



**PRETEEN**

JUNE 2024

## FOR LEADERS ONLY

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### **GOD VIEW: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JOY AND GOD'S CHARACTER, AS SHOWN THROUGH GOD'S BIG STORY**

Choose joy! This may be a commonly used phrase you've heard, but what does it *actually* mean? Joy is more than being excited about the good things that happen to us. Joy is an attitude—a decision to trust God no matter what is going on in our lives. From the very beginning, God had a plan for the world. As we dive into the Bible, we'll discover God's plan for us and how God has been at work through it all. When we see and celebrate what God is doing, we can find true joy!

### **CORE INSIGHT: The theological foundation for JOY**

**Faith** in God's Son. I believe in Jesus and will continually trust Him even when life doesn't make sense.

Jesus never promises that life will be easy or perfect, even when we follow Him. Though we may experience hurt and see pain all around us, God is still at work. Because of Jesus, we can experience a relationship with God and learn how to trust God no matter what.

### **JOY is choosing to celebrate what God is doing.**

### **HEADS UP: IDEAS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU TALK ABOUT JOY WITH KIDS**

As you talk about joy this month, keep in mind that kids are concrete thinkers and need a solid starting point before they dive into bigger concepts and ideas. Kids may naturally equate joy with their circumstances or with their possessions . . . which can cause those who don't have as much to feel out of place or feel badly about themselves and their family. This is an opportunity to help kids see how joy is about more than the things we have. Explain how you can have joy whether you're having a good day or a bad day because God gave us Jesus. Guide the conversation to help kids find joy because of what God has done in their lives or in the life of someone they know.

Be sensitive to those kids or volunteers in your environment who may be experiencing more acute mental health-related illnesses. Clinical depression, anxiety, or PTSD will make it more difficult for people to experience joy or identify how God is at work. Enter those conversations with a posture of listening and encouragement. Don't rush in and try to fix anything with a quick answer or Bible verse. Connect with families impacted in this way and find out the best way you can help. And if your environment turns out to be the first point of contact for this family's experience, be sure to have a plan to connect that family to the help they need to ensure the child's safety.



WEEK  
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LARGE GROUP  
**PRETEEN**

## TODAY'S SUGGESTED SCHEDULE

### WEEK 3

Key Question: **What is something that took longer than you wanted it to?** Joy is something that we choose every single day. And we can still choose joy even when the things we hope for end up taking longer than we would like or expect. As preteens think through this question, they can begin to see that no matter how long the journey might be, they can still choose joy along the way.

For week 3, we head to **Ezra 3:10-13**. At the time, God's people were living as captives in Persia, when the new king, Cyrus, allowed them to return home to Jerusalem. However, when they returned, everything was broken down and destroyed. The people got to work rebuilding the temple . . . but before they got far, they stopped to worship God and celebrate the ways that God had helped them.

Bottom Line: **Celebrate each step of the way.** Some tasks seem to take longer to complete than others. Whether kids are learning how to ride a bike, bake a cake, solve a math problem, or talk to new people, they learn that each step is important. The same thing is true about our relationship with God. We can choose to trust God and find joy, even when we can't see the whole picture. We can celebrate how God is working in our lives with every step we take.

### TODAY'S BIBLE STORY

**Build Your Kingdom Here** Ezra and the Rebuilding of the Temple Ezra 3:10-13

### TODAY'S KEY QUESTION

What is something that took longer than you wanted it to?

### TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE

Celebrate each step of the way.

### MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE

"A cheerful heart makes you healthy. But a broken spirit dries you up."  
Proverbs 17:22, NIV

### MONTHLY VIRTUE

Joy—Choosing to celebrate what God is doing

### BASIC TRUTH

I can trust God no matter what.

### Host

#### WHAT YOU NEED:

- Host
- All Small Groups

#### MUSIC AND SOUND EFFECTS:

- Upbeat music to use as kids enter the room
- Upbeat dance music from multiple genres (See What You Do)
- Upbeat dance music

#### LARGE GROUP VISUALS:

- Theme Slide
- "Fancy Foxtrot" Title Slide

### 3. COMMUNICATOR SCRIPT (STORY)

#### WHAT YOU NEED:

- Communicator
- Bible
- Baked cake
- Box of cake mix
- Plastic tablecloth
- Table
- Kitchen utensil
- Bowl of water to clean hands
- Paper towels
- *Optional: Rubber gloves*
- *Optional: Wipes*

#### MUSIC AND SOUND EFFECTS:

- Upbeat music to use as kids exit the room



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**PRELUDE**      **SOCIAL**      **STORY**      **WORSHIP**      **GROUPS**      **HOME**

25 MINUTES      10 MINUTES

### TODAY'S BIBLE STORY

**Build Your Kingdom Here**  
Ezra and the  
Rebuilding of the Temple  
Ezra 3:10-13

### TODAY'S KEY QUESTION

What is something that took longer than you wanted it to?

### TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE

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### MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE

**"A cheerful heart makes you healthy. But a broken spirit dries you up."**  
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### MONTHLY VIRTUE

**Joy—Choosing to celebrate what God is doing**

### BASIC TRUTH

**I can trust God no matter what.**

## LARGE GROUP

ENGAGE KIDS' HEARTS THROUGH A DYNAMIC AND INTERACTIVE BIBLE STORY, WORSHIP, AND PRAYER EXPERIENCE IN A LARGE GROUP SETTING.

**AUDIO: PLAY HIGH-ENERGY MUSIC AS STUDENTS ENTER.**

**SLIDE: THEME**

**OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP**

Host enters . . .

**OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): COUNTDOWN**

**OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME**

## WELCOME

Host has lots of energy as he or she welcomes everyone to [Name of Environment]. Host is relatable and inviting. Host can talk about something that happened culturally throughout the week like a big sports game (US Open, NBA Finals, Stanley Cup Finals), Father's Day, Juneteenth, movie opening (*Despicable Me 4*), a viral video on YouTube, etc. Host tells them how excited he or she is that they're there and briefly runs through what they can expect. This is especially helpful for first-time guests to make them feel like they know what's happening.

## OPENER

**HOST:** "Everybody! Today is the day! No exaggeration. You picked the perfect time to join us in [Name of Environment]! Some of you woke up today, noticed the sun came out again, and thought, 'Let's party!'"

"Others rolled out of bed, glanced in the mirror, and discovered you were having a good hair day and thought, 'I feel like dancing!'"

"Don't lie. I know you did. (beat) Anyway! Is there anybody out there who wants to play a game? (Allow response) Whoa. I'm not sure this has ever happened. Every single small group just emphatically said they wanted to play this game. And you have no idea what it is yet.

"(shrug) Well, I'm left with only one option—let everybody play our game! It's one I like to call 'Fancy Foxtrot.'"

**SLIDE: "FANCY FOXTROT"**



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25 MINUTES

10 MINUTES

"I know, I know, you're wondering, 'What is it? How do you play? Will I get fabulous prizes?'"

"To play Fancy Foxtrot, each Small Group will need to gather around their leader. Our very own DJ will be playing jams across all genres. When the music starts, your group's dance should match the style of the music. For example, country music should highlight your group's Western style of dance. Classical tunes should bring out those floaty moves from a different century. If you're unsure how to dance, simply look to your leader! They'll know what to do! Sounds easy enough, right? But when the music stops, your group needs to freeze as fast as they can. The last group to freeze will be eliminated from the game. Make sense? (Allow response) Good! Let's start the party!"

**AUDIO: VARIOUS STYLES OF MUSIC**

*Have all the small groups stand up and gather around their leaders. Make space between the various small groups so you can better see the last group to freeze.*

*Play Songs in the following styles:*

*Country*

*Grunge*

*Hip-hop*

*Disco*

*Musical Theater*

*Scottish Bagpipes*

*Classical*

*Techno*

*Play the game and celebrate the last group remaining.*

"What a way to celebrate our time together! Amazing job to all our small groups! Each of you demonstrated a wide variety of dance moves I've never ever seen before . . . some of them I never want to see again.

"For that, each of you should pat your back for a job well done. Speaking of which, we have a brand-new 'Fancy Foxtrot' Champion! To celebrate, as we do here at [Name of Environment], everybody stand up on your feet for a 15-second dance party! All of you should be warmed up! LET'S GO!"

**AUDIO: UPBEAT DANCE MUSIC**

*Lead the crazy dance for about 15 seconds. At the end of the 15 seconds, cut the music abruptly and have everyone remain standing.*

"Now, everyone, stay on your feet and get ready to worship our amazing God! And who knows, we might even get a chance to worship with our dancing feet! Let's get ready to sing!"

*Host exits as Worship Leader enters the stage.*



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## WORSHIP

*Worship Leaders enter as Host exits.*

**WORSHIP LEADER:** "Hi, everybody! These songs we're singing today are full of joy. Joy isn't based on what our lives are like on the outside. Joy is something God's Spirit creates IN us. God's Spirit makes us want to MOVE and live our lives the way Jesus taught us to live. Let's celebrate the joy God gives us. Let's move!"

**AUDIO:** "MOVIN' ME" / TRACK 6 FROM READY, SET, MOVE!

**OPTIONAL VIDEO:** "MOVIN' ME" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

"Every day, we can choose to worship God—with our voices, but also with the way we live our lives. We can share the joy God gives us. We can show God's love to other people. We can **[Basic Truth] treat others the way we want to be treated**, like Jesus taught us to do. We can live our whole life for God! That's what this song is about. Sing it with me.

**AUDIO:** "MY LIFE FOR YOU" / TRACK 9 FROM MY LIFE FOR YOU

**OPTIONAL VIDEO:** "MY LIFE FOR YOU" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

"Our God is so faithful. As David wrote in Psalm 30:11-12: 'You turned my loud crying into dancing. You removed my clothes of sadness and dressed me with joy. So my heart will sing your praises. I can't keep silent. Lord, my God, I will praise you forever.' (NIRV) Each of us has a story of what God has done in our lives. The best way we can remember and celebrate what God has done is by responding in praise and worship. Let's lift our voices and tell God how grateful we are."

**AUDIO:** "I'M SO GRATEFUL" / TRACK 3 FROM MY LIFE FOR YOU

**OPTIONAL VIDEO:** "I'M SO GRATEFUL" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO



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## COMMUNICATOR SCRIPT (STORY)

SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND

*Communicator enters as Worship Leader exits.*

### INTRODUCTION

**COMMUNICATOR:** "Hey, friends! It's great to be here today to start the party with each of you! When you hear the word party, what kinds of celebrations come to mind?"

*Call on several volunteers to share their answers.*

"Not bad! As you know, there are so many kinds of parties in the world. Birthday parties, retirement parties, slumber parties, Christmas parties, wedding parties, pool parties, and the list goes on. Thinking about all of these, what might all these parties have in common?"

*Call on several volunteers to answer the question. If no one says it, fish for the word "cake."*

"Yes! Sweets. Desserts. Cake! It's the perfect food. And I just think that every party needs a cake for it to be an official party. I hesitate to do this because many of us might be hungry, but I need to list off different types of cake. Plug your ears if your stomach starts to growl.

"There are chocolate cakes, ice cream cakes, red velvet cakes, German chocolate cakes, tres leches cakes, pineapple upside-down cakes, angel food cake, layered cakes, vanilla cakes, cake pops, cheesecake, cake shakes, and the mother of all cakes, 'The Be-All and End-All of Big, Rich, Old-Fashioned, Milk Chocolate Cake with Hershey Bar Chocolate Frosting'! It's a recipe straight out of The Birthday Cake Book!

"Good cakes abound in the world. What is your favorite cake to eat at a party?"

*Call on several volunteers to share their answers.*

"Yep. I'm officially drooling. Like you, I have a favorite cake. It comes not from a store, a restaurant, or a box. Rather it comes from my mom's kitchen.

*Briefly share about your favorite cake. If you can, go into detail about the ingredients and the process of making the cake. Use the following as a template.*

"Where I grew up, there was a popular cake called a chocolate sheet cake. No exaggeration, it could be the greatest cake in the history of cakes. It's thinner than a traditional layered cake, which means two amazing things—the cake cooks faster AND gives you a higher frosting-to-cake ratio! A win-win!

"Making the cake was quite the process. Mom would start by pulling out all the kitchen supplies needed like the large sheet pan, pots, whisk, measuring spoons, the mixer, and more. Next, she would collect the ingredients and begin to mix them for the cake sponge. Once the cake batter was mixed and placed into the oven, my mom would start working on the icing. This required her to stir the icing forever in a pot on the stove! She was always nervous the chocolate icing would burn, but it never did. Once the icing was added to the cake, she let the icing set on the cake.



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**25 MINUTES**

“Licking the spoon is the best part. And wanting to eat the whole thing by myself was the hardest!”

