

# Prayers and Protection

Call weaves through this week's scripture passages. The call to be faithful to the roots of Judaism, courageous in following Jesus, grounded in the love and presence of God, to live truth-telling lives, persevere and pray, even amid trying times.

## Focus scripture: Ephesians 6:10–20

This week, we come to the final verses of this letter to the Ephesians, which, we recall, likely was not written by Paul but rather by a follower of Paul. The author draws on a picture of God from Isaiah 59, in which God appears as a divine warrior who will bring about justice. The "armour of God" includes "the breastplate of righteousness," and "the helmet of salvation." In Isaiah, we hear that God alone fights for justice; Ephesians describes how the new Christian community is to prepare for the struggles for justice, wholeness, and harmony.

The early church was a religious minority and suffered daily harassment and discrimination. With the picture of a Roman soldier ready for battle, sword in hand, standing firm, the message given in this reading takes up the countercultural narrative of the scriptures and strangely becomes the ultimate vision of pacifism. The nature of the violent, oppressive and powerful Roman soldier is in contrast with the behaviour of the Christian community. The church is called to put on other clothing and to practice a new reality based on the life of Christ, who brings peace.

Once again, the verbs and pronouns in this passage are plural, "you" is the many, not the individual. The church stands together in love and reconciliation; by peace and righteousness she works in the world and seeks to put into practice all the instructions already extolled before: living in love and peace with one another, singing hymns to God, speaking truth and forgiving one another.

The message ends with the exhortation to pray. Prayer is seen as the means by which the community of faith can stand in the holy presence of God and find strength.

**1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10–11), 22–30, 41–43,** Solomon brings the ark of the covenant into the newly built temple, praising God for God's loyalty and God's faithfulness. A tension between sacred place and God's freedom emerges in this prayer, as Solomon acknowledges that the temple or anything in creation is unable to contain God. The Holy One remains free to move and free to love as God chooses. Reflecting that truth, Solomon asks God to hear prayers by those outside Israel in the midst of hearing of prayers by Israel.

In **Psalm 84**, we hear pilgrims enter Jerusalem and the temple singing, "How lovely is your dwelling place." The temple has become the place in which even the sparrows and swallows come to dwell with God. As in Solomon's prayer, God makes room for stranger and foreigner as well as friend and kin.

In **John 6:56–69**, Jesus' disciples seem to be offended by his teachings, yet Peter recognizes that in Jesus is the "Holy One of God." In Christ, the dwelling place for God, they have found their hope and strength to go on when others have turned back.

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We read that Jesus holds the words of eternal life and that those who follow him are holders of truth, righteousness, peace, and salvation; the church is called to share this with the world. In doing so, the church often places herself in a situation that is open for criticism and cynicism from secular society. What do we need to do to care for one another as we seek to live a faithful life? What does a faithful life look like in these circumstances and at this time?



**Focus scripture**  
**Ephesians**  
**6:10–20**

**Additional scriptures**  
**1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10–11),**  
**22–30, 41–43**  
**Psalm 84**  
**John 6:56–69**

 *Seasons of the Spirit*  
is based on semi-  
continuous readings of the *Revised*  
*Common Lectionary*.

**God, walking your way requires a particular kind of footwear – shoes in which we can march for justice, run faithfully, stride through rocky terrain, step tenderly and dance joyfully. Guide us in our choice of shoes. Amen.**

**Lection Connection**  
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on the link.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

The youngest children in your group are getting better at knowing what they need to do or prepare, in order to do different activities. For example, 5- and 6-year-olds are probably able to pack their own bags for an overnight trip and 8-year-olds can probably prepare a lunch and get their homework organized and ready for the following school day. The older children in this age group are developing their abstract thinking and reasoning skills. They are also honing their decision-making skills and in the process of making choices, they can weigh the pros and cons between two appealing options. They are increasingly independent and like to make their own decisions. For

example, they want to choose what to pack for a holiday trip, or what to have in their school lunches. They are usually able to get their homework organized and assemble the tools needed for projects, chores, and activities.

This week we read from the last chapter of the letter written to the Ephesians. Children will have an opportunity to explore the theme of preparing to do the work of God. The love and support that children receive from parents and from adult members of their church family helps to prepare and equip them for engaging in the ministry of the church. Pray that the children will continue to experience God's presence, equipping them and strengthening them to live in God's way.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Ephesians 6:10–20, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 99).
- ❑ Set up the "house church space" (see resource sheet "[About the Early Church](#)," p. 119).
- ❑ Bring offering basket, [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), matches, candle snuffer, and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring a small bell or "singing bowl."
- ❑ Bring, if possible, "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

### Engage

- ❑ Make a copy of the reading from Ephesians on this week's resource sheet "[Be Strong in God](#)"; roll it like a scroll and tie with ribbon or yarn; place in the house church space.
- ❑ **Sculpture group:** copies of section "Scripture words" from resource sheet "[Be Strong in God](#)"

- ❑ **Chant group:** "[God's power is...](#)" chant (p. 116)

### Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Meditation](#)"
- ❑ **Prayer zone:** pieces of card stock, art supplies
- ❑ **Baking zone:** card stock, yarn, frozen bread dough, coarse salt, baking sheets, copies of this week's resource sheet "[Prayer and Pretzels](#)"; make arrangements to use an oven; option: work with another group to do the baking.
- ❑ **Craft zone:** large white T-shirt for each child, fabric markers
- ❑ **Community zone:** resource sheet "[Poster Board Banner](#)" (p. 120), art and craft materials, poster board banner from previous weeks or sheets of construction paper

### Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, "Children of the Spirit" (pp. 8–9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #4 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



# Prayers and Protection

## Scripture

Ephesians  
6:10–20

**FOCUS** To be strengthened to spread God's love in our actions and words

## Gather

**Welcome** the children as they arrive. Introduce newcomers to the group.

**Call to gather** Ring the bell or "singing bowl" as a signal to gather in the "house church space." Invite a child to light the candle.

**Pray** the following prayer.

O God, open us to your Spirit today.

We ask you to hear our prayers...

*(Invite children to name some joys and sadness.)*

**Amen.**

**Sing**, if possible, the song, "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended

## Connecting with the focus

Invite children to name some of their favourite activities. Discuss together all the things that would need to be prepared for each activity, for example, equipment, tools, uniforms, training, or practice. Explain that today we will read one more letter written to the Christians at Ephesus that helped them to prepare for doing God's work in the world.

## Engage

### Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the letter to the Ephesians. Recall that we have been reading letters written for the first Christians, and imagining what church was like in those days. Explain that today we will read from the last chapter of the letter written to the Ephesians.

### The Bible story

Invite a child to take this week's scroll (from the resource sheet "[Be Strong in God](#)") based on **Ephesians 6:10–20**, unroll it, and read it aloud. This last part of the letter to the Ephesians speaks about standing firm in God's power when it is hard to live in God's way.

- **What do you think it means to wear God's love and power like protection?**
- **What does the writer of the letter say about prayer?**
- **How do you think prayer can make us feel strong?**

Invite a child to glue this last letter onto the poster board with all the other letters. Review them together, reading aloud a phrase or two from each one.

### Exploring the story further

*(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their own interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)*

**Sculpture group** *(for older children)* The children in this group will have an opportunity to use their imaginations to illustrate some of the images in this week's reading. Divide the phrases from the bottom of the resource sheet "[Be Strong in God](#)" among the group. Have them work in pairs to illustrate these phrases by creating body sculpture poses.

**Chant group** *(for younger children)* Children in this group will have an opportunity to learn more about God's power. Teach the words and actions for "[God's power is...](#)" (p. 116). Encourage them to make up new lines and actions.

**Reporting** Ring the bell or “singing bowl” as a signal to gather as a whole group again. Invite the role play group to share one or two body sculpture poses; invite the chant group to perform “[God’s power is...](#)” including some of their own lines.

### The Bible story and us

The last part of the letter to the Ephesians talks about being strong in a way that isn’t just physical strength.

### ■ What are some of the ways that people are strong?

The people in the house churches were told to be strong by trusting in God and God’s love.

### ■ What are some ways we can spread God’s love by what we say and do?

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## Respond

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

❑ **Quiet zone: Meditation** This week’s reading from the letter to the Ephesians speaks about being strong in God’s power. Lead the children gathered in this group in a meditation about taking on God’s power and spirit. Invite children to sit comfortably and close their eyes. Read quietly from the resource sheet “[Meditation](#),” pausing frequently for children to think about the words. Distribute copies of the meditation for children to use at home.



❑ **Prayer zone: Prayer partners** Followers of Jesus can help and support each other through prayer. Distribute pieces of card stock and invite children to write their name on one side and decorate the other side of their cards using the art supplies. Place all the cards in a container and ask children to choose one each, making sure that they don’t get their own card. Encourage children to keep these cards beside their beds as reminders to say a prayer for their friends.

❑ **Baking zone: Pretzel prayers** The letter to the Ephesians talked about being strong in a new way. Prayer is one of the ways we can be strong. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Prayer and Pretzels](#)” and read the story about the symbolism of the pretzel shape. Follow the instructions for making the pretzels and the prayer cards. Make extras to share with other groups or with the congregation. Encourage children to take a copy of the resource sheet home to make pretzels with family members.

❑ **Craft zone: T-shirt messages** The reading from Ephesians 6 speaks of putting on God’s love and power like clothing to protect and help us continue Jesus’ work in the world. Distribute T-shirts and fabric pens and help children to decide on words and images for T-shirt designs that offer encouragement to follow Jesus and live in God’s way. They might use words and phrases from the resource sheet “[Be Strong in God](#)” for their shirts. Help younger children print the phrases. Encourage them to wear their shirts as reminders to share God’s love and encourage one another.

❑ **Community zone: (last week)** Invite children to create their own poster using symbols and phrases to remind them of the messages from this week’s reading of the letter to the Ephesians or finish working on the banner begun on July 11. Review information on the resource sheet “[Poster Board Banner](#)” (p. 120) and invite children to create symbols and choose words and phrases based on this week’s reading. If a group banner was created during this season, decide on a title and plan where this will be displayed to share with the rest of the congregation.

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## Bless

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**Gather** in the worship space and relight the candle.

**Pray** (*Invite children to name something which they have enjoyed about their time together this week; then invite them to repeat each line of the prayer after you.*)

Dear God,  
with your love we are strong.  
We are ready to share your love  
wherever we go. Amen.

**Sing**, if possible, the song, "Children of the Spirit" (pp. 8–9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #4 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

**Blessing** Send the children out with these words, "Always be ready to share God's love with others."

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## Reflect

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How have the children shown their ability or readiness to spread God's love and care for others?



# BE STRONG IN GOD

(based on Ephesians 6:10–20)

Finally, stand firm and be strong in God's power.  
Some people that you meet won't want to live in God's way.  
They will try to make things difficult for you, but have no fear. God's love is real.

Surround yourself with God's love like protective clothing.  
Cover yourself in faith.  
Wrap God's truth around you like a belt.  
Wear peace like good walking shoes.  
God's power will be like a helmet.  
God's love will be like a shield to protect you from the hurtful things that people do.

Be prepared to tell others about God's way of peace.  
Support and encourage each other.  
Use the power of God's Spirit when you pray.  
Never stop praying, especially for others.

Always be ready to spread God's love by what you say and do.  
And may God's peace and grace be with you.

Praise God!  
Amen.

*Scripture  
words*

**Be strong...**  
**Stand firm...**  
**Spread peace...**  
**Pray always...**  
**Keep on trying...**



# Meditation

Sit up straight with your hands in your lap. Relax your body.

Breathe in deeply. Breathe out. *(Repeat the breathing directions several times until the group is quieted.)*

Be strong in God.

Fill your body with God's power. Feel God's power enter your shoulders, your arms, your chest, your legs.

Sit quietly as God's power fills your whole body. *(Pause.)*

Think about God's Spirit surrounding you.

Cover yourself with God's Spirit. *(Pause.)*

Take on the gifts God has given you, gifts that will help you to reach out to others. *(Pause.)*

What are your gifts?...Gentleness...patience...a willingness to treat one another with love...a commitment to peace.

Think about how you will help to spread peace in the world. Imagine peace flowing out from you out into the world like a gentle wind. *(Pause.)*

Cover yourself with faith and trust in God, like a comfortable, soft blanket. *(Pause.)*

Let all your body be filled and covered with God's Spirit and power.

Hold on to this feeling and know that you can bring it back whenever you wish, for God is always with you.

Breathe in deeply; breathe out. *(Repeat two or three times.)*



# Prayer and Pretzels

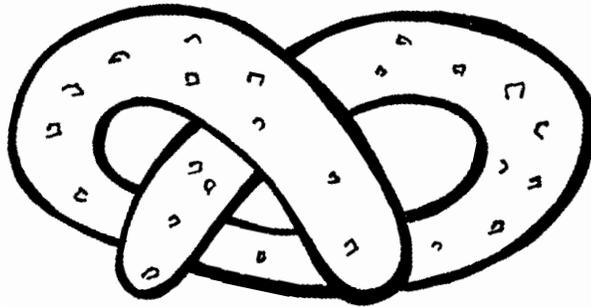
## ***A story about pretzels***

Many years ago a priest wanted to give something to the children that would remind them of God but he had no money to buy gifts. One day as he was baking bread, he took a piece of dough and rolled it into a rope. As he twisted the rope, he came upon the shape we know as a pretzel.

This shape reminded him of the shape his arms made when he crossed them over his chest while praying. That gave him an idea. He baked bread in these shapes and gave them to the children as reminders that they could always pray to God, anytime, anywhere.

## **Pretzel recipe**

- Take a piece of bread dough and roll it into a rope shape.
- Arrange the rope into a pretzel shape (*see illustrations*) and place on a greased baking sheet.
- Sprinkle with some coarse salt.
- Bake at 200°C/400°F for about 15 minutes (less if pretzels are small and thin; more if they are larger and thicker).



### ***While pretzels are baking make some prayer cards...***

1. Write a short prayer onto pieces of card stock.
2. Decorate the cards with felt markers.
3. Use the hole punch to make a hole in one corner.
4. Thread a length of yarn through the hole.
5. Tie a card onto each baked pretzel.

# Response Centres

Offering a variety of ways in which to respond to a story invites children to find their own ways to connect the biblical stories with their own experiences. A “Response centre” offers an open-ended activity, which encourages children to learn and respond as the Spirit moves them. Those who may not be able to articulate their thoughts through words are often able to express themselves through their encounters with paper, fabric, items from nature, paints or pastels, and so on.

If children are not familiar with this type of activity, explain that they are free to use whatever materials they wish in whatever ways they wish. Some children may want to share their finished work with the whole group and others will not. Assure everyone that explanations of their work are not necessary.

**Create a comfortable environment** by playing a recording of quiet music. Begin by gathering around the table and looking at what is available in the “Response centre.” As you briefly review the biblical story aloud, encourage children to begin choosing items they might like to use. Move amongst the group during the activity, affirming their creativity and individual expression.

Some sessions in this season will include the option of a “Response centre” in the Respond time. However, you might consider providing a permanent “Response centre” in a corner of your meeting space, stocked with a variety of materials.

**Basic supplies:** variety of types of paper, foam trays, different sizes of small boxes and other empty containers, fabric scraps in a variety of colours and textures, yarn, cotton balls, wooden pegs (to make people figures), craft sticks, toothpicks, pipe cleaners, glitter, pastels, chalk, watercolour paints and brushes.

**Other materials:** variety of shiny paper, used compact disks, craft foam, sequins, confetti, glitter glue or glitter pens, glass “stones,” buttons, plastic beads and lacing, paper doilies, wooden chopsticks or dowsling, fingerpaints, used egg cartons, googly eyes, feathers, items from nature, sandpaper.

## God’s power is...

Higher than the highest mountain.  
(Raise hands way up high.)

Deeper than the deepest sea.  
(Make a rolling wave motion with arms and hands.)

Bigger than the space around us.  
(Twirl around.)

Brighter than a starry night.  
(Wiggle fingers above head.)

Stronger than a solid rock. (Stomp feet.)

Wider than the universe.  
(Stretch hands out wide.)

(Invite children to make up more lines and actions.)



# About the Early Church

## The early church

Most of the first Christians were probably Jewish and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. But as Christians they also met on Sunday, the day that celebrated Jesus' resurrection. They would meet in one another's homes, rather than in the synagogue, for worship and fellowship. Both men and women shared leadership in these "house churches," where Christians would pray and sing together, read from the Hebrew Scriptures, tell stories about Jesus, and exchange news of other Christian communities. This news often came in the form of letters. The apostle Paul was instrumental in the formation of many house churches. Letters in his name were often addressed to such groups. People might also receive letters from other Christian communities as a way of encouraging and supporting each other.

## Sharing food

Those who gathered together in the early house churches would usually share meals together. Often they would remember Jesus' last meal in a ritual of sharing bread and wine. The leftover food from their communal meals would be gathered by the deacons to share with widows and orphans in the community and those who were infirm and elderly.

## Weekly ritual

July 15 and July 22, and August 5 to August 26 the children will gather in the "house church space" for their opening worship time and to explore that week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians.

- Gather in the house church space, sitting on the mats, and putting on biblical costumes if desired.
- Participate in the gathering worship and activity together.
- Invite a child to get that week's letter from the basket, open it and read it aloud.
- The children will share a snack together as they listen and discuss the questions.
- After each letter has been read it will be glued onto a sheet of poster board to create a display.

## Creating a "house church space"

- ❑ Place a low table or box in the middle of an area and cover with brightly coloured fabric.
- ❑ Place on the table a Bible with a bookmark placed in the letter to the Ephesians, a candle in a holder or small oil lamp, a plate and goblet (clay if possible), and a jug.
- ❑ Beside the table place a basket (to hold the weekly scroll letters).
- ❑ Around the table provide small mats (or folded towels) for children to sit on.
- ❑ Shawls, cloaks, and/or headdresses could also be provided as simple costumes.
- ❑ Prepare the letters by making a copy of each week's resource sheet, cutting out the letter, rolling it like a scroll, and tying with a ribbon; place in the basket.
- ❑ Place a snack on the plate each week; bring juice to place in the jug and small glasses.



## Church chant

One by one, two by two (*two people join hands, then two more*)

the early church grew and grew.

Three by three, four by four (*more join, then all join hands*)

love was shared, more and more.

No matter how big (*spread hands wide apart*), no matter how small (*bring hands close together*), we can all share God's love, we can share it with all. (*Put arms around each other's shoulders.*)

One community all are we (*hold hands in a circle*) bringing peace and harmony! (*Raise joined hands high.*)

## We Are the Church

(*tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"*)

You and I, we are the church.

We are the church together.

Sharing love and sharing joy,  
we are the church together.



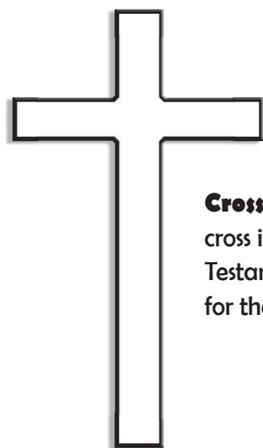
# Poster Board Banner

**Symbols** Different symbols can remind us of the messages in each week's readings from the letter to the Ephesians. Here are some common Christian symbols and their meanings.

**Dove** — the most common symbol for the Holy Spirit

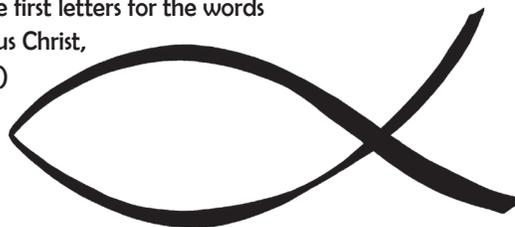


**Flame** — symbol of the Holy Spirit



**Cross** — an empty cross is a New Testament symbol for the risen Christ

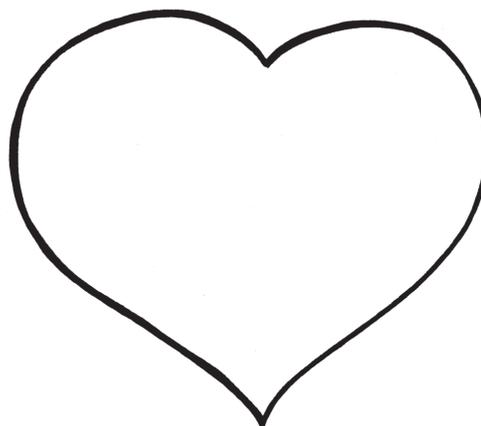
**Fish** — early Christians often used the fish as a symbol of Christ (the letters of the Greek word for fish are the first letters for the words in the sentence "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour")



**Butterfly** — a symbol of Jesus' resurrection



**Heart** — symbol for love (of God, of Jesus, of people)



## Making a banner

1. Make templates of the patterns of different symbols (*see note below*).
2. Use the patterns to cut symbols from craft foam or different kinds of paper such as construction paper, wallpaper samples, gift wrap, corrugated cardboard.
3. Arrange symbols on a sheet of poster board.
4. Add words and phrases from each week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians.

For pattern shapes such as fish, dove, cross, flame, footprint, heart, and butterfly go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on "Library," and then on "Virtual Resource Booklet."