



Rejoice!

Goal: To find joy in knowing God is with us.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Philippians 4:4-9

The church at Philippi was under persecution. Acts 16:11-40 describes the beginning of the church there, which involved Paul and Silas being tried, beaten, and jailed due to local suspicion and resentment of the work of the gospel. The Christians there suffered great stress and danger for their faith, even threats of imprisonment and attack. When writing the letter to the Philippians, Paul is imprisoned elsewhere, possibly Rome, and parallels his situation to that of the Philippians, both needing to proclaim the gospel under duress.

The motto of this letter is to be of one mind in devotion to Christ, and to know that even suffering can be a "privilege" (1:29) when done for Christ's sake. Paul exhorts the Philippians to be brave, to "speak the word with greater boldness and without fear" (v. 14), and to be "without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world" (2:15). Paul's closing word to the Philippians is to rejoice in the Lord no matter the circumstances.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Most of the children in your class will not have firsthand experience of suffering for their faith. However, children can understand that life can be hard, that people can be mean and unfair, and that we need to stick together as followers of Christ. Be sure to explain to your class that Paul was in jail not for being a bad person, but because people were afraid of the new and different things he was saying and doing for Jesus.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

The children will focus on Paul's closing and benediction in his letter to Philippi. The key word here is rejoice! How surprising to hear this remarkable exclamation of celebration and joy in the midst of strife for both Paul and the church. Verses 4-7 assure the Philippians and us that, no matter how dire our situations, Christ is with us in an authentic way, and the peace of God guides our hearts and minds. Assure the children that, no matter how hard life may be, God is always good and present with us. Knowing this gives us courage, confidence, and peace and enables us to rejoice, even at the worst moments.

*Dear God, help me be an example of
joy and thanksgiving in all things.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 10, 10a, 14, 18

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

candle

cloth in a variety of
colors

Responding

Claiming

small jar for each child;
stickers, such as smiley
faces, stars, and hearts

Celebrating

inflatable beach ball

Praying

internet-connected
device

Offering

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

Extra

copies of **GN 2**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Claiming God’s Grace,” “Celebrating God’s Grace,” and “Praying God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG C

Welcome each child with, “Grace and peace be with you, *(Name)*.” Prompt children to respond, “And also with you.”

Invite children to help prepare the worship space. Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Ask for one or two volunteers to practice the Scripture reading.

Suggest that the children may use the cloths to cover the worship table. Encourage them to use a variety of colors to create a festive table. Place the candle in the center of the table.

Invite one child to write the word “JOY” in large bubble letters on mural paper, and invite other children to use markers to fill in the letters and decorate around them. Display the mural by the worship table.

As children work, ask:

- ▼ What does it mean to feel joy?
- ▼ How is it possible to have joy if we are worried or afraid?
- ▼ How is it possible to be thankful in difficult situations?

Singing

SD

Sing and clap to “The Whole World Is in God’s Hands”—**SCM 14**.

Praying

L M

Turn on the candle to remind you of God’s presence among you. Invite children to close their eyes and to recall something from this past week that made them feel joy. Sit silently for a few moments. Then have them imagine God with them. Ask them how God’s presence makes them feel. Then invite them to imagine something that made them feel worried or frightened. Sit silently for a few moments. Have them imagine God with them. Ask them how God’s presence makes them feel. Pray:

God of grace, thank you for your presence in both times of fear and in times of joy. We rejoice and give thanks for your constant presence with us at all times. Amen.



- T** *Transition times can cause children to act out. Giving them something enjoyable to do provides them with a way to deal with these times.*

Preparing to Hear the Story VI

Show the children the pictures on **SCM 10a**, a depiction of heat-mapping emotions. Explain that these pictures represent how and where different emotions are felt in our bodies. For example, when we are angry, there is a lot of heat and feeling in our upper body, our head, and our hands. Ask if anyone has felt that kind of feeling before, where they feel like their head or chest might explode or their fists are clenched because they are angry. Point out happiness. Ask the children to describe how happiness, or joy, feels. Invite any other comments about the emotions and how they make our bodies feel.

Have the children use their faces and bodies to practice showing different emotions. Use the emotions or feelings on **SCM 10a**. Ask the children for other feelings to try.



Hearing the Story LG L C

Invite a child to find Philippians 4 in the Bible. Have one or two volunteers read Philippians 4:4–9. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible on the worship table.

Ask the children to use their faces and bodies to show the emotions and feelings in the story as you read a retelling using **SCM 10**. Pause occasionally to let children pose or move.

After the story, ask the children what emotions they think appeared most often in this story. Ask them what was surprising to them.

Reflecting on God’s Grace L C

Use the following questions to engage the children in conversation.

- ▼ How did Paul encourage his friends through the letter he wrote?
- ▼ What does Paul’s letter tell us about God?
- ▼ What does Paul’s letter tell us about how to be faithful?

Consider a time in your own life when you experienced sadness, worry, or discouragement but also the joy of God’s presence. Maybe it was at the time of a death of a loved one, but you felt God’s presence through the love and comfort of church members. Maybe it was during a big move or job change when God provided people to help and care for you during a stressful time. As you share, pause and show your emotions through your face and/or body.

Invite children to share their own experiences.

Comment that it is possible to remember and trust God when we are scared, sad, worried, or discouraged—that we can feel joy in God’s presence with us even when life is hard.



Singing

Sing and dance to “I’ve Got Peace like a River”—**SCM 18**.
Turn off the candle.

LD *Children with learning disabilities may be no less able than other children; they just receive, process, and/or respond differently. If writing or reading is difficult for a child, allow them to participate verbally.*

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.



Claiming God’s Grace

LD

Before the session, cut a sheet of paper into 1" strips for each child.

Remind the children that we can find joy in all circumstances. Tell them that they will create “Joy” jars to hold experiences of joy. Provide jars and craft supplies. Invite children to decorate their “Joy” jars. Give each child a set of strips of paper and suggest they put a sticker at one end of each strip.

Have the children identify a time of joy or a time when they felt sad, discouraged, or worried but knew that God was with them. Maybe it was through a friend who offered kindness, through a song they heard on the radio, or through the encouraging words of others. Instruct the children to write down a few words to remember this experience. Assist with writing as needed. Have them place the strips of paper in their “Joy” jars.

Encourage the children to take home the rest of their strips of paper and continue this practice each evening.

Tell the children that Paul wanted his friends to be full of joy. Explain that they too may fill their “Joy” jars to be full of joy.” Offer a prayer of thanksgiving over all the moments that will be recorded to fill their “Joy” jars this week.



Celebrating God’s Grace

B MS C LD

Before the session, use a permanent marker to write the following statements in different places on the inflated beach ball:

- ▼ *Tell about someone who brings you joy.*
- ▼ *Tell about a place that brings you joy.*
- ▼ *Tell about something you think is beautiful.*
- ▼ *Tell about someone you think is honorable.*
- ▼ *Name a sound or place that you find peaceful.*
- ▼ *Name a person who shows the characteristics Paul talks about.*



Play a game to reinforce Paul's teaching. Ask the children to recall the things Paul suggested that people focus on, no matter what situation they are in. Read the section in the story, if necessary, to remember.

Hold the prepared beach ball in your hands and turn it over, reading aloud each statement. Use the following directions to play:

- ▼ Stand in a circle and toss the ball to someone. Whatever statement the catcher's right thumb is on or nearest to is read aloud and answered.
- ▼ Toss the ball to another person to continue play.
- ▼ Pass the ball so that everyone has received it at least once. Continue playing for as many rounds as you like.



Praying God's Grace

L D SD

Tell the children that singing can be a prayer to God. Play the YouTube video "Rejoice in the Lord Always" by Wee Sing ([bit.ly /2Md0MK1](https://bit.ly/2Md0MK1)) so that the children may learn the tune. Praise God together using the song as your prayer. Use the following ideas: Sing as a group. Sing in a round. Add movement. Add rhythm instruments.

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.

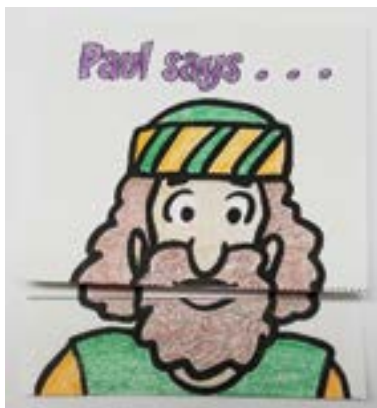
Offering God's Grace

Offer joyful reminders to the congregation. Provide several copies of GN 1 and markers, and invite the children to make "joy cards" reminding others to be full of joy. Encourage the children to decorate and cut apart the cards. Fold each card at the dotted line. Fold again, aligning the dotted line with the narrow line. Show the children that, when they open the card, Paul says, "Rejoice!"

Consider ways to distribute the cards. Some ideas could be:

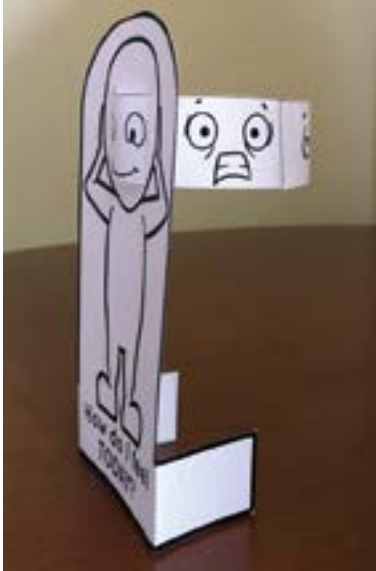
- ▼ Safely visit the parking lot and leave them on windshields.
- ▼ Place them in pews.
- ▼ Serve as greeters and hand them out as worshippers enter the building/sanctuary.

Determine how you will distribute the cards. Before you do, gather in a circle with the cards in the center and offer a prayer that those who receive a card would know the grace of the joy of the Lord.





Extra Activity



*Before the session, carefully cut the two slits in the face on **GN 2** for each child.*

Recount for the children that Paul said no matter what situation you are in and no matter how you feel, God is always with you.

Hand out copies of **GN 2** and invite the children to color the person to look like themselves. They may also color the strip of expressions. As they work, encourage a discussion about what each expression might be.

Have the children cut the figure out along the bold line and fold back the tabs at the bottom to make the figure stand. Then have them cut out the strip of emotions. Show them how to thread it through the two slits in the face so that the face on the strip can be seen on the face of the figure. Start from the back, pushing the strip through the front and then to the back again. Tape the strip in a loop, securing both sides. This will make it a little easier to slide the strip through the slits without catching. Demonstrate turning the loop to land on the emotion they feel today.

Invite the children to name different times or circumstances. Have everyone respond by showing an emotion.

Encourage the children to take the figures home and use them as a reminder that, no matter how we feel, God is with us.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Lead children in cleaning up the space.

Gather children for the following responsive prayer, which is based on Paul's letter. Invite them to repeat the **bold** words, telling them that you will gesture when you speak a word they should repeat.

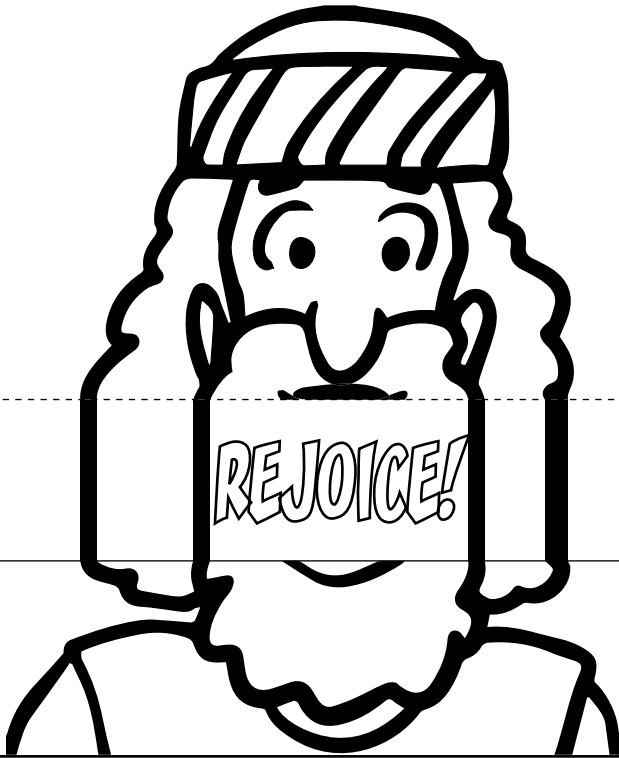
My brothers and sisters in Christ,
whatever situation you are in,
focus your thoughts on the **good** and **not the bad**.
Instead of worrying, think about things that are **good** and
true,
that are **right** and bring **honor**,
that are **beautiful** and worthy of **praise**.
Practice what you learned from me.
Do what I have told you and what you saw me do.
And the God who gives **peace** will be with you.
Amen.

As children depart, give each one a blessing. Say to each: "(Name), the grace of God is with you. Be joyful!"

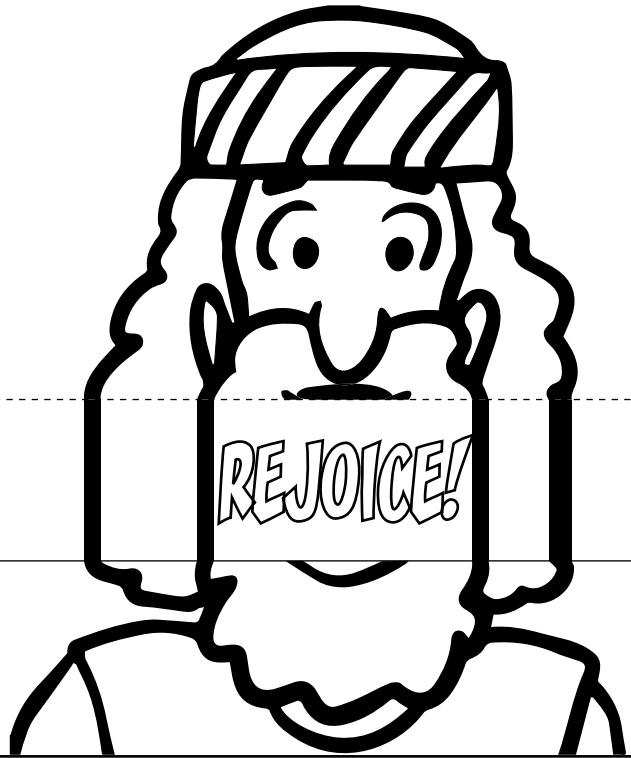


Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

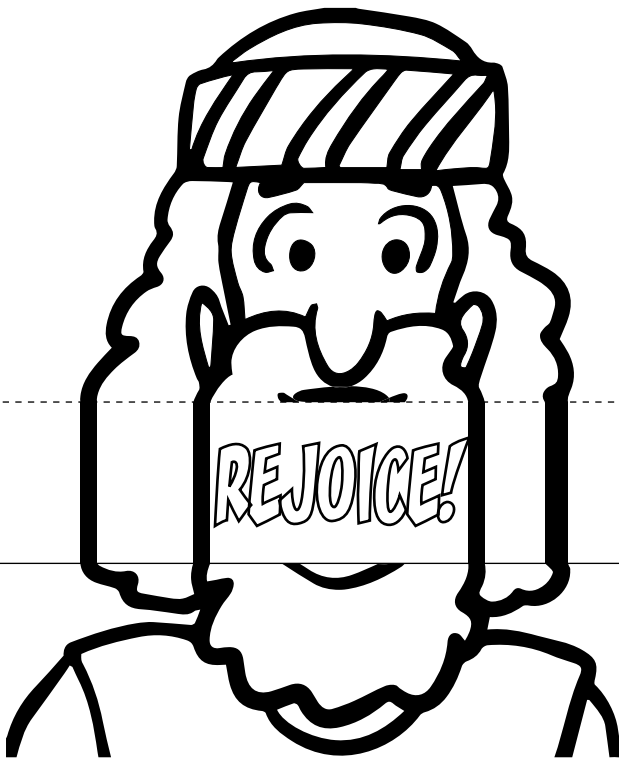
Paul says . . .



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