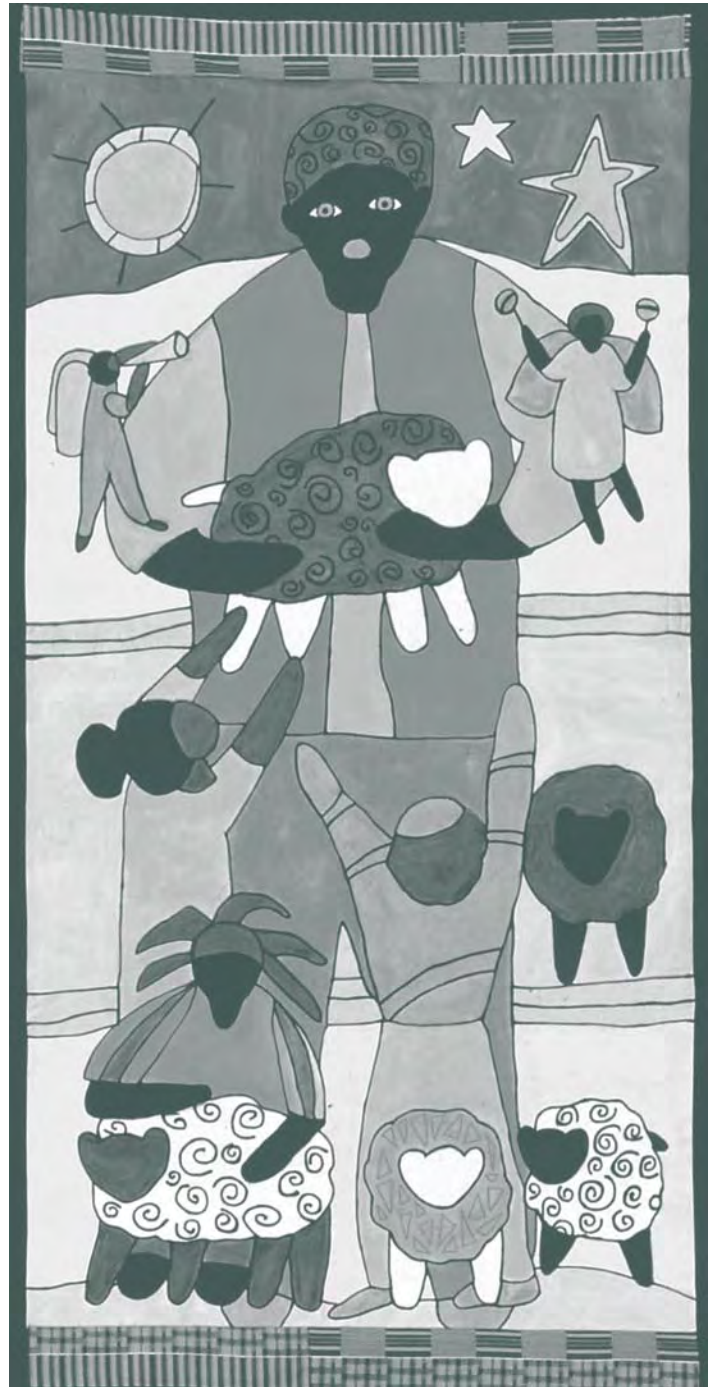
# This Season... Pentecost 2

**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. . .

## Before the opening session

As you look over the entire leader's guide, note activities that particularly interest you, or that need special materials or extra preparation. Read "The Focus for Ages 9–11" for each session to gain a general idea of how the children in your group might approach these Bible texts. If children of this age are new to you, read about them in *From Start to Finish*, available from your curriculum distributor, or visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) and click on Library. Look over the articles in the back of this leader's guide. Then spend time in prayer before you begin to plan the first session.

Read the letter to families (p. 93). What information about events of your congregation can be sent with this letter? If you are a new leader, how would you like to introduce yourself? If you need substitutes, you might ask parents to volunteer.

Nourish your soul as you prepare to teach. Meditate on the posters. Another source of nurture for you is *Behold: Arts for the Church Year*. This 28-page arts resource explores themes of the season through a diverse and beautiful collection of images, writings, and scripture. To order, contact your curriculum distributor for information.

## Online opportunities

Go to [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) regularly to see what interests you and to follow up on suggestions in the sessions. Visit the *Seasons* website and use the password *linking* to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage. Encourage the children to check the *Seasons* website and visit Action Zone, especially when sites are suggested in the session plan.

## The children and Bibles

The children will spend most of this season in Luke, but letters and Hebrew Scripture books are also included. It is important that they learn their way around the Bible. Helping them find the passages will take extra time during the session, but it is time well spent. Encourage the children to bring their own Bibles, if they have them.

### Basic supply kit

The materials required for specific projects are listed in Prepare in each session. However, some supplies are assumed to be available and are not included in those lists. For your group, you need:

- crayons or coloured markers
- pencils
- scissors
- glue or glue sticks
- masking tape
- newsprint and markers
- clear tape
- stapler and staples
- writing paper
- plain paper

May you grow in faith as you lead the children in your group toward a deeper knowledge of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.



# 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 9–11

**G**roup experiences are common for children from nine to 11 years of age. Reading circles, two or three children working together on special projects, even “buddy” groups for outings are a regular part of school for most children. These experiences continue in such after-school activities as sports teams, dance, gymnastics or martial arts classes, and scouting organizations, among others.

These various formal and informal groups play a prominent role in a child’s journey to adulthood. It is here the children learn from one another as well as from adult leaders what it means to be a part of a group. They

learn teamwork, cooperation, and how to care for one another.

In the church the children learn from the faith community the essentials of what it means to be a disciple. Through their involvement with the church school, worship, and outreach activities, children experience firsthand what it means to follow Christ in word and action. It is here that their faith is formed and nurtured by experiences with caring adults as well as their peers.

Pray that the children in your group will deepen their understanding of how they are supported and how they support others as they grow as disciples of Christ.

### 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

- ❑ Read, and prayerfully reflect on, the focus scripture, Philemon 1–21, and the biblical background material (p. 9). Who supports you in your role as disciple?
- ❑ Bring *Bibles* and *basic supply kit* (see p. 2 for list).
- ❑ If possible, bring *Seasons Music CD, vol. 5*, and *CD player*.

#### Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *green cloth*, *Bible*, *white Christ candle*, *matches*, and *offering basket*.
- ❑ If you are still learning the children’s names, bring *name tags*.
- ❑ Bring song “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa Emimimo” (p. 83, also #10 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring assortment of *letters and greeting cards*, including envelopes, that you have received.

#### Engage

- ❑ Bring “*The New Testament*” (p. 7).
- ❑ Bring *copies of today’s resource sheets* “A Request of Philemon” and “*Slavery in Bible Times*.”

#### Respond

Bring the supplies for the Respond options you choose.

- ❑ **Discipleship letter:** information about and address of congregation to receive the letter
- ❑ **Disciples today:** poster “Solace”
- ❑ **Musical encouragement:** song “God Is the One We Trust” (p. 92, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*)

#### Bless

- ❑ Bring song “God Is the One We Trust” (p. 92, also #27 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 how we help one another grow as disciples of Christ.

## GATHER

# 1

**Greeting** Welcome the children and invite them to get name tags, if you have them.

**Call to gather** Light the candle and invite the children to join you at the worship table. Explain that this is a Sunday in the Season after Pentecost, also called ordinary or common time. Note that the worship cloth is green, and the white candle symbolizes the presence of Jesus Christ.

**Song and offering** Play “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa Emimimo” (p. 83, also #10 on the *Seasons Music CD*) as the offering is received. Then invite the children to read the words in unison.

**Pray** the following prayer, or one of your own:

Loving God, be with us as we come to your church to learn how to be your people. Amen.

## Connect with the focus

**Mail call** Place the envelopes, letters, and greeting cards that you collected on the worship table. Ask:

- **When have you received mail, like a letter or a greeting card?**
- **Who sent it to you?**
- **How did it feel to receive it?**

After the children have offered a few responses, explain that today’s scripture passage is a letter written by one follower of Jesus to another, encouraging him to help someone in an unusual way.

## ENGAGE

# 2

### Reviewing the New Testament

**Letters in the New Testament** Show the group “The New Testament” (p. 7). See that each child has a Bible. Remind the children that this page shows the books in the New Testament and the writing categories into which they fall. Ask:

- **What book did we read from last week?**

Not every child will recall the name, but many will be able to tell you something about it. Have them find Hebrews on “The New Testament.” Then have them find Philemon. Ask:

- **What type of writing is Philemon?**

While Philemon and Hebrews are both classified as letters, Philemon is a better example of letters during New Testament times. It also bears some resemblances to letters today. It has a greeting, a message, an ending, and even a signature of sorts. Explain that the person writing the letter is Paul, a major disciple in the early church. Invite them to tell anything they remember about Paul. Point out that it is Paul’s writings, like this letter,

that help us understand even more clearly how Jesus expects us to live as disciples.

### The letter to Philemon

**Master and slave** Help the children find Philemon in their Bibles by encouraging them to find it in the table of contents. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “A Request of Philemon” and work through it with the children to review the passage.

Have the resource sheet “Slavery in Bible Times” ready to refer to during discussion. After both sheets have been reviewed, ask:

- **How did Paul’s request to Philemon give Philemon an opportunity to grow as a disciple?**

After a few thoughts have been offered, point out that the letter does not tell us what Philemon decided to do about Paul’s request. Ask:

- **What do you think Philemon decided?**
- **What would you decide?**

**Finding ourselves in the story**

**Discipleship today** To help the children connect this letter to their lives and to prepare them for the Respond options, ask:

- **What kinds of things do you do at church that help you grow as a disciple?**

■ **Who helps you to do them?**

After the children have given a few responses, ask:

- **What are other things we can do to grow as disciples?**

**3**  
**RESPOND**

Select one or two of the following options.

- **Discipleship letter** To help the children understand how we can encourage one another in discipleship, invite them to write a letter of support to another congregation. If your congregation has a connection with one in another place, tell the children about that church. Then brainstorm with the children what might be included in the letters, listing their ideas on newsprint. Distribute pencils and paper to the children to write their letters, working in pairs, if they wish.

- **Disciples today** To help the children imagine how they can grow as disciples, invite them to think of situations they might encounter. Place the poster *Solace* on the table. Invite the children to form triads and position themselves like the figures in the poster. Then invite the child on one end to whisper to the child in the middle, "How will you be a disciple today?" The middle child whispers an answer to the two children. This child speaks a word of encouragement, such as "God's Spirit be with you." The third child then moves to take



the place of the first child, who becomes the person in the middle, and the cycle repeats. Continue until each child has had a turn in the middle. If you wish, continue by mixing up the triads.

- **Musical encouragement** The song "God Is the One We Trust" is a musical encouragement for following God's way. The group can sing the song or read the lyrics as a choral reading. Follow these directions, building the voices so they are loud and enthusiastic at the end:

One voice: God is,  
Two or three voices: God is the one,  
Everyone: God is the one we trust!  
God is the one we trust to give all good things we need to live.  
One voice: God is,  
Two or three voices: God is the one,  
Everyone: God is the one we trust!

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**4**  
**BLESS**

**Gather** Bring the group together around the worship table. Light the Christ candle.

**Sing** "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 92, also #27 on the *Seasons Music CD*).

**Prayer** Remind the children that during this season, the prayer will focus on a specific part of church life. Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Gentle and caring God, thank you for all the ways to be disciples that we find in this church. Bless us and help us to be the disciples you need us to be. Amen.

**Blessing** To each child, offer this blessing: "(Child's name), be a blessing in the world as you follow Jesus this week."

**REFLECT**

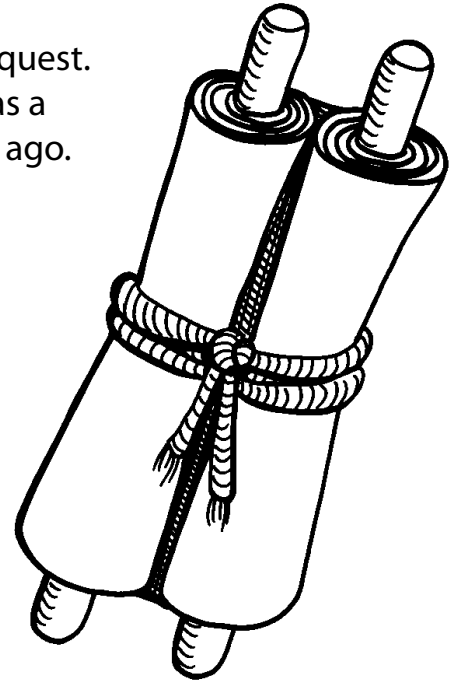
How did the children expand their understanding of discipleship through this session? Which children need extra encouragement to participate in the discussions?

How did the children's experience with this passage encourage you to live out your discipleship each day?



# A Request of Philemon

Philemon received a short letter with an unusual request. Find it in your Bible. Then use the questions below as a guide to understand this letter written so very long ago.



## Who

- wrote the letter to Philemon?
- was the letter addressed to in addition to Philemon?
- is Paul asking Philemon about?

## How

- does Paul know Philemon?
- is Paul helping and supporting Philemon?
- is Paul helping and supporting Onesimus?

## Why

- does Paul say he gives thanks for Philemon in his prayers each day?
- might it have taken courage for Onesimus to go back to Philemon?

## What

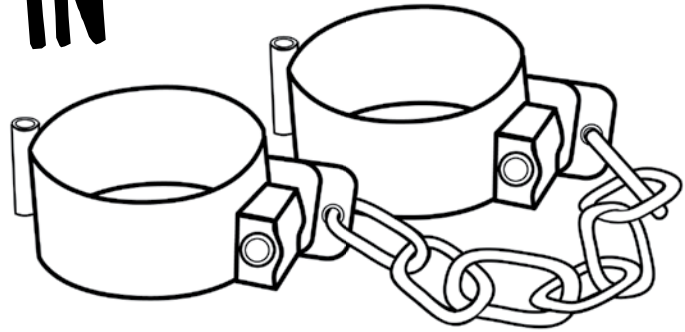
- does Paul say he is praying for Philemon each day?
- is Paul asking Philemon to do with Onesimus?
- does Paul offer to do on behalf of Onesimus?
- does Paul hope will change between Philemon and Onesimus?

## Where

- is Paul when he is writing to Philemon?



# SLAVERY IN BIBLE TIMES



The word “slavery” means one person owns another person, just like they would own a chair or a coat or any “thing.” Slavery has existed from the most ancient of times and, even though it is now illegal in most of the world, it still exists in some places today.

Slavery is all about money. Work by slaves is “free” work because the slave is not paid for the work done. The only cost to the slave owner is the food, clothing, and shelter needed for the slaves to stay alive. While some slave owners took good care of their slaves, others did not. That’s because one way for the slave owner to save money was to spend as little as possible to take care of the slaves. Slaves remained slaves until they died or were freed by their owners.

People became slaves in Bible times for a variety of reasons:

- **Captives of war:** When you were captured during a war, you could expect to become a slave to someone from the winning army. This was the single biggest source of slaves in the biblical world.
- **Sale of children:** Some families were forced to sell their children as slaves when there wasn’t enough money and food to take care of all of them. Girls were sometimes sold as slaves with the provision that they would eventually be married to someone not a slave so they could regain their freedom at a later time.
- **Self sale:** When times were very hard, such as in a famine or a war, people would soon spend all they had and eventually have to sell themselves as slaves to survive.
- **Born into slavery:** Children born to slaves were automatically slaves.

Slavery is mentioned a lot in the Bible because it was a common reality in those days. There are passages in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament telling slave owners to take care of their slaves and not to abuse them. These passages have been used in the past to justify slavery, saying that God approved of slavery. But now we understand that God never intended for one human being to own another human being.

# 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.

• • • • •

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 9–11

“I can’t find it!” Parents, teachers, or anyone within hearing distance has heard this lament from children, even as old as 11. The children will surely understand the plight of the shepherd and the woman in Jesus’ stories in this session. Those children who have been lost from an adult for a time may even identify with the lost sheep, a feeling that is frightening at any age. Some children in your group may have learned about deeper emotions during a loss if a grandparent or someone close to them has died. You need only say the word “lost” and the children will immediately conjure some connection with the concept.

Because these children have a stronger sense of time and history, they may also be ready to think anew about one message of Jesus’ parables in Luke 15: the knowledge of God’s constant and trustworthy love. Younger children may find the words of constancy comforting, but not until children have a concept of ongoing time, before and after their own experiences and memory, do they begin to appreciate the wonder of this knowledge.

Pray that the children in your group will come to a fresh knowledge of God’s trustworthy love for them.

September 16, 2007

PREPARE

Materials needed

### Before the session

- ❑ Read, and prayerfully reflect on, the focus scripture, Luke 15:1–10, and the biblical background material (p. 15). What portrays God’s trustworthy love to you? What story would you tell to describe it?
- ❑ Bring *Bibles* and *basic supply kit* (see p. 2 for list).
- ❑ If possible, bring *Seasons Music CD, vol. 5*, and *CD player*.

### Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *green cloth*, *Bible*, *white Christ candle*, *matches*, and *offering basket*.
- ❑ Bring song “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa Emimimo” (p. 83, also #10 on *Seasons Music CD*).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring *today’s resource sheet “They Listened.”*
- ❑ Bring *poster “The Good Shepherd.”*
- ❑ Bring *song “God Is the One We Trust”* (p. 92, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*).

### Respond

Bring the supplies for the Respond activity you choose.

- ❑ **Bible words reminder:** verse written on papers
- ❑ **Sheep reminder:** *copies of today’s resource sheet “No Longer Lost,” clean flat-sided clear plastic milk or drink containers, permanent black fine-tip markers, needles, and thread or fishing line*
- ❑ **Story and song:** “John Newton” (p. 94), *hymnbooks*, and (optional) *recording of “Amazing Grace” and player*

### Bless

- ❑ Bring *song “God Is the One We Trust”* (p. 92, also #27 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 rejoice in the trustworthy love of God.

## GATHER

**Greeting** Welcome the children and introduce yourself to any who are new. Provide name tags, if you wish.

**Call to gather** Light the candle and invite the children to join you at the worship table. Explain that this is the Season after Pentecost, also called ordinary or common time. During this season we explore what it means to be a disciple in our everyday living and as part of a faith community. As a reminder of the season, the worship cloth is green and the white candle symbolizes Christ's presence.

**Song and offering** Play "Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa Wa Wa Emimino" (p. 83, also #10 on the *Seasons Music CD*) as the offering is received. Invite the children to hum or sing with the music.

**Pray** the following prayer, or one of your own:

Loving God, be with us as we come to your church to learn how to be your people, together and in our own lives. Amen.

## Connect with the focus

**Lost and found** Before the children arrive, hide a coin in a fairly difficult-to-see spot. Ask them to look for the coin. When it is found, bring everyone together. Ask:

■ **When have you lost something that was important to you?**

After they tell about losing, and finding, the item, explain that the Bible stories today are about finding things that were lost.

## ENGAGE

### Prepare for the Bible story

**Gospels** Look at "The New Testament" (p. 7) together. Go over the types of literature found in the New Testament. Then find the gospels on the page and read the definition of "gospel." Finally, have the children find the **Luke 1** in their Bibles. Ask:

■ **For whom did Luke write this gospel?**

Guide the children to skim the first three verses, until they discover the name Theophilus (thi-off'ill-us). Many people think that Theophilus was a Roman officer and that the gospel was intended for people who were not Jewish and had little knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. Point out that naming someone as the person for whom the gospel is written makes this one different from Matthew, Mark, and John.

### The Bible story

**Jesus' listeners** Have the children turn to **Luke 15**. Invite a child to read **Luke 15:1–2** aloud. Comment that it is helpful to know who was listening when Jesus told a story. His stories are often parables (stories about ordinary events, but with messages about God and how we relate to God). Ask:

■ **What do you remember about scribes and Pharisees?**

Because these groups regularly show up in the gospels, the children probably have some idea about them. Build on their knowledge with information on today's resource sheet, "They Listened." Ask:

■ **Why do you think the scribes and Pharisees grumbled that the tax collectors and sinners were present?**

Puzzling out the relationship of these groups encourages the children to read scripture closely.

**Jesus' stories of lost and found** Invite one or two children to read **Luke 15:3–7** aloud. Before talking about it, show the group the poster *The Good Shepherd*. Ask:

■ **If you were going to use this picture to illustrate the story of the lost sheep, what title or caption would you give? Or what part of the story do you think this could show?**

Read **Luke 15:7** aloud. Ask:

■ **If you were a scribe or a Pharisee, how do you think you would react to this story?**

Then have a child read **Luke 15:8–10** aloud. Ask:

Go to the *Seasons* website ([www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com)) and click on Action Zones and then on Ask the Rabbi for his answers to questions about scribes, Pharisees, tax collectors, and sinners.

- **Why do you think the woman was so worried about finding one coin?**

Then read **Luke 15:10** aloud. Ask:

- **How are the endings of the two stories alike?**
- **By this time, how do you think the scribes and Pharisees were feeling? the tax collectors and sinners?**
- **What do you think Jesus wanted the scribes and Pharisees to learn from this story? the tax collectors and sinners?**

Help the group come to understand that Jesus

wanted all the people who heard the story to know that God's love was for everyone and they could depend upon that knowledge.

### Finding ourselves in the story

**Song** When we know that God loves us no matter what, we know that God is worthy of trust or trustworthy. Sing the song "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 92, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*). Read the words together. To prepare for the Respond options, ask:

- **How can we remember that we can trust God to love us today?**

# 3

**RESPOND**



Select one or two of the following options.

- **Bible words reminder** Memorizing words from the Bible can help us remember that God's love is trustworthy. In *The Message*, Luke 15:10 is recorded: "Count on it – that's the kind of party God's angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God." Write the phrases in these verses, each on a sheet of paper: Count on it – / that's the kind of party/ God's angels throw/ every time/ one lost person/ turns to God. Place the papers in order on a table. Have the group read it in unison. Turn over one paper, from the middle. Have the group read it again, filling in the missing phrase. Continue to do this until all the papers are turned over. By this time, the children will have memorized this verse, a good reminder of the parable of the lost coin.
- **Sheep reminder** A visual reminder of God's love and Jesus' parable of the lost sheep is another way to keep the knowledge of God's trustworthy love before us. See today's resource sheet "No Longer Lost" for directions for creating sheep.
- **Story and song** Jesus' stories were parables, stories of truth, but not a real incident. The story of the man who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace" is also story of being lost and found, one that did take place. Read the story to the children and listen to a recording of this famous hymn, which has been recorded by singers from classical music to country music. Or provide hymnbooks and sing or read the hymn together.

# 4

**BLESS**

**Gather** Bring the group together around the worship table. Light the Christ candle.

**Sing** "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 92, also #27 on the *Seasons Music CD*).

**Prayer** Remind the children that during this season, the closing prayer is for a specific area of church life. This week it is ministries that show our love for all. Pray this prayer, or one

of your own:

Loving God, thank you for the people in our church who show your love to others. Help us remember that God loves us all. Amen.

**Blessing** As the children leave, offer each this blessing: "(Child's name), God will love you forever."

# REFLECT

What did the children learn about God's love from Jesus' stories? How can you back up that learning with the way you plan and lead the group?

Pray for each child in your group this week.

**For one September 23 Respond option, invite the youth, older youth, or adult group in the church school to be prayer partners with the children in your group.**



# THEY LISTENED

## Tax collectors

Tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman government. They collected the hated Roman taxes, and legally added a fee, which was their wages. Some tax collectors added a small fee, but others added a large fee so they could have more money.



## Sinners

Sinners were Jews or Gentiles who the priests thought did not live according to God's laws. If they were Jews, they could perform acts that would make them acceptable again.



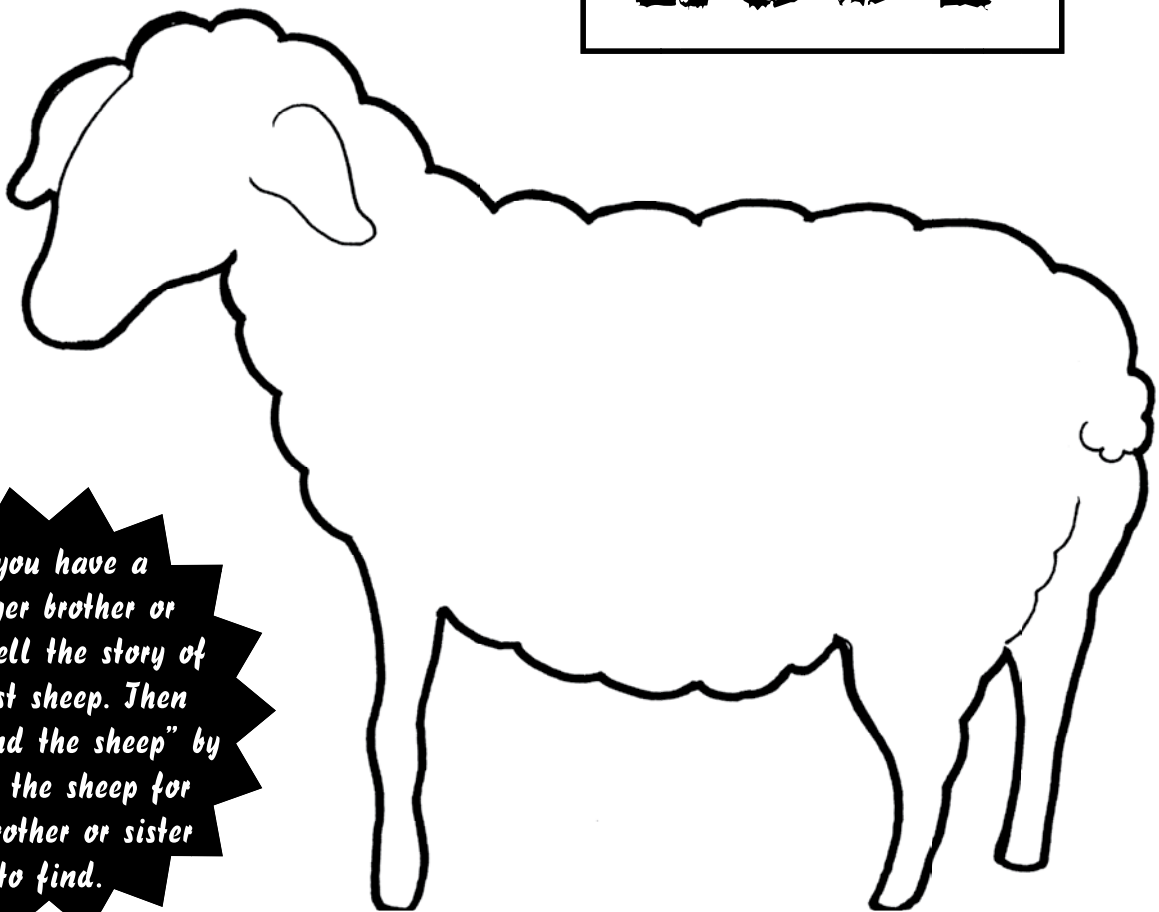
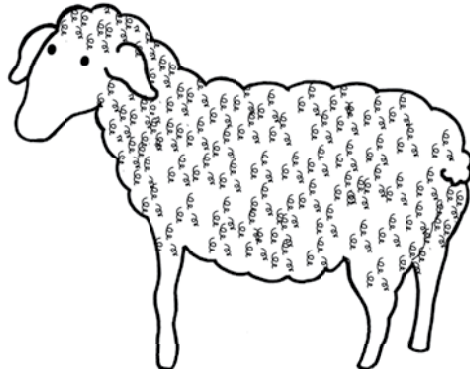
## Pharisees

The Pharisees were Jewish men who were experts in the religious law. They believed in resurrection and a life after death and in angels. They emphasized learning scripture and following religious practices.

## Scribes

The scribes were Jewish men who wrote down important ideas and papers for people who could not write. They often agreed with the Pharisees about religious matters.





*If you have a younger brother or sister, tell the story of the lost sheep. Then play "find the sheep" by hiding the sheep for your brother or sister to find.*

### What you need

- clean, flat-sided, clear plastic milk or drink containers
- sharp scissors
- black permanent fine-tip markers
- needles
- thread or fishing line
- sheep pattern

### What you do

- 1 Cut a side from the milk or drink container.
- 2 Use the pattern here or draw your own sheep on the plastic.
- 3 Add details to the sheep.
- 4 Cut out the sheep.
- 5 Thread the needle with thread or fishing line.
- 6 Make a hole through the sheep with the threaded needle and make a hanger.
- 7 Take your sheep home and hang it as a reminder that God will always love you.