

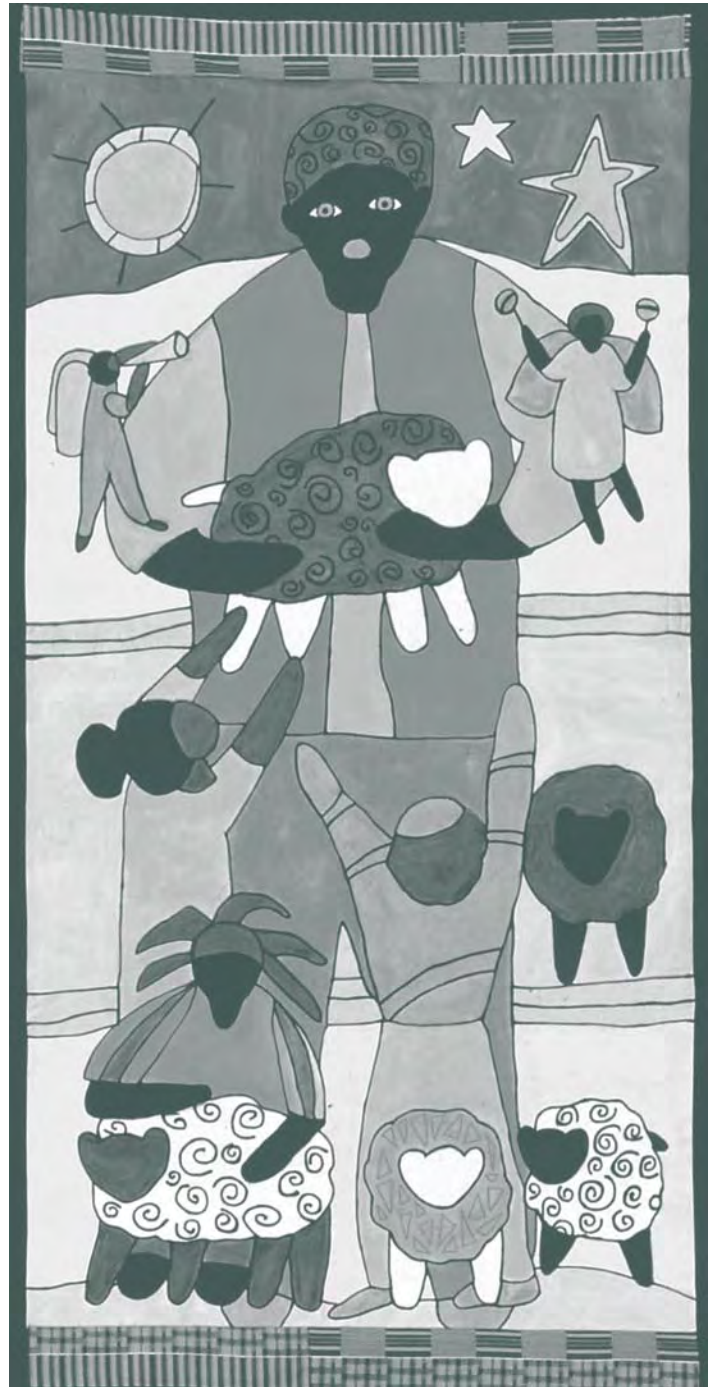
# This Season... Pentecost 2

**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 set of material, note activities that particularly interest you or that require special materials or extra preparation. Each session has an outreach zone in Respond. Look over them and plan how to involve the children in the ministries of your congregation. Read “The Focus for Ages 5–11” 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 it can be downloaded free from the library at [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com). Look over the articles in the back of this guide. Then spend time in prayer before you begin to plan the first session.

Read the letter to families (p. 119). What information about events of your congregation can be sent with this letter? Look ahead to any outreach projects you plan for the group so families can be ready for them.

Use the posters for your own meditation without thinking about their use with the children. *Behold: Arts for the Church Year* is a 28-page arts resource that explores themes of the season through a diverse and beautiful collection of images, writings, and scripture. Individual copies are available for use as a devotional preparation or as a way to enhance your teaching ministry. 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. Check Spirit Sightings from time to time for your own growth and to see if there is something of interest to your group. Encourage the children to check the *Seasons* website and visit Action Zone for online activities.

## Respond zones

Think about where you place each zone in your space. The quiet zone needs a corner or place that is out of the way, but where you can still monitor what is happening in it. The music zone will make more noise. The art zone is best in a place where it’s okay to be messy. The outreach zone can be tailored to fit the ministries of your congregation that can involve the children in your group. The community zone features ways for children to work together, an important characteristic of the church.

## Storytelling

Telling the Bible story is a central feature of the sessions in this guide. If you are inexperienced in telling Bible stories to groups of children, notice the storytelling hint on each resource sheet with a Bible story for telling. Talk with a preschool teacher for tips about telling stories to children. Invite a guest storyteller from time to time.

### 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

# 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.



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.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

Slavery is not a familiar topic for most children. Since slavery in New Testament times was different in some ways from slavery the older children may have heard about, this letter will be explored as one from a friend to a friend about a mutual friend/acquaintance and the Christian way. Friends are a topic children of all ages know something about. They value friendship as they become more involved in activities beyond the family. The church is a good place for them to find friends of all ages.

Through this letter, the children will think

more about the place of helping, encouraging, loving, and praying in their friendships through the church. This can also build the community of learners in this church school group. As they work together in pairs or larger configurations, they also learn how to help and accept the help of others. Throughout this season, that helping will extend to others in the congregation as well as to those outside it.

Pray that the children will connect their experience of friendship to their growing understanding of discipleship.

September 9, 2007

PREPARE

Materials needed

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on the focus passage, Philemon 1–21, and the biblical background material (p. 11). How would you describe the relationship between Paul and Philemon?
- ❑ Bring *Bibles* and *basic supply kit* (see p. 2).
- ❑ Bring *Seasons Music CD, vol. 5*, and *CD player*, if possible.

### Gather

- ❑ Set worship table with *green cloth*, *offering basket*, *candle*, *matches*, and *Bible*.
- ❑ Bring song “*God Is the One We Trust*” (p. 118, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring *today’s resource sheet “To My Friend, Philemon,”* rolled as a scroll.
- ❑ For story anagram group, bring *today’s resource sheet “To My Friend, Philemon.”*
- ❑ For Bible research group, bring *copies of today’s resource sheet “New Testament Letters”* and *directions*.
- ❑ Bring song “*Servant Song*” (p. 118, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*).

### Respond

Gather or make the materials for the zones selected.

- ❑ **Art zone:** *large newsprint or mural paper*, *coloured construction paper*, and various *art supplies*
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *information* about and *address* of congregation to receive letter
- ❑ **Community zone:** *today’s resource sheet “Accordion Books.”* *Cut paper strips* (11 cm x 35.5 cm/4 in x 14 in).
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *information* about ministries to one another in congregation
- ❑ **Music zone:** *song “God Is the One We Trust”* (p. 118, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*)

### Bless

- ❑ Bring songs “*Servant Song*” and “*God Is the One We Trust*” (p. 118, also #7 and #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 discover how following Jesus helps us be friends to one another in the church.

## GATHER

# 1

If this is your first week together, play the get-acquainted game in Gather for September 2, 2007 so you and the children can learn one another's names.

**Greeting** Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing newcomers or guests to other children.

**Call to gather** Have the children gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle. Say:

Come, let us gather together as God's people.

Then stretch out one hand, palm down. Invite the children to place a hand on yours, one at a time, building a tower of hands, all palms down.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

Dear God, help us learn together about being your church. Amen.

The group raises their hands in the air, and responds with:

**We are the church!**

**Song and offering** Have the children sit down. Play the song "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 118, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*). Invite the children to clap softly to the rhythm. Have a child take up the offering during the song.

Extinguish the candle as the signal that the Gather ritual is over.

## Connecting with the focus

**Friends** Invite the children to think of people they consider their friends, any age. After they have had time to think about their friends, ask:

■ **How do you know that someone is your friend?**

Explain that the Bible passage today is a letter from one friend to another.

■ **How many chapters does it have? How many verses?**

Then explain that you have a paraphrase of the letter on your scroll. Review the meaning of "paraphrase" (writing something in simpler or more modern language). In the case of the Bible, a paraphrase also means that you do not go back to the original language, but work from translations in your own language. Read the paraphrase of Philemon on today's resource sheet "To My Friend, Philemon" to the group. Invite the children to think about the content by asking:

■ **Paul wrote this letter to Philemon because he wanted Philemon to do something. What was it?**

■ **What do you think Philemon did when he got the letter?**

We don't know what Philemon did, but encouraging the children to ponder what might have happened is good Bible study.

## Prepare for the story

**Letters in the Bible** Review with the group the guidelines found in the letter to the Hebrews in the previous session. If the group created a welcome banner or a group covenant in the Respond zones for that session, refer to it as well. Show them where Hebrews is found in the New Testament, or invite a child to find it. Explain that there are many other letters in the New Testament. Provide Bibles for the children to find some of them.

To include younger children in this activity, pair them with older children.

## The Bible story

**A letter to Philemon** Print "Philemon" on newsprint. Read the word for the group and have them find this letter in the New Testament. If they have a bit of trouble finding this short letter, suggest that they turn to the table of contents and locate it there. When they find it, ask:

# 2

ENGAGE

Read "The Pastoral Epistles" (p. 128).

**Explore the story further**

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

**Story anagram group** This group will review the content of Philemon’s letter with a cheer based on the word “help”: help, encourage, love, and pray. Write the word “help” on newsprint. Talk with the children in this group about how the letter to Philemon “helps” (point to “h”) him be a follower of Jesus, “encourages” (point to “e”) him to continue to do what he does, “love” (point to “l”) is the basis for his actions, and “prayer” (point to “p”) is how Paul and Timothy will continue to help Philemon. Refer to specific examples in the letter on the resource sheet for each one. Then lead the children in this cheer:

**Leader:** Give me an H for helping others!

**Children:** “H is for helping others!”

**Leader:** Give me an E for encouraging others!

**Children:** “E is for encouraging others!”

**Leader:** Give me an L for loving others!

**Children:** “L is for loving others!”

**Leader:** Give me a P for praying for others!

**Children:** “P is for praying for others!”

**Everyone:** H-E-L-P. The church helps, encourages, loves, and prays for others!

**Bible research group** This group will learn about the basic form of letters in the New Testament and test that knowledge on the letter to Philemon. Provide copies of today’s resource sheet “New Testament Letters,” Bibles, pencils, and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of “New Testament Letters” and a Bible.
- 2 Read about letters at the top of “New Testament Letters.”
- 3 Follow the directions on the rest of the page. You may work alone or as a group.



**The Bible story and us**

**Play** the song “Servant Song” (p. 118, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to come together. Invite the story anagram group to lead everyone in their cheer. Then ask:

- **How do we help, encourage, love, and pray for one another today?**

**3 RESPOND**

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: group mural** The letter to Philemon is a reminder that we help one another be faithful disciples. In advance, print in the middle of a large sheet of newsprint or mural paper: Help Encourage Love Pray. These are ways we help one another. Give each child a sheet of coloured construction paper. Have them help one another trace around their hands. Then have them cut them out. Provide art supplies for the children to decorate their hands so each one is unique. Glue them to the mural. Leave some space for children who are not present for this session. Display it in the learning area near the worship table.



- **Quiet zone: letters to churches** One way to follow through on the message of the letter to Philemon is for the children to write letters of encouragement to another congregation or a church school group in it. If your congregation has a connection with another congregation, tell the children about that church. Then talk together about what words of encouragement might be helpful to them, listing their ideas on newsprint. Provide writing paper for them to write short notes, individually or with a partner.

**Any children who find it difficult to write can be paired with someone who enjoys writing.**

Help  
Encourage  
Love Pray

- ❑ **Community zone: prayer booklets** Paul wrote that he prayed for Philemon and the church that met in his house. The church prays for one another too. This booklet will be a daily reminder for the children to pray for one another. Directions for making them are on today's resource sheet "Accordion Books."
- ❑ **Outreach zone: helping others project** Many instances of helping are suggested in the letter to Philemon. Bring information about a ministry of your congregation that helps people, whether members of the congregation or in the community. This session is a good time to help the children discover how the church helps one another through support groups or assistance during an illness. Invite a congregational member to talk with this group.

- ❑ **Music zone: community song** The song "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 118, also #27 on the *Seasons Music CD*) is a musical encouragement for following God's way together. Have the group sing the song or use the lyrics as a choral reading. Follow these directions, building the voices so they are strong 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!

Words and music copyright ©2005 Maria Millward. Published by Willow Publishing Pty Ltd. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

# 4 BLESS

**Gather** Play "Servant Song" (p. 118, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table. Light the candle.

**Song or choral reading** Play "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 118, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*) and invite the children to stand in a circle and sing along. If some children prepared a choral reading of the song, have them present it.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

God of love, thank you for this time together. Help us to encourage and love others this week. Amen.

**Blessing** To each child, say, "(Child's name), you will be prayed for this week. Also pray for our group members."



What did the children discover about being the church in this session? When did you see a child encourage someone? From time to time, quietly compliment a child who gives encouragement or help to another child.

When did you encourage a child in this session? How might you continue to do that for each child?



# To My Friend, Philemon

(based on Philemon 1-21)

This story can also be told in the first person. Philemon can ask the closing question of himself.

Philemon (FY LEE'MON) was excited. A letter didn't arrive every day or even every week or month. Who had written to him? Would it be good news, or bad? He frowned as he wondered what it said.

From Paul and Timothy, to Philemon, our good friend and partner. And also to Apphia (A' FEE A), who is like a sister to us, and Archippus (AR KIP' US), faithful with us too, as well as to all who meet at the church in your house.

Grace and peace to you from God and Jesus the Christ.

I pray for you always and remember your strong faith and all that you do to share your faith in Jesus the Christ with others. You give me much joy and encouragement as you do many others.

Therefore, I am speaking plainly to you on the basis of our love and fellowship in Jesus. I write to you on behalf of Onesimus (O NES' I MUS), who is with me in prison. I have become like a father to him. I ask you to accept him back into your household as a brother, not as a slave. I cannot force you to do this, but I ask you to do so freely out of love.

If you think of me as your partner, now welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me. If he has done anything wrong, charge that to me. Do this for me to gladden my heart in Christ.

One more thing, get a guest room ready for me. I hope that I may be with you soon.

I also send greetings from Epaphras (E PAF' RAS), Mark, Aristarchus (AR ISS TAR' KUSS), Demas (DEE' MAS), and Luke.

The grace of Jesus the Christ be with your spirit.

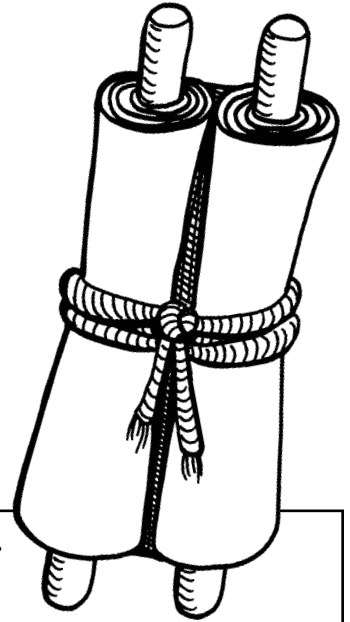
What do you think Philemon will do?



# NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

*But they don't look like letters!*

Many of the books in the New Testament are really letters. They were written by early leaders of the church as a way to teach people in other places about Jesus the Christ, and what it means to be the church. No e-mail or even post offices then. Letters were carried by people and often went from city to city.



These letters don't look like letters we write, but they do have a form. The usual form is:

- ④ an opening that names the sender and the receiver
- ④ a greeting, such as "Grace and peace to you."
- ④ a thanksgiving or blessing for the receiver
- ④ the main body of the letter, what the sender wanted to say
- ④ messages for particular people may come next
- ④ a grace or blessing

**Turn to Philemon in your Bible.**

- ④ Which verse names the person writing the letter? \_\_\_\_\_  
Who else is the letter coming from? \_\_\_\_\_
- ④ Which verses name the receivers of the letter? \_\_\_\_\_  
Who is the letter really to? \_\_\_\_\_
- ④ What is the greeting in this letter? Copy it here: \_\_\_\_\_
- ④ What verses say good things about Philemon? \_\_\_\_\_
- ④ What does Paul want Philemon to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why does he think Philemon will do what he asks? \_\_\_\_\_
- ④ Who does Paul send greetings from besides himself and Timothy? \_\_\_\_\_
- ④ What verse has the closing grace or blessing? Copy it here: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



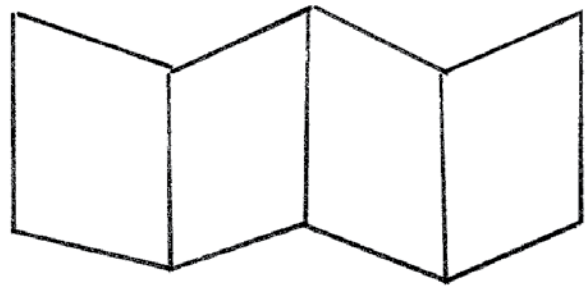
# ACCORDION

## Books

Cut the paper strips before the session.

### Materials

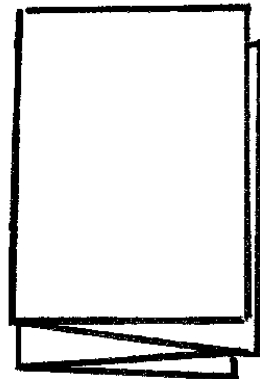
- strips of plain paper (11 cm x 35.5 cm/4 in x 14 in)
- pencils or pens
- transparent tape
- crayons or markers



### What to do

- 1 Have the children sit around a table. Give each child enough strips of paper so there will be a folded section for each child in the group plus the cover. Each strip of the measurement above will provide four sections. If you have more than three children, tape strips together.
- 2 Show them how to fold the paper strips accordion style. The first strip will be the cover of the book and the first three pages. After the paper strips are folded, tape them together so each book has several pages.
- 3 Have the children print their names on the first pages (not the covers) of their books.
- 4 Then have the children move one place to the left, leaving their books at their original seats. Have the children write their names on the second page of the book in front of them. Then have them move again and write their names in the third page of the book in front of them. Continue until they are seated in front of their own books again.
- 5 The children may also decorate the covers of their books.
- 6 Explain that they will take the books home as reminders to pray for the group members this week and throughout their time together. If you know of children who are in the group but not present, a leader might add their names to the books.

**Leaders can make books  
and be part of the  
prayers too.**



# 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 5–12

All children will be able to identify with the basic premise of Jesus' parables in this session: losing and finding something they treasure. They may even be able to identify with the lost sheep through their own unfortunate experience of being separated, or temporarily lost, from parents or other adults. In that case, they know first-hand the joy of being found and the joy of the finder. But the story may also bring back the frightening part of the experience. If it does, try to reassure the child without pretending that their anxiety was not warranted.

It will take more work on the children's part to make the connection of the parables and God's desire to "find" us. However, hearing the parables as important stories that Jesus told may be enough for the younger children in your group. Older children may be ready to link the actions of the shepherd and the woman with God's action toward us.

Pray that the children in your group will know the assurance of God's love now and throughout their lives.

September 16, 2007

PREPARE

### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on the focus passage, Luke 15:1–10, and the biblical background material (p. 19). When have you rejoiced over finding something that you lost?
- ❑ Bring *Bibles* and *basic supply kit* (see p. 2).
- ❑ Bring *Seasons Music CD, vol. 5*, and *CD player*, if possible.

#### Gather

- ❑ Set worship table with *green cloth, offering basket, candle, matches, and Bible*.
- ❑ Bring song "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 118, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring poster "Solace."

#### Engage

- ❑ Rehearse story on *today's resource sheet "Found!"*
- ❑ For before and after group, bring *poster "Solace."*
- ❑ For listeners group, bring *copies of today's resource sheet "Listening to Jesus," directions, and (optional) headdresses and shawls*.
- ❑ Bring song "Servant Song" (p. 118, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*).

#### Respond

Gather or make the materials for the zones selected.

- ❑ **Art zone:** *today's resource sheet "Sheep Reminders," clean and clear plastic milk or beverage containers, black permanent fine-tip markers, needles, thread or fishing line, and copies of sheep template*
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *poster "The Good Shepherd" and directions*
- ❑ **Community zone:** *today's resource sheet "Found!," card stock/heavy paper or poster board, and yarn or shoelace*
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *coloured paper*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *song "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 118, also #27 on Seasons Music CD) and poster "First Steps, after Millet"*

#### Bless

- ❑ **Bring songs** "Servant Song" and "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 118, also #7 and #27 on *Seasons Music CD*).

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



# Of Great Value

## Scripture

Luke 15:1–10

**FOCUS** To rejoice that God will always love us.

## 1 GATHER

**Greeting** Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing newcomers or guests to other children.

**Call to gather** Have the children gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle. Say:

Come, let us gather together as God's people.

Then stretch out one hand, palm down. Invite the children to place a hand on yours, one at a time, building a tower of hands, all palms down.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

Dear God, help us learn together about being your church. Amen.

The group raises their hands in the air, and responds with:

**We are the church!**

**Song and offering** Have the children sit down. Play the song "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 118,

also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*). Invite the children to clap softly to the rhythm. Have a child take up the offering during the song.

Extinguish the candle as the signal that the Gather ritual is over.

### Connecting with the focus

**Something lost** Show the children the poster *Solace*. Ask:

- **How do you think the women in this picture feel?**
- **Perhaps one of them has lost something that was special? When have you lost something that was very special to you?**
- **What did you do?**
- **If you found it, what did you do?**

Explain that the Bible story today is about finding things that were lost.

## 2 ENGAGE

### Prepare for the story

**The gospels** This session introduces the gospel of Luke to the children for this season. Invite an older child to find the beginning of the New Testament in the Bible. Ask the child to read the name of that book, being sure the child reads "The gospel of" or "The gospel according to Matthew." Then ask the group:

#### ■ **What do you think the word "gospel" means?**

Some children may know that it means "good news." Invite another child to turn the pages of Matthew until the first page of Mark, and read the name of that book of the New Testament. Do the same with Luke and John, noting that these four books of the New Testament, the first four books, are called the gospels because they tell the story of the good news of Jesus' life and resurrection. The story today is found only in the gospel according to Luke.

### The Bible story

**Jesus tells two stories** Tell the stories from today's resource sheet "Found!" that are based on **Luke 15:1–10**. The discussion of the stories will happen in the following activities and at the conclusion of Engage.

### Explore the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

**Before and after group** This group will explore the emotions of the people in the parables. Invite the children to look at the poster *Solace* and pretend that the woman in the middle is the shepherd who lost a sheep, or the woman who lost a coin. Ask:

- **How did the shepherd and the woman feel when they discovered the sheep and the coin were missing?**

- **How did they feel when they found them?**
- **What did they do?**

Distribute drawing paper and crayons and invite the children to imagine these three women were with Jesus when Jesus told these stories. Invite them to draw pictures of the three women at the end of the story that Jesus told.

**Listeners group** This group will consider who was listening to the story and what they might have learned about God from it. If possible, give this group some simple costumes (headdresses or shawls) so they can dress up as listeners to Jesus. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Listening to Jesus," Bibles, pencils, and these directions:

- 1 Find Luke 15 in the Bible. Read verses 1-10.
- 2 Take a copy of "Listening to Jesus" and a pencil.
- 3 Put on a headdress or shawl.
- 4 Follow the directions on "Listening to Jesus."



### The Bible story and us

Play the song "Servant Song" (p. 118, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to come together.

Ask:

- **What do you think Jesus' parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin tell us about God?**

The Respond zones will help the children remember the inclusiveness and steadfastness of God's love.

# 3 RESPOND

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: sheep reminder** To help the children remember these stories, reminders of God's strong love, they can make sheep, using the directions on today's resource sheet "Sheep Reminders." Encourage them to take them home and place them where they will see them each day.
- **Quiet zone: meditation** In this zone, the children will have time to think about the stories, especially the shepherd and the lost sheep, putting themselves in the story. Display the poster *The Good Shepherd* and these directions:



To include children who do not read well, have a leader in this zone to lead the meditation.

Sit down so you can look at the poster *The Good Shepherd*.

Recall the story Jesus told about the shepherd with 100 sheep.

Look at the poster. The shepherd there is surrounded by sheep and children.

Pretend that you are in the picture with the shepherd.

- **Where are you in the picture?**
- **How do you feel about the shepherd?**
- **See the angels on the shepherd's arms? What does that say to you about this shepherd?**
- **How does this picture help you learn about the shepherd in Jesus' story?**
- **How does this picture help you think about God and you?**



- **Community zone: picture books** The stories Jesus told are brief enough for the children to make picture books for younger children. Begin by helping them to outline the story. For example, the outline for the woman with the ten coins might be: woman has ten coins; woman counts coins and gets to nine; woman searches for coin; woman gets lamp to look in dark places; woman finds coin; woman celebrates with friends. Then provide a sheet of card stock or heavy paper for each scene. The children can select scenes to draw, making sure that every scene is taken. Punch holes in the left side of the pictures and tie them together with yarn or a shoelace. Give the books to a nursery or preschool group in your congregation.
- **Outreach zone: welcoming all people** Have the children make posters or banners welcoming others to your services of worship. Provide sheets of coloured paper and markers. Talk together about what to say, being sure the children have correct information, such



as the address and name of your congregation and the time of the worship service. If it is not possible for the children to participate in displaying them, give them to an appropriate committee of your congregation.

- **Music zone: God's trusting love** The song that the children heard in Gather, "God Is the One We Trust," is another way of learning that God loves us and wants everyone to know that. Show the children the poster *First Steps*. Ask:
  - **What is happening in this picture?**
  - **What do you think the adults are saying to each other? to the child?**
  - **What about this picture is like the stories Jesus told about the sheep and the coin?**

While the children will have ideas, one connection between the stories and the poster is the confidence the people have in one another. The adults are confident that the child will eventually learn to walk. The child is confident that the adults are there to give help and love. This message is also in the words of "God Is the One We Trust." Sing it together.

# 4

**BLESS**

**Gather** Play "Servant Song" (p. 118, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table. Light the candle.

**Song** Play "God Is the One We Trust" (p. 118, also #27 on *Seasons Music CD*) and invite the children to stand in a circle and sing along.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

Loving God, who searches for each person, we trust in you. Keep us safely in your arms. Amen.

**Blessing** To each child, say, "(Child's name), God loves you and will always love you."

## REFLECT

If some of the children knew one, or both, of Jesus' parables, how do you think they gained some new insight about it in this session? Which Respond zones were the busiest? How might this affect your planning for coming sessions?

How were you touched by these parables after preparing and exploring them with the children? Look over the list of your group. Are there any children who might be feeling "lost" or alone, or on the "outside"? What follow-up might you do?



# FOUND!

(based on Luke 15:1-10)

Props that are key to the story and do not distract the children's attention can be symbols of the story for them.

Oh that Jesus! There he was, sitting and eating with people others would stay away from. The religious leaders shook their heads, "Tsk, tsk. Why is Jesus friendly with that kind of people?"

Jesus could see the looks on the faces of the religious leaders. He didn't have to hear them to know what they were saying and thinking. So he told stories, parables, that they might understand what he was doing.

One was about a shepherd and a sheep. (*Hold up the toy sheep.*) A shepherd had a flock of 100 sheep. The shepherd watched over them day and night, and knew everyone of the sheep by sight and maybe even by name. In the mornings the shepherd took the sheep to the grassy hillside and to the brook of cool water. When night came, the shepherd took them to a safe place so nothing would harm the sheep. And every night, the shepherd counted the sheep. "One hundred," the shepherd would say, smiling. But one night, "Ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine..." A sheep was missing. The shepherd hurried to look for the

missing sheep. "Sheep, sheep, where are you?" After searching the hills and the ditches, the shepherd heard, "Baaa, baaaa." There was the missing sheep, caught in a bramble bush. The shepherd untangled the wool of the sheep and herded it back to the flock. That evening, the shepherd and all the shepherd's friends celebrated that the sheep that was lost was found.

The next story was about a woman and a coin. (*Hold up the coin.*) The woman, who was not rich, had ten silver coins. She kept them safely tucked away, but from time to time, she counted her coins. "One, two, three" until she got to ten. But on this day, she counted, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine..." She looked and she counted again, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine." A coin was missing! She looked in her lap, among the folds of her dress. She looked on the floor around her. She even got her broom and swept the floor, going into every corner and under every piece of furniture. She lit a lamp so she could see into the dark corners. Finally, she found the coin. She was so happy that she went to her friends next door and said, "Come, celebrate with me. I have found the coin that was lost. I am so, so happy."

Jesus looked at the people around the table with him and at the religious leaders standing apart from them. "Now do you understand? God is like the shepherd and the woman. God does not give up until everyone is included. God celebrates when we are all together."



# LISTENING TO JESUS

## Tax Collectors and Sinners

Tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman government. They collected the hated Roman taxes. They added a fee, which was their salary or wages. Some tax collectors added a small fee; others added a larger fee so they would make more money. Many Jews did not like the tax collectors because they helped the Romans who had conquered their land.

Sinners, as they are called in the New Testament, were Jews or Gentiles who the Jewish religious leaders thought did not live according to God's laws. They were considered unacceptable to be with and could not come to the temple. If the sinners were Jews, they could do acts that would make them acceptable again.

When the tax collectors and sinners heard Jesus' stories, how do you think they felt?

What did they learn about God?



## Pharisees and Scribes

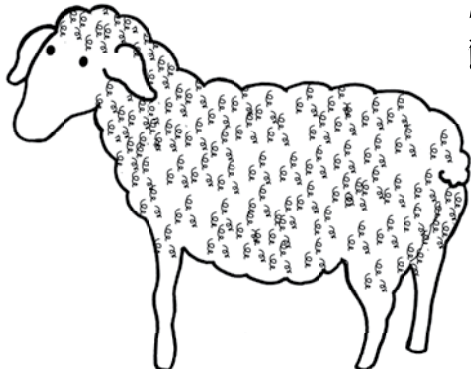
Pharisees were Jewish men who were experts in the religious Jewish law. They believed in the resurrection and a life after death. They expected all Jewish people to obey the law as they interpreted it.

The scribes were Jewish men who wrote down important ideas and papers for people who could not write. (Many people did not learn to read and write in those days.) They usually agreed with the Pharisees about religious teachings and laws.

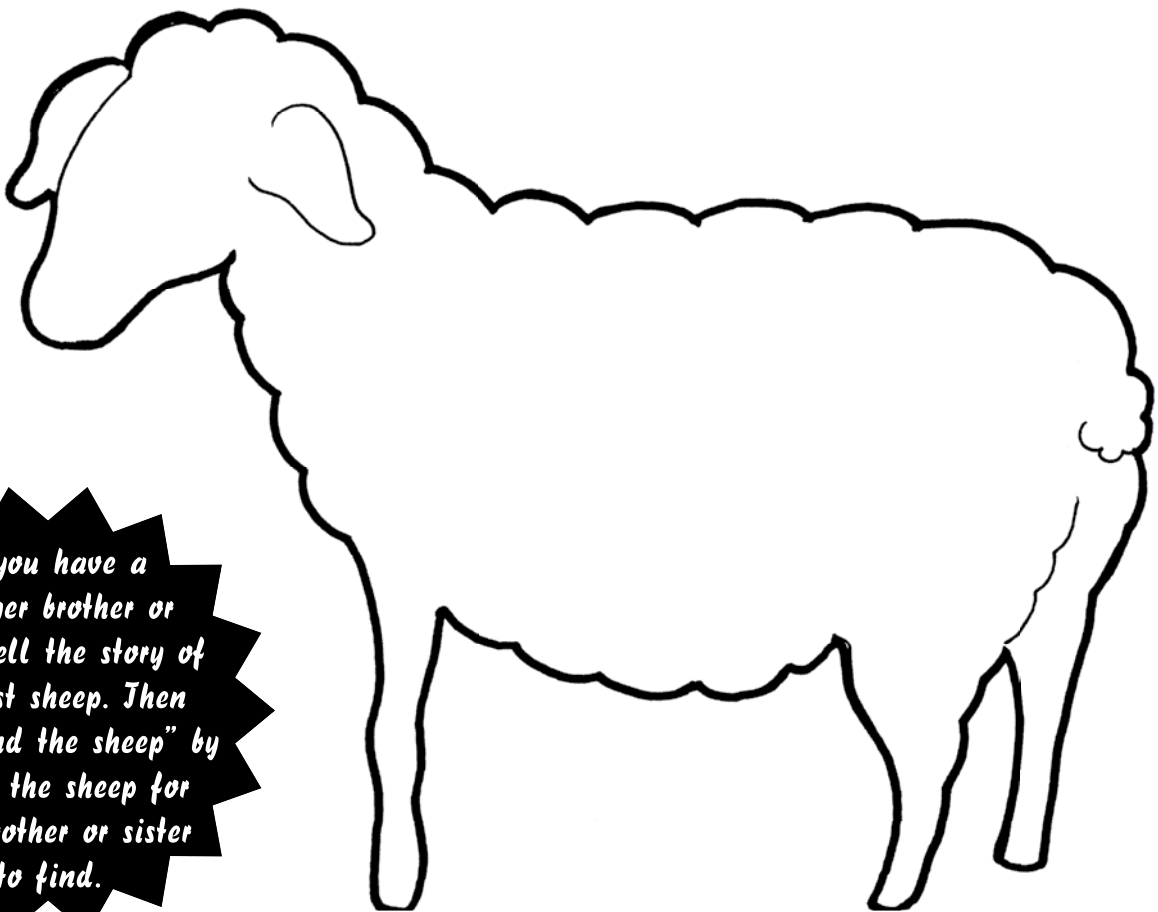
When the Pharisees and scribes heard Jesus' stories, how do you think they felt?

What did they learn about God?





# SHEEP REMINDERS



*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.