



PRETEEN

JUNE 2024

FOR LEADERS ONLY

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.

Start the Party

Celebrate the Good News

WEEK
ONE
JULY 2024

LARGE GROUP
PRETEEN

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

STORY

WORSHIP

GROUPS

HOME

GETTING READY

HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET READY FOR THIS WEEK

WEEK 1

Key Question: **What does joy mean to you?** Preteens have greater access to technology than ever before. Because of this, they're often bombarded with negative messages, and joy can seem hard to find. That's why we're starting the month by helping our preteens think about what joy is . . . and where true, lasting joy really comes from.

We start the month with **Luke 15:1-7**, where we find Jesus telling a parable about a shepherd who goes to find his lost sheep. Jesus explains that the shepherd cares so much about the missing sheep that he leaves the other 99 sheep to go look for it. After the shepherd finds his sheep, he invites his friends to help him celebrate!

Bottom Line: **We can have joy because of Jesus.** In Jesus' story, the shepherd is full of joy when he finds his lost sheep. He rejoices with his friends. When we recognize that we are like the lost sheep, we can have joy because we know that God sent Jesus to rescue us! And this joy isn't just something we keep to ourselves. We can share the good news about Jesus and celebrate when others put their faith in Him too.

TODAY'S BIBLE STORY

Tidings of Comfort and Joy Shepherds and Angels
Luke 2:8-20

TODAY'S KEY QUESTION

Who do you know who could use some joy?

TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE

Jesus brings joy to the world.

MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE

"Always be joyful because you belong to the Lord. I will say it again. Be joyful!"
Philippians 4:4, NIRV

MONTHLY VIRTUE

Joy—Choosing to celebrate what God is doing

BASIC TRUTH

I can trust God no matter what.

Host

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Host
- Today's script or a pile of papers stapled together to represent today's script
- 5 Small Group Leaders
- 10 Squeaky Rubber Chickens
- 5 Rolls of tape or Velcro® strips
- Theme Slide
- "The Cha-Cha Chicken Dance-Off" Title Slide

2. WORSHIP

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Worship Leader(s)

3. COMMUNICATOR SCRIPT (STORY)

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Communicator
- Bible
- Female Small Group Leader
- 3 pre-selected Small Group Leaders
- 1 Beach ball
- 3 Inflatable flamingos
- 1 Inflatable unicorn ring floatie
- 1 Tiki hut or beach umbrella
- Several pool noodles
- 3 Inflatable palm trees

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STORY

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GROUPS

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25 MINUTES

10 MINUTES

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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. *holiday (4th of July), movie opening (Despicable Me 4, Mufasa: The Lion King), 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: "BY GEORGE, I THINK I'VE DONE IT! Never ever before has ANYONE ever experienced such a thing of beauty! This will be THE greatest party game in the history of great party games!

"Oh. I'm sorry. I got a little ahead of myself. *(clear throat)* My name is [Name of Host], and today is a stellar day to host in [Name of Environment]. Not only do I get to start the party, but I also get to do something I've never, ever done before! Typically, my duties in [Name of Environment] are restricted to whatever is on a script.

Hold up a script and wave it wildly in the air.

"Rarely do I get the creative freedom to make up my own game without their oversight. But everything changed this week when [Name of Kids Pastor] gave me a call and said I was on my own! This means *I'm* being trusted to create a unique party game that will go down as the greatest contest [Name of Environment] has ever seen! For the benefit of all humanity, I labored and



WEEK
ONE
JULY 2024

LARGE GROUP
PRETEEN

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

25 MINUTES

10 MINUTES

dreamed all week to create an incomparable and most preeminent party game my brain could concoct. And trust me when I say—I think I've done it.

"Friends! Today, we will party by playing the brand-new game I've decided to call . . . 'The Cha-Cha Chicken Dance-Off!'

SLIDE: "THE CHA-CHA CHICKEN DANCE-OFF"

"Take a moment. I know. It's a lot. This game needs the mad dance skills of a few Small Group Leaders. Does anybody want to see their Small Group Leader compete? (Allow response) Oh, yeah. That's what I thought.

Invite five Small Group Leaders to the stage. Hand each leader a squeaky rubber chicken, along with a roll of masking tape or ribbon of Velcro.

"Sometimes, normal dance parties can be drab. No life. No rizz. No chickens and no cha-cha. And this feels like a crime.

"And to counteract this, I've given each leader chickens and a roll of tape. (To the Leaders) Do you mind attaching those chickens to the bottoms of your feet?

Take a few moments while they do this to encourage them to test the chickens out by taking a few steps.

"Ahhh, the sweet sounds of cha-cha'd chickens. (beat) Now, to play our game, the leaders will dance around the stage, lifting their knees high in the air and taking big steps. The dancing should continue until they no longer hear music. When the music stops, all leaders should freeze. The last leader to freeze—or the person with the last squeaky chicken to squeak—will be eliminated. Make sense? (Allow response) The last cha-cha chicken dancer will go down in history as the ultimate Cha-Cha Chicken Champion!

"Alright! Enough talking! Let's make this happen!

AUDIO: UPBEAT GAME MUSIC

Play the game—essentially freeze dance with chickens.

Keep the energy up, encourage all leaders on stage to dance like no one is watching.

CHA-CHA CHICKEN PRO TIP: By lifting legs up high and pausing a moment, it allows the air to get back in the chicken before stomping its guts out again.

AUDIO: STOP THE MUSIC ABOUT EVERY 8-12 SECONDS

Eliminate the last Small Group Leader who freezes until a winner remains.

"(Fake solemnness and overacted energy) Friends. Never have I been prouder of our amazing Small Group Leaders, and never have we played a better game! Our leaders cha-cha'd! The chickens squawked. The music bopped. Let's give the biggest round of applause to all of our leaders. (Allow response) To honor our very first Cha-Cha Chicken Champion, let's all give a big ba-GAWK!



WEEK
ONE
JULY 2024

LARGE GROUP
PRETEEN

PRELUDE	SOCIAL	STORY	WORSHIP	GROUPS	HOME
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Lead kids in obnoxious chicken noises in reverence to the Cha-Cha Chicken Champion.

"Now, with a voice that's slightly better than the chickens we just encountered, let's all stand up and get ready to worship our amazing God!"

Host exits as Worship Leader enters.

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COMMUNICATOR SCRIPT (STORY)

SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND

Communicator enters as Worship Leaders exit.

INTRODUCTION

COMMUNICATOR: "What's up, everybody? It's so good to see you. As I walked in, I couldn't help but smile. It is such an exciting time of the year. Summer is always such a fun time of year! I love being outside, grilling dinner with the fam, and swimming at the community pool!

"What about you? What's something you look forward to this time of year?"

Have several kids answer the question. Affirm each response and repeat it so the crowd can hear.

"Not bad! I'd add stargazing, Ice Pops, and beaches to that list! Sometimes, though, even the best times go horribly wrong.

Share a personal summertime story where everything goes wrong. Use the following as a guide.

"As a kid, my family made an annual trip to the beach. There was nothing I looked forward to more than that. It was so fun. The crashing waves, Frisbee on the white sandy beaches in the warm sun . . . and we got to go every year! It was the pinnacle of the entire summer. There was endless, fun body surfing, catching crabs with my net, or looking for big shells.

"Has anyone ever done things like that?"

Pause to take a few responses.

"I know, right? It's the best! However, I remember one trip being memorable for all the wrong reasons. Our typical routine was to rush to the beach as soon as we arrived at the rental house. All the unpacking would happen after the first dip in the ocean. In the rush, though, I forgot to put on sunscreen.

"Yeah. This was a mistake. Not only that, after only about a half hour in the water, I felt a sharp, stinging pain on my shoulder. Hurriedly, I got out of the ocean wincing. Dad knew right away a jellyfish had stung my shoulder. Instead of playing, my parents told me to sit out of the water to avoid more agony. A short time later, mom made me a sandwich. As I ate, I noticed more and more seagulls flying close overhead. Before I was halfway done with my lunch, a bird swooped down and stole my sandwich right out of my hand!

"Fast forward about two hours, and I've got no sandwich, a stung shoulder, and now my legs are red hot with sunburn. Best. Vacation. Ever.

"If you thought all of this put me in a horrible mood . . . you're right. I was mad. Grouchy. My attitude started ruining the rest of the day for everyone. I'd like to say the trip greatly improved along with my attitude, but it didn't. The entire trip was a huge disappointment. Furthermore, my mood and my attitude affected the rest of my family. Nobody wanted to be around me because I was grumpy."



WEEK
ONE
JULY 2024

LARGE GROUP
PRETEEN

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

25 MINUTES

TENSION

COMMUNICATOR: "Has anyone else had something like this happen? You've got something amazing planned and it all turns south? (*Ask for a show of hands*) Yeah. It happens to all of us at some point.

"So, what do you do? How do you respond? When you're mad that things aren't working out, plans are ruined, or stupid seagulls eat your sandwich, how do you get out of that funk? It's difficult, isn't it? You want the whole world to feel like you feel . . . mad, frustrated, and crabby. Your attitude stinks, and it's affecting everyone else. So, what can you do to switch things around?

"Great questions. But rather difficult ones too. Sometimes when you're mad, you want to stay mad. Joy seems a million miles away! Thankfully we've got some guidance this morning. The writers of the Bible experienced God's goodness and guidance firsthand and were inspired by God to write about them so others could learn to trust God, too! That's why each week we take a look at how what we read in the Bible can help us trust God and discover more about how to live by following Jesus. This week is no different—let's head there now!"

TRUTH

COMMUNICATOR: "In the beginning, God created the world, and it was good.

Pick up a beach ball to represent the world.

"Although this goodness became . . . well, not-so-good due to sin and brokenness, God had a plan to send a Rescuer to restore all that was broken, including the relationship God had with people.

"Enter the Israelites, God's chosen people. Along the way, this group ran into problems. The Israelites kept turning away from God, messing up, and generally making some pretty not-so-wise decisions.

"Kind of like us, if you ask me. We know the wise thing to do, and yet we still mess up. All the time.

"They faced many attacks by foreign nations, too. Time and time again, through all this mess, God consistently reminded the Israelites of His plan to send this Rescuer. This Messiah. And after hundreds of years, God finally delivered on that promise. God sent Jesus.

"In the New Testament, we call the first four books the Gospels. Each gospel talks about different aspects of Jesus' life. Today, we're looking in the third book of the New Testament—Luke. Luke was an interesting guy. He was a doctor, and he did his research! He provided tons of details to give us an accurate and thorough account of the ministry of Jesus.

"For those who have grown up in and around the church, you've probably heard today's story because it's usually told around Christmas. We're telling it now, in the middle of summer, and that posed a bit of a problem. I went shopping for something Christmas-y, but unfortunately all those decorations are seasonal.

"I think I found a suitable replacement, though.

Hold up an inflatable flamingo.

"Our story starts with an angel.



WEEK
ONE
JULY 2024

LARGE GROUP
PRETEEN

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

25 MINUTES

Ask a female Small Group Leader to join you on stage.

“This angel appeared to a young girl named Mary. In their conversation, the angel explained to her that she would have a baby.

Bop the head of the flamingo on the head of the Small Group Leader.

“Psst. Hey. Hey, Mary. You’re going to have a baby.

“The baby was to be named Jesus and would be no ordinary Child. Jesus is the Son of God! Soon after, a pregnant Mary traveled with her fiancé, Joseph, to Bethlehem to be counted for the Roman census. I like to picture Mary riding on the back of a donkey. Couldn’t find a donkey, so . . .

Hand an inflatable unicorn ring floatie to the Small Group Leader and have her sit on it.

“Upon arrival, the couple found the town without any available rooms—except for a space typically used for housing animals.

Bring out an inflatable tiki hut or beach umbrella, and position it over the top of the Small Group Leader.

“While staying in the place for the animals, God’s very own Son, Jesus, was born where cows and sheep stayed! We don’t have cows or sheep, and I couldn’t find anything that exactly matched, but here’s something close.

Dump an armful of pool noodles on top of the Small Group Leader.

“Maybe there were snakes there. You don’t know.

“After Jesus was born, the baby was placed in a feeding trough to sleep. And you know what? Even though the Savior being born was the most incredible news ever . . . no one else really knew about it yet. But that was about to change. On the outskirts of town, there was a group of shepherds.

Bring out three palm trees to represent the shepherds and place them on the opposite side of the stage from the Small Group Leader.

“These men were doing exactly what you’d think. Standing around, watching sheep. Understand that these shepherds—this profession—had a pretty low social standing. Shepherds weren’t exactly considered the upper crust of society . . . more like the bottom rung.

“We don’t know what this particular night was like for them, but we do know that their job wasn’t that glamorous. Long hours, sore feet, animals constantly running away or needing protection from predators. Chances are things were not the greatest for these guys. But check this out!

“While in the grazing pasture, their night was interrupted.

Open the Bible to Luke 2:9 and read.



WEEK
ONE
JULY 2024



25 MINUTES

"An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified.

Bring out three inflatable flamingos to represent angels and place them around the trees.

"The angel spoke and said:

Open the Bible to Luke 2:10-12 and read.

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.'

"Then a group of angels appeared and began to praise God!

AUDIO: UP TEMPO CHRISTMAS MUSIC

Have several pre-selected Small Group Leaders come out and grab the flamingos, making them dance to the music around the inflatable trees.

After about 30 seconds, fade the music as the volunteers dance off the stage with the flamingos.

"Whew! Angelic dance party, nice!

"While they were just doing their job with the aching backs, the hard days, and even longer nights, some incredibly joyful news came right to them. Now, they could've just dismissed this message, this flamingo dance party . . . but they didn't. Instead, once the angels left, the shepherds rushed into Bethlehem to find this newborn Baby.

Move the three inflatable palm trees near the tiki hut or beach umbrella.

"The shepherds found Mary, Joseph, and Jesus just as the angel had said. There with the Baby, His parents, and . . . er . . . the 'cows' . . . they all praised and worshiped God!

AUDIO: UP TEMPO CHRISTMAS MUSIC

The pre-selected Small Group Leaders return, carrying the flamingos, making them, the trees, and the pool noodles all dance to the music around the inflatable trees.

After about 30 seconds, fade the music as the volunteers dance off the stage with the flamingos.

"Wow, God likes to party!

"Following their encounter, the shepherds went out and told everyone they knew about Jesus. They shared about this to everyone they saw. News began to spread around town about Jesus! As people heard, they were amazed.

"Can we get a round of applause for our volunteer? Let her hear it!"



WEEK
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JULY 2024

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PRETEEN

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

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Lead the group in applause for the Small Group Leader, then continue.

APPLICATION

COMMUNICATOR: "The birth of Jesus was pretty amazing, right?! God sent Jesus to earth to save us from our sins and to restore our relationship with God.

"I love how the shepherds found joy in this story—or more accurately, joy found them. While there's no way to know if joy was difficult to find for shepherds during this time, judging by what we know of shepherds in Bible times, chances are their lives weren't the greatest.

"When things are low, when things go wrong, it's hard to find joy. It's hard to get out of that mood. But just like God did with the shepherds . . . God is ready to bring you some good news!

"You may not own a flock of sheep or be visited by an inflatable flamingo choir, but joy can be found wherever and whenever. All you need to do is look and listen.

"No matter how average or difficult your day is going, you can always find joyful news—like the shepherds did. When Jesus came into this world, He brought joy. Now all you have to do is let Him into yours! And once you do, your attitude will change. And that joyful attitude will start to spread to those around you!"

LANDING

COMMUNICATOR: "The shepherds also demonstrated what we should do with our joy. Instead of keeping it to themselves, they attempted to spread joy to others by telling them about Jesus. When we remember who Jesus is and what He did, every moment is an opportunity to share God's love and spread a little joy."

"As we prepare to spend time with our small groups, I have a question for everyone to consider."

SLIDE: KEY QUESTION

"Who do you know who could use some joy?" In the summer, we're often surrounded by family and friends. Not all of them are probably feeling joy. Let's pray and ask God to help us find joy in all situations—but to also spread that joy to those who need it!"

Communicator leads group in a prayer related to what they just heard. After prayer, Communicator dismisses kids to Small Group.

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

SLIDE: THEME

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP