

Spend Time Well

Seeking wisdom can be like stepping out into an unknown city and being faced with streets and alleyways that lead to who knows where – the city centre or a dead end. There are maps and apps to help negotiate the way around foreign cities and lands, and we have the scripture, teachers, and prophets to help us navigate our faith. Today's readings have specific things to assist with that navigation.

Focus scripture: Ephesians 5:15–20

Ephesians 5:15–20 lies in the middle of the second half of the epistle, the half that consists of what might be considered moral teaching – guidelines for how the church can live the salvation they have received by building unity and living in peace with one another.

Care should be taken about making any writing legalistic. In the context of this writing when divisions have been broken down, what would be the advantage of creating others? If we take seriously the advice offered in this text, we are called to do exactly the opposite of division building; we are called to come together in unity, to live a life of thanksgiving, “singing and melody making” to God “at all times and for everything” (vv. 19–20).

The writer calls us to use our time well. How Christians spend their time and what draws their attention is not the same as for others. We are called to a eucharistic life – a life of thanksgiving. “Getting drunk with wine” is contrasted to the experience of being fully aware of all that is around us through experiencing life in the Spirit.

The letter reminds the recipients that they are members of God's family; no longer are there divisions between Jew and Gentile. All are part of one universal church, a holy temple in which God dwells. Things have changed. The emphasis is on wisdom and how a Christian life should display this.

1 Kings 2:10–12; 3:3–14 King David has died, and his successor, Solomon, prays for God's guidance in his reign and asks for the gift of discernment.

Psalm 111 notes that wisdom comes through recognizing the place of humanity in relationship with God.

God's wise providing takes another form in **John 6:51–58**, in the imagery of Jesus as the Bread of Life. In the figurate nature of those words, the gospel asserts a wisdom that sees beyond any literal meanings of Jesus' words to God's life-giving provision. Jesus proclaims eternal life, which is given to those who find nourishment in feasting on the one who is the living word.

• • • • •

There is uncertainty as we step into God's way of love and leave aside the customs and habits of what is seen as an ordinary life. The people of God are called to be loving, wise, and courageous, and to practice gratitude and find joy as they walk the path of faith. How well does the church do in resourcing her people, caring for their wellbeing, and equipping them in their ability to live God's way in our world?



Focus scripture
Ephesians
5:15–20

Additional scriptures
1 Kings 2:10–12;
3:3–14
Psalm 111
John 6:51–58



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

Creator God, we remember that your most gracious gift to us is life, and that our life is grounded in and full of your goodness. We are grateful. Amen.

Lection Connection
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Younger children in this age group are often restless, energetic, and active. They often have an exuberant approach to life that is infectious. They are happy to join in celebrations, whether it is a birthday, a visit from a friend or beloved grandparent, or the chance to go on a trip. Older children in the group are also often energetic and active. They generally have a positive outlook and are developing strong interests and passions. This week's letter to the early Christian church speaks of rejoicing and giving thanks, a theme that children will probably be able to relate to well. They will recognize that those in the early church par-

ticipated in activities that are also part of their own experiences at church: worship, prayer, singing, hearing stories about Jesus.

The letter also speaks of God giving us everything that we need. Children usually experience having their needs met by their parents and caregivers. In the care of loving parents, they are fed, clothed, housed, comforted when sad, cared for when ill, and celebrated. Children come to trust that those who love them will take care of them. As part of a church family, they are also coming to understand that God, who loves them, will also care for them. Pray that you and the children will experience joy in learning and worshipping together.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Psalm 111, Ephesians 5:15–20, and [biblical background material](#) (p. 91).
- ❑ 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.

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 ["Sing Songs to God"](#); roll it like a scroll and tie with ribbon or yarn; place in the house church space.
- ❑ **Bible research group:** copies of the section "Psalm 111" (on resource sheet ["Sing Songs to God"](#))

- ❑ **Music group:** "Church chant" and song ["We Are the Church"](#) (p. 119)
- ❑ Bring a recording of lively music, or choose lively songs from one of the *Seasons Music CDs*.

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 ["Acrostic Poem"](#)
- ❑ **Art zone:** fingerpainting paper, fingerpaints, paint smocks, paper towels, recording of lively music
- ❑ **Music zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet ["Wooden Harmonica,"](#) tongue depressors or wide craft sticks, strips of paper, long and short rubber bands
- ❑ **Craft zone:** set up an area following the suggestions on resource sheet ["Response Centres"](#) (p. 116)
- ❑ **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).



Spend Time Well

Scripture

Ephesians
5:15–20

FOCUS To experience the joy of learning and worshipping together

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

Print the word “JOY” in large letters on a sheet of newsprint and invite children to share some ideas about what this word means. Encourage them to think of other words that can mean the same thing.

■ **What are some things that make you feel happy and joyful?**

■ **How do people act when they are joyful?**

Explain that one of the things that we do when we gather together at church is to give thanks and celebrate that we are loved by God.

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. Point out that chapter 5 is the second to last chapter of the letter. Explain that next week we will read the last part of this letter.

The Bible story

Invite a child to take this week’s scroll (from the resource sheet “[Sing Songs to God](#)”) based on **Ephesians 5:15–20**, unroll it, and read it aloud. When the letter is finished, invite a child to help glue it onto a sheet of poster board. Notice that this part of the letter to the Ephesians begins by telling people to be careful and live wisely.

■ **What do you think it means to “live wisely”?**

■ **What did you learn from today’s letter about the different ways that we can worship God?**

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.)

Bible research group *(for older children)* The children in this group will have an opportunity to explore another reading for this week. Explain that the psalms referred to in the letter would be those in the Hebrew Scriptures. The psalms are songs that people in the early church would have sung together. Help children find **Psalms 111** in their Bibles. Then invite volunteers to read aloud the paraphrase of Psalm 111 on the resource sheet “[Sing Songs to God](#).”

■ **What good things about God are mentioned by the psalm writer?**

Music group Children in this group will have an opportunity to express their joy at being part of the church. Lead the group in the “[Church chant](#)” (p. 119) to recall the growth of the early church. Then teach them the song “[We Are the](#)

Church" (p. 119) and sing together, making up actions if desired.

Reporting Ring the bell or "singing bowl" as a signal to gather as a whole group again. Invite the research group to share what they learned about the psalms; invite music group to sing "We Are the Church."

The Bible story and us

This week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians invites us to express our joy and thanks-

giving to God. One of the ways we can do this is through singing and movement. Play a recording of lively music and invite children to join in, dancing around the room. As you move, talk together about how music and dance can help us to give praise and thanks to God.

- **What are some things we do in our church to praise God?**
- **What are some things you can do this week to praise and give thanks to God?**

Respond

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

❑ **Quiet zone: Acrostic** (*for older children*) This week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians encourages people to live wisely and express thanks to God. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Acrostic Poem" and review the introductory information together. Invite children to create individual acrostic poems or work together in pairs or small groups to create group poems. Consider including the poems in a church newsletter.



❑ **Art zone: Mural** (*for younger children*) This week's letter encourages Christians to rejoice together. Invite children to put on paint smocks or shirts and work together to create a "Joy" mural. Gather around a length of fingerpainting paper, play a recording of lively music, and have children use the fingerpaints to create a joyful painting in time to the music. Choose a title for the painting and display in the church hall.

❑ **Music zone: Making music** Musical instruments help people to sing and express joy during a worship service. Invite children to name the

instruments used in your church. Review the instructions on the resource sheet "Wooden Harmonica." Help the children to make their own harmonicas. When finished, use them to play a few tunes together.

❑ **Craft zone: Response centre** The letter to the Ephesians encourages followers of Jesus to rejoice, sing songs, and give thanks to God. Encourage children to use the materials provided in the centre to make creations that express joy and thanksgiving. Consider making a display of these to place in the church hall.

❑ **Community zone: Banner** (*stand alone or ongoing activity*) Invite children to create their own poster using symbols and phrases to remind them of the messages from this week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians or continue 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.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and relight the candle.

Pray (*inviting children to repeat each line after you*)

Dear God,
thank you for our time together today.
We thank you for...
We pray in Jesus' name. 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, "Go now and share God's love, today, tomorrow, and always."

Reflect

How have the children been encouraged to express their feelings in worship and during group time? How have the children encouraged your own creative expression?



Sing Songs to God

(based on Ephesians 5:15–20)

Dear friends and followers of Christ:

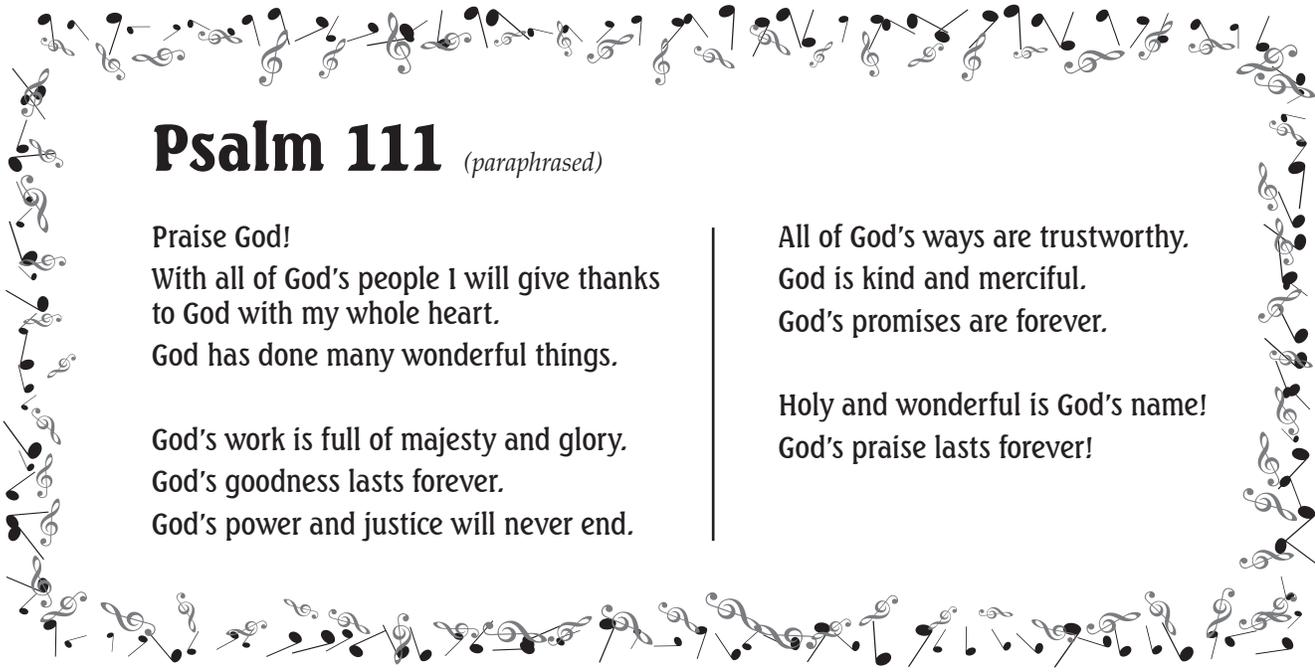
Be careful and wise about how you live. Make every minute count.
Make the most of every moment and avoid doing things that lead you away from God.

Breathe in God's Spirit until it fills you completely, and then let it out as beautiful music.
Sing songs to God with all your heart and soul.

Rejoice together! Sing and be joyful!
Sing psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs that you know.
Sing songs that you make up on the spur of the moment.

Be wise and use each day as a gift from God.
God gives us everything we need.
Welcome any and every excuse to sing and give glory to God,
with your words, your actions, your thoughts, and your music!

In the name of Jesus, give thanks to God always!
Amen!



Psalm 111 *(paraphrased)*

Praise God!
With all of God's people I will give thanks
to God with my whole heart.
God has done many wonderful things.

God's work is full of majesty and glory.
God's goodness lasts forever.
God's power and justice will never end.

All of God's ways are trustworthy.
God is kind and merciful.
God's promises are forever.

Holy and wonderful is God's name!
God's praise lasts forever!



ACROSTIC POEM

An acrostic is a poem in which the first letter of each line spells a word. This kind of poem usually doesn't rhyme. Below is a phrase from this week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians. Use each of these letters to write your own poem about ways to live and celebrate in God's way. The first line is written to help you get started.

Living in God's way makes me happy.

I
V
E

W
I
S
E
L
Y



Wooden Harmonica

Supplies

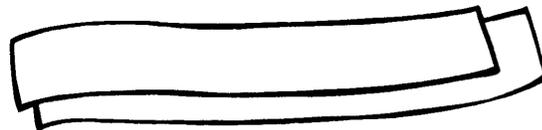
- 2 wooden tongue depressors
- 1 large rubber band
- stickers
- 2 thin rubber bands

Instructions

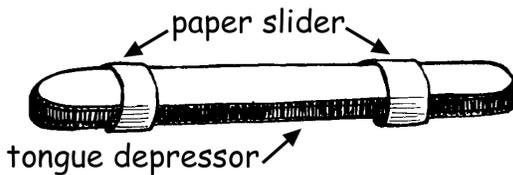
Decorate one side of each tongue depressor with stickers and crayons.

Make paper sliders by cutting two strips of paper about the same width and length as a tongue depressor. (Illustration #1)

#1



#2

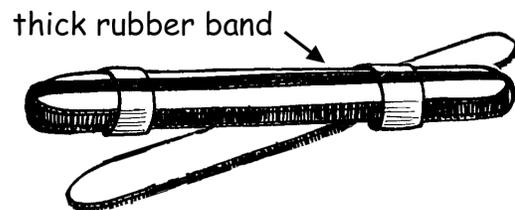


Stack the tongue depressors together, wrap each paper strip around the stack, then cover each loop with a layer of clear tape.

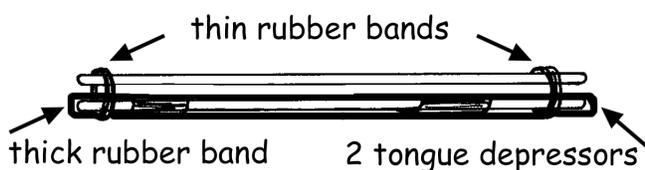
Remove the sliders from the stack, separate the tongue depressors, and slide the sliders back onto just one of the tongue depressors. (Illustration #2)

Stretch the thick rubber band lengthwise over the tongue depressor and both sliders. (Illustration #3)

#3



#4



Restack the tongue depressors (plain sides in) and wrap a thin rubber band around each of the ends. (Illustration #4)

To play, blow in the middle and move the sliders back and forth to change the pitch.

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.



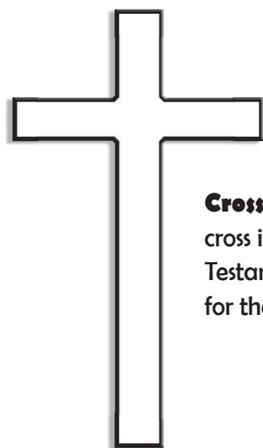
Poster Board Banner

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

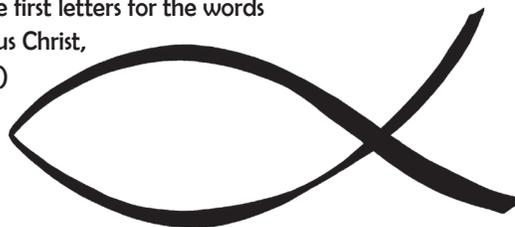


Flame — symbol of the Holy Spirit



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

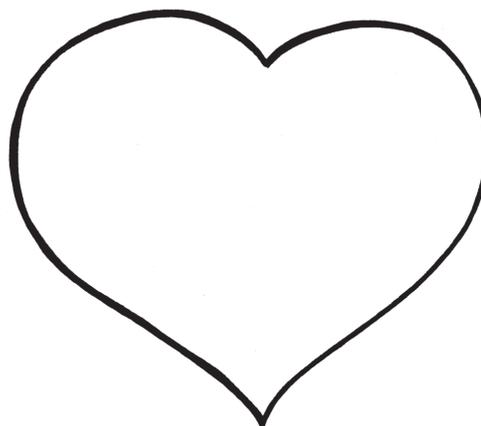
Fish — early Christians often used the fish as a symbol of Christ (the letters of the Greek word for fish are the first letters for the words in the sentence "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour")



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 and click on "Library," and then on "Virtual Resource Booklet."