*Bring out the pre-made cake and place it on a table.*

“Today, I’ve got a surprise! Here is my mom’s world-famous cake—in all its glory! Looks delicious, right? (Allow response) This cake never lasted long in our house. It only lasted about two days. Maybe.”

**TENSION**

**COMMUNICATOR:** “Seeing this cake today reminds me of something my mom always said: ‘Good things take time to bake.’

“She was right! The process of preparing, baking, eating, and cleaning up the cake mess was no quick task. When you’re hungry and have an itch for chocolate sheet cake, it always feels like forever before you can eat it.

“But if we can be honest for a minute, waiting for *anything* can be difficult. Waiting for summer vacation is the worst. Waiting for your favorite cousins to drive in from out of town can take forever. Anticipating your birthday when it is weeks away can be super hard. Waiting isn’t great. It’s not very fun, and it certainly is not very joyful.

“I’m curious, though. Is it possible to have joy when waiting? Is there a way we can keep focused on what God is doing in the process and celebrate with joy before we are finished waiting? Sometimes the good stuff in life takes time before it is done baking. It is a process—sort of like making a cake from scratch. Is it possible to find joy in the middle of the wait?”

“Great questions. (hold up Bible) Let’s see if we can find some answers.”

**TRUTH**

**COMMUNICATOR:** “To start our answer search, we’ll start in the Jewish Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament in our Bibles. It’s where we find the story of God’s people, the Israelites! You know, if the Israelites were standing in this room with us, they would know exactly what I’m talking about when it comes to waiting. They faced many situations that required them to wait without knowing when their waiting would end. Today, we head to a story where the Israelites were tasked with a huge job, but I want you to pay attention to their response as they made a little bit of progress.

“Many of you will remember that God created an amazing world full of beautiful sights, creatures, plants, and of course, people. It was GOOD—until, of course, the people messed it up. We’re always messing things up, especially when we turn away from God. You think we’d learn . . .

“Adam and Eve’s sin broke their relationship with God. But from the very beginning, God had a plan to fix and restore that relationship. Through the family line of a man named Abraham, God blessed the entire world. As his family, the Israelites, grew in number, they became a great nation. However, time and time again, as we all do, God’s people turned away. You’d think we’d learn . . .

*Stand behind the cake on the table.*

“Imagine this cake is Jerusalem where the Israelites built a temple to worship God along with mighty city walls to protect everything and everyone in the city. It was a sweet setup. But it didn’t last.



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“God’s people faced many hardships, including the time they were conquered by the Babylonians and taken away from their land. When King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, their homes were ransacked. On top of that, they destroyed God’s Temple and looted many of the valuable furnishings. What they didn’t take, they burned up. It was a disaster . . . sort of like *this*.

*Do the unthinkable—plunge your hands into the cake and start destroying it. Turn it to mush.*

“It was a cake-tastrophe! God’s people were forced to leave, and their homes were destroyed. It was a horribly hard time for God’s people.

*Clean your hands with water and towels.*

“But God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah that the Israelites would eventually return home. God didn’t say when or how . . . but at some point, they WOULD return. God promised that!

“Ultimately, the Babylonians were conquered by another nation, Persia. After decades of captivity, a new generation of God’s people were born who had never seen their homeland of Judah or what was left of it.

“Through it all, God remained powerful and had everything in control. Under the rule of the Persian King Cyrus, everything changed for God’s people. God moved the heart of the king to allow more than 40,000 Jewish people to return to Jerusalem.

“King Cyrus said:

*Open the Bible to 2 Chronicles 36:23 and read.*

*“The LORD is the God of heaven. He has given me all the kingdoms on earth. He has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem. And may the LORD their God be with them.*

“Not only did the king allow God’s people to return to rebuild the temple, but Cyrus also provided the people with silver and gold, livestock, and other valuables to be returned to Jerusalem. As thousands of exiles returned to Jerusalem, they found what was left.

*Stand behind the destroyed cake as an example of the destroyed city.*

“Instead of a crushed cake as we see here, the Jewish community saw a crushed city. The walls had fallen, creating gaping holes. The Lord’s temple was burned. Numerous other important buildings were destroyed. The leaders of the people, including a man named Zerubbabel, knew the most important thing was to rebuild the temple—the place where God would dwell among them.

“The Israelites started simple. They rebuilt the altar. The significance of this can’t be understated. The altar was a place where people could make offerings to God. Once completed, the Israelites paused to celebrate God’s past protection and guidance in the Feast of Booths just as God had instructed them to do long ago. However, their work was just getting started.





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"Next, they laid the foundation of the temple. But something interesting happened after this construction step. The priests and Levites came wearing special attire and carrying trumpets and cymbals. They lifted their voices and began to worship God.

*Open the Bible to Ezra 3:11 and read.*

*"They sang to the LORD. They praised him. They gave thanks to him. They said,*

*'The LORD is good.*

*His faithful love to Israel continues forever.'*

*All the people gave a loud shout. They praised the LORD.*

*Reveal a box of cake mix.*

"It was sort of as if the Israelites were celebrating a box of cake mix after their first cake had been destroyed. They had all the ingredients to make the cake again . . . or in this instance, rebuild the temple and eventually the city. Instead of mourning over what was (*indicate the destroyed cake*) they were joyful in what was to come (*indicate the cake mix*).

"Rebuilding the temple and then the city wouldn't be easy. . . However, in the middle of the waiting, people celebrated. They had built one tiny piece of foundation for the temple. One tiny piece when the entire city had yet to be rebuilt. Yet the people praised and danced. And they found joy!

An interesting scene unfolded next:

*Open the Bible to Ezra 3:12-13 and read.*

*"Many of the older priests and Levites and family leaders wept out loud. They had seen the first temple. So when they saw the foundation of the second temple being laid, they wept. Others shouted with joy. No one could tell the difference between the shouts of joy and the sounds of weeping. That's because the people made so much noise. The sound was heard far away.*

"There were some older people among the crowd who had seen the glorious temple before it was destroyed. And they were super-sad that the new temple was a shadow of the previous one.

"Their sadness was justified. It's true that the new temple wasn't as impressive as the first one. It was true that God's people still had a long way to go. But God's people were still filled with joy to know that they'd completed one big step along the way. They praised God so loudly that their shouts of joy could be heard for miles around."

## APPLICATION

**COMMUNICATOR:** "This is such a great story! The Israelites were taken from the city and land they built. In the process, Jerusalem was destroyed, looted, and burned. But eventually, God gave the people of Judah the opportunity to return. Upon surveying all the damage and destruction, they knew the rebuilding process would take a long time. There were plenty of opportunities for the people to express sadness or anger over their city's condition. Instead of bitterness, the Israelites responded in a completely unexpected way. They celebrated each step with shouts of joy that could be heard for miles around because they completed the temple's *foundation*!"



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25 MINUTES

“Now I realize nobody in this room will be leaving today to go build a temple. But we all have big work to complete. School projects, big chores, learning to play a sport, improving your musical skills, or healing from an injury. We will never be completely finished in this lifetime with all the things we need and want to do. That’s why it’s so important to celebrate the steps along the way.

“Truth is, I don’t always feel like celebrating when I’m looking at a mountain of dirty clothes or when I have a five-page report on a boring subject due at school. But the best part of all this is the fact that God gives us joy, and we don’t have to find it by ourselves. Celebrate the milestones. Celebrate the steps. See what God has done along the way and you’ll find your joy! When we follow Jesus, God gives us joy through the Holy Spirit so we can celebrate every moment!”

**LANDING**

**COMMUNICATOR:** “God is with you each step along the way. **[Basic Truth] We can trust God no matter what.** It’s so important for all of us to stop and remember God doesn’t abandon us even when life is difficult. When we pause to give thanks for all God has done and ask God for help to keep going . . . that can bring you joy.

“We don’t want you to process this alone! Each of you will be joining a Small Group of peers and a fantastic Small Group Leader to further discuss this. As we prepare to head to Small Groups, I want you to think about this one question:”

**SLIDE: KEY QUESTION**

**“What is something that took longer than you wanted it to?”** Maybe you faced delays or obstacles. It could have been learning a new unit at school or a new skill with a sport you love. Come up with an answer and be prepared to share it with your Small Group. But first, let’s pray together to thank God that we always have a reason to celebrate through Jesus.

**SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND**

*Communicator leads the group in a prayer related to what they just heard. After prayer, Communicator dismisses the kids to small group.*

**AUDIO: PLAY HIGH-ENERGY MUSIC AS THE KIDS EXIT.**

**SLIDE: THEME**

**OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP**