

Second Sunday in Kingdomtide

Joy as a Kingdom Value

Old Testament: Psalm 100 (NRSV)

All Lands Summoned to Praise God

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. ²Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing. ³Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. ⁴enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. ⁵For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Habakkuk 3:17-18 (NRSV)

Trust and Joy in the Midst of Trouble

¹⁷Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation.

New Testament: Philippians 4:4-7 (NRSV)

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

General Concept: The church rejoices in the midst of adversities.

Key Concepts in the Different Age Levels in Sunday School

N/K/YE: **The church is a joyful community.**

ME/OE: **The church rejoices at all times.**

Y: **The church can experience joy amidst problems and difficulties.**

A: **The church rejoices amidst adversities.**

Exegesis of the Biblical References

The Book of Psalms is traditionally attributed to David, although not all Psalms is of his own writing. The book actually is divided into several themes that depict the worship life of the Israelites. Walter Brueggemann offers 3 schemes to understand the theological path of these powerful poems: These are the 1. Psalms of orientation; 2. Psalms of disorientation and 3. Psalms of reorientation. Psalms, according to him point us to a two-fold movement of faith. First, we move from a settled orientation to a season of disorientation. Then we move unto a new orientation that comes to us as a surprise gift of God's grace.

Psalm 100 points us to a call to all the people of Israel to give thanks and rejoice knowing that they are God's people. It has a special similarity with Ps. 95:1-2, 6-7. Why is there a need for Israel to praise the Lord? Because God is above all gods, and there is nothing in the universe that do not belong to God. The word "all the lands" or "all the earth" gives us an idea of the inclusive nature of this call. Although it is very clear here that God has a special relationship with Israel, these words give us an idea that the call goes out to the whole world, "all the lands" with all its peoples which ought to acknowledge the Lord because "the Lord is indeed good, His steadfast love endures, and His faithfulness to all generations" of peoples.

Among the prophetic writings, Habakkuk is somewhat unique because it seems that there is no oracle addressed to Israel, like that of other prophetic writings. It contains, however a dialogue between the prophet and God. In this writing, Habakkuk was somehow confused of the "going ons" in Israel, especially of the rise of the ruthless Babylonians, and with God seemingly doing nothing about it. Habakkuk then wrestled with the question: "How could God, who is "too pure to look on evil" (1:13) appoint such a nation to "execute judgment" (1:12) on a people "more righteous than them" (1:13)? God makes it clear however, that eventually the corrupt destroyer will itself be destroyed. In the end, Habakkuk learns to rest in God's sovereign appointments and await God's working in a spirit of worship. He learns to wait patiently in faith (2:3-4) for God's kingdom to be expressed universally (2:14).

Habakkuk 3:1-18 is actually a prayer of Habakkuk expressing his confusions and his resolve to patiently wait for God's ultimate expression of making known God's kingdom universally. Thus, he would just continue to rejoice in the Lord no matter what happens around him trusting fully that when God promises, God fulfils. This is truly rejoicing in the Lord even in the midst of deep adversities.

Paul's sole purpose in writing this letter to the Philippians is to express his gratitude for the gifts they sent to him when they learned that he was detained in Rome. He made use of this opportunity to express his other desires: to make known his own circumstances; to encourage the Philippians to stand firm in the face of persecution and rejoice regardless of circumstances that they face.

An exhortation of Paul to the Philippians (4:4-7) is to rejoice in the Lord under all kind of circumstances, including suffering. Thus, they should embody Christ-like gentleness and consideration for others, especially for the leaders. They should not be anxious or self-centered or worried but they should be prayerful to attain the peace of God which is not merely a psychological state of mind, but an inner tranquility based on peace with God. It is the kind of peace that passes all understanding because it comes purely as a gift of God. It cannot be forced or imposed by some other powers. It cannot even be banned or prohibited. It is the kind of peace that transcends all kinds of tribulation that can ever be faced by those who would become loyal followers of Christ. It is the kind of peace that enables the faithful exemplified by the early church to rejoice even in times of extreme persecution and repression of their faith. It is all because we know and are assured that we have a God who is with us and who fights with and for us. The whole UCCP has been threatened, criticized and attacked nowadays because of the distinct faith expression and faithful prophetic witness it is rendering to the least of our brothers and sisters. This is precisely what the prophets, the apostles and the early church and finally Jesus himself had experienced, yet they persisted with great joy, serenity and steadfast persistence. Because of their kind of historical witness, we the Church have become what we are today: called to continue what they have done. But let this be a reminder, that we are not alone; that we should not be moved but remain joyful in the Lord in whatever circumstance we may be facing in this life.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and other End-users

The church is bound to suffer especially when it must give up part of itself for the sake of others as Jesus did. But the right response to the experience of suffering is not to wallow in self-pity but to find joy in it, which is a fruit of the Spirit for those whose hope is in the coming of the kingdom of God. The joy that comes from the Spirit is intimately connected with doing the mission of the church.

Some Christians are drawn to congregations offering experiences that are supposed to induce happy feelings. They find no satisfaction in a church that preaches a message that disturbs their peace. For them the church is the one place in the world that can hide them from the daily fares of troubles, hurt, sadness and burdens in life. They wish to follow a kind of mission that's self-gratifying and self-fulfilling. This is a false gospel that only leads sincere and gospel-starved Christians to damnation.

Joy as a fruit of the Spirit in us is the one experienced and shared by the apostle Paul at his most trying moments when he was incarcerated with a real prospect of execution. His last word to the Christians in Philippi was for them to rejoice rather than mourn for his impending departure. This is the epitome of genuine Christian joy that is available to all who suffer for the sake of the gospel. Christian joy is not to be found in the pursuit of personal happiness for its own sake. It is a unique kind of joy that one finds in suffering for the gospel. The joy of the Spirit makes the pursuit of the kingdom light rather than burdensome, delightful rather than mournful.

Nursery/Kindergarten/Younger Elementary Levels

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. sing songs and recite verses of praise joyfully;
2. tell that God wants us always to rejoice; and
3. begin to discern the values of being joyful as part of the mission of the church.

II. Concept: The church is a joyful community.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song/verse chart, two small plates for each child, dry beans, glue, stapler, a hole punch and thin, colorful ribbon.

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children warmly as they arrive.
2. Opening prayer: "We are grateful to you Lord for allowing us to come together today. We rejoice in the thought that you will always love us no matter what. Teach us O God to be joyful in all circumstances. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."
3. Opening song: "Rejoice in the Lord Always"
Rejoice in the Lord always
And again I say, rejoice. (2X)
Rejoice, rejoice and again
I say rejoice. (2X)
Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, rejoice.

B. Getting Ready

1. Prepare the children to worship the Lord by making a noisemaker. Provide two small plates for each child, dry beans, glue, and thin, colorful ribbons. Tell the children to put some beans on one of the plates. Then put some glue or paste at the rim of the plate. Then put the other plate on top of the plate with glue. Press the rims to glue the two plates together. As they dry, staple along the rims. Punch some holes along the rim and put thin ribbons as tassels. These noisemakers are ready for use. (Note: The teacher can make use of available materials in their locality to make other versions of the noisemakers.)
2. When the noisemakers are ready, tell the children to shake them and say, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord."

C. Learning Time

1. Prepare the class by doing some finger exercises.
2. Tell the class that they will listen to a song of thanksgiving. This song is found in Psalm 100. Read the verses one by one and discuss each verse.
 - a. ¹ *Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.* The word joyful comes from the word joy which means happy. God wants us to be joyful when we praise God. Let the class say, "**We praise God with a joyful heart.**"

- b. ²*Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.* The Lord wants us to sing joyfully while we worship because we acknowledge God's love for us. Tell the children to sing songs of praise with gladness that they already know. Let the class say, "**We praise God with a joyful heart.**"
 - c. ³*Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.* We are joyful because God created us in God's image. Let the class say, "**We praise God with a joyful heart.**"
 - d. ⁴*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.* ⁵*For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.* The Hebrew people used a gate when they entered Jerusalem. Today, we use the church door as we enter into God's presence. We come to God because God is good. God's love for us endures forever. Let the class say, "**We thank God for God's goodness. We praise God with a joyful heart.**"
3. Let the class use their noisemakers and say, "We praise God with a joyful heart." Ask: Did you feel joyful also upon coming here to church today?

D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

Let the children answer these questions:

1. According to the psalmist, what does God want us to make? (A joyful noise)
2. Who does the Lord want to make a joyful noise? (All of us.)
3. What is the psalm telling us? (The psalmist is telling us to be joyful.)
4. Why do we have to be joyful? (Because it is God who made us and we are God's children. We believe and trust God. God, through Jesus Christ saved us.)
5. How can we show our joyful acts to God? (We should go to church to give thanks to God and praise God's name. We should be part of a joyful community.)
6. Why do we have to show joyful praises and thanksgiving to God? (Because God is good, God's love endures forever, God is faithful.)
7. When are we joyful? Is it only when we get what we want or should we always be joyful? Why?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: As a church, why do we have to be joyful always? (God wants us to be joyful always because God loves us and God will always be with us in times of joy and in times of sorrow.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. **For N/K:** Call on each pupil to say what they thank God for. As they go back to their seats, let them say, "I'm joyful in the Lord always."
2. **For YE:** Tell the class to do the following:
 - a. Find a partner. Let them talk about two things that they are happy receiving and two things that they are not happy receiving. Assist them to say that they thank God for everything that they receive because they trust God. Let them end their talk by saying, "I'm joyful in the Lord always."

b. Complete these sentences.

- 1) God teaches us to be joyful _____. (always, sometimes)
- 2) In church, I feel joyful whenever I see _____. (name of the person)
- 4) When we praise and worship God together, God will be _____. (joyful)

G. Closing Worship

1. Memory verse: Psalm 100:1
2. Offering: Let the children use their noisemakers in praising God while giving their offerings.
3. Closing Song: "I've Got Joy Down In My Heart"
I've got joy down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart.
J-O-Y down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart.
Jesus gave it to me and no one can destroy it. Destroy! Destroy! Oopsss!!!
I've got joy down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart.
J-O-Y down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart.
4. Closing prayer: "We are thankful O God for teaching us always to be joyful as a church. Help us to teach others that through your love and faithfulness, we can always be joyful all the time. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Middle and Older Elementary Levels

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. share happy and sad experiences at home, in school, or in the church;
2. explain that joy in all circumstances comes for the Spirit;
3. describe how rejoicing is connected to the mission of the church; and
4. tell ways by which the church remains joyful at all times.

II. Concept: The church rejoices at all times.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song/verse chart, cartolina of different colors, coloring materials, markers, glue, scissors, 3' x 0.5' sheet of white paper and a tongue depressor

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children as they arrive.
2. Opening prayer: "Dear God, we come to you rejoicing because we know that you are our ever-present God. As we listen to your word today, help us to follow and do your will joyfully. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."
3. Opening song: "C'mon Everybody"
C'mon everybody, preach the name of Jesus.
All the people of the earth let them hear. (Repeat)
Chorus: Joy is like the sunshine shining down upon us
Joy is like a golden crown so c'mon everybody.
Preach the name of Jesus Halleluia. (4X)
C'mon everybody, sing a song of joy.
Let everybody listen to the happy song. (Repeat)

B. Getting Ready

1. Prepare the class to worship the Lord as they prepare streamers. Provide each child a 3' x 0.5' sheet of white paper and a tongue depressor. Make the other materials available for class use: markers, crayons, glue, and scissors. Tell each child to glue one end of the streamer to the tongue depressor. Ask them to decorate their streamers and let them choose from any of the following texts (or expect their own statements):
 - a. I'm joyful in the Lord always!
 - b. I will always rejoice in the Lord!
 - c. I will make a joyful noise unto the Lord!
 - d. The peace of God will guard my heart and mind in Christ.
2. Ask the class how they felt when working on their streamers. Then let them set aside their work for use later.

C. Learning Time

1. Ask the class to share any happy or sad moments in their life at home, in school, or in the church. Tell them that today's lesson will help them face whatever challenges that may come their way.
2. Divide the class into two groups. Tell them to do a choral recitation of the two texts.

Group 1: Psalm 100

All: ¹Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

Girls: ²Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Boys: ³Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

All: ⁴enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. ⁵For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Group 2: Philippians 4:4-7

Girls: ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Boys: ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

All: ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

3. Discuss the texts using the given information:
 - a. *Psalm 100*. This psalm is attributed to David. Verse 1 tells us to shout joyfully to the Lord when we consider what God has done for us. We say **we praise God with a joyful heart**. Verse 2 says we respond in singing as we come into God's presence and as we acknowledge God's love for us. We say **we worship God with a joyful heart**. Verse 3 says we honor God knowing that God is our Creator and we come into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. We say **we honor God with a joyful heart**. Verses 4 and 5 say that as we enter into God's presence, we thank and praise God because God is good and God's love for us is everlasting. We say **we praise, honor, and worship God with a thankful and joyful heart**.
 - b. *Philippians 4:4-7*. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians during his two-year imprisonment in Rome. In these verses, Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord always and for everything. Paul says the following:
 - 1) Our experience of God's peace is the answer to our anxiety. Worry becomes a sin when we do not believe and trust God's presence and providence.
 - 2) We must pray with thanksgiving regarding all our concerns, be they big or small. The Holy Spirit will always intercede for us as we pray.
 - 3) The peace of God will always help us understand because God's peace is sovereign and not based on human anxiety, all-knowing, and stays in the inner heart, mind, and thoughts of human beings.

D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

Ask these questions.

1. What idea is being discussed in both texts? (Rejoice in the Lord always.)
2. How can we make sure that we do not fall into the sin of anxiety when we experience life's challenges? (Philippians 4:6)
3. Why is it important to have a regular prayer schedule even during happy and sad experiences in life? Why? (Philippians 4:7)
4. How can the church include prayer as a ministry of the church? (Answers may vary depending upon the experiences of the pupils.)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: What programs or ministries of the church help her members to rejoice at all times? (Prayer is the best tool to help God's people to rejoice at all times. Serving others with joyful hearts will keep our hearts and minds joyful at all times.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. **For ME:** Tell the class to find partners. Call each pair the "praise pair" and ask each pair to talk about five things that they can thank or praise God for. After they finish exchanging their notes, let them write these things on the board. After all the praise pairs have done their work, emphasize to them that there are endless things that we can thank God for as Christians who enjoy God's goodness.
2. **For OE:** Ask the class to make a bookmark using cartolina of different colors. Let the children use the form of a church in making the bookmark. Let them write at least five ways on how to joyfully serve God in the church. Encourage the children to share their work to the class.
3. After the activity, lead the class to say a prayer of praise and thanks for God's goodness.

G. Closing Worship

1. Memory verse: Psalm 100: 1 and Philippians 4:5
2. Offering: Let the children use their streamers while singing and giving their offering.
3. Closing song: "Rejoice, Give Thanks in the Lord Always" (HFJ # 174)
4. Closing prayer: "We rejoice O God for your love and faithfulness to us. Teach us dear God to do this even in the midst of trials and temptations, in sadness and in joy. As a church, help us and teach us how to be joyful at all times and in all circumstances. This we pray in Christ's name, our source of joy and strength. Amen."

Youth Level

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. discuss problems and difficulties young people experience;
2. explain what the biblical texts tell about being joyful in the Lord in the midst of problems and difficulties;
3. thank God for the gift of joy by the Holy Spirit; and
4. express one's commitment to be part of the church's ministry in making her members rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances.

II. Concept: The church can experience joy amidst problems and difficulties.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), worksheets

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Dear God, we acknowledge your goodness in our lives because you are the source of all good and perfect gifts. Be with us today as we listen and learn together the gifts of joy that come from you alone. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."
3. Opening songs: "Rejoice, Give Thanks in the Lord Always" (HFJ # 174) and "I've Got Joy Down In My Heart"
I've got joy down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart.
J-O-Y down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart.
Jesus gave it to me and no one can destroy it. Destroy! Destroy! Oopsss!!!
I've got joy down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart.
J-O-Y down in my heart, deep, deep down in my heart.

B. Getting Ready

Form triads. Let each group share their experiences as young people and the possible cause of such anxieties. Let them write the first three and be ready to share them to the whole group. (Before this lesson, the teacher can ask assistance from guidance counselors or psychologists to anticipate how to respond to the troubles experienced by young people.) Set aside the list for use later.

C. Learning Time

Tell the class to read the texts in unison. Explain that praising God is a way of acknowledging who God is and what God has done for us. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the biblical texts. As much as possible, provide each group a copy of the information they would need to discuss their assigned text.

1. *Psalm 100*. This psalm is attributed to King David.
 - a. Verse 1. *The Lord is the ruler of the whole creation and God created human beings for God's glory.* God commands us to make a joyful noise unto God.
 - b. Verse 2. *God wants us to praise and worship God as a service to the Lord.* We express this by singing joyfully.
 - c. Verse 3. We are reminded that God will always take care of us, despite everything. *God's abiding presence in all our circumstances, is something we,*

God's people, can rely on.

- d. Verse 4. *God wants us to come into God's presence with gratitude and thanksgiving.* We need to thank God for everything that happens to us because God knows what is best for each of us.
 - e. Verse 5. *God is good. God loves us eternally. God's love for us never fails. God remains faithful to us forever.* God seeks to give us a future and a hope.
2. *Habakkuk 3:17-18.* Habakkuk is a prophet who wrote and spoke during a difficult time when God used Babylon to conquer Israel and punish it for its iniquities. He speaks gratefully for and sings joyfully unto God for Who God is and God's unchanging love for God's people. His use of the words "although" and "yet" explain his undying trust and devotion to God.
 - a. *Thank God anyhow.* Although people may experience troubles, yet, they need to thank God.
 - b. *Thank God. God's love, power and sovereignty change not.* Although we are not certain about God's plan for our lives, yet, we are certain of God's love and care for each of us and we know God has the best plan for each of us.
 - c. *Thank God. God's plan of salvation ceases not.* Although we experience life's troubles and our hands are tied, yet we are assured of God's deliverance and rescue for each of us.
 - d. *Thank God for God's strength fails not.* Although in our human sight, we are troubled on all sides, yet, the peace of God, the peace that can come only from God will make us stand according to God's will and power.
 3. *Philippians 4:4-7.* Paul writes this letter to the church in Philippi and its central message is to rejoice in the Lord for everything.
 - a. Verse 4. This verse talks about *gentleness of spirit* that should be made known to everyone. Gentleness is a product of rejoicing unto God. It is a product of knowing that *God is near* and that God watches over us and protects us.
 - b. Verse 5. Paul tells us to free ourselves from anxiety because we have the *peace of God*. This peace can make us free from being anxious for life's challenges to free us from unwanted worry, we are reminded to *make all our requests to God in prayer with thanksgiving.*
 - c. God's peace will make sure that we can rely on God for spiritual blessings that will accompany us in our life's journey. *God's peace will guard our hearts and minds against anxiety.*

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Ask questions:

1. Which of the following concepts is/are common to the three biblical texts? Explain your choice.
 - a. God loves us forever.
 - b. God's people will experience troubles in life.
 - c. God's peace will free us from our anxiety.
 - d. God listens to all our requests in prayer done with thanksgiving.
 - e. God wants us to sing, praise, and worship God joyfully.
2. Why do you think David wrote Psalm 100? (David personally experienced God's love and peace. He wrote this psalm because he wanted to express his gratitude to God for all the blessings he received.)

3. Why do you think Habakkuk was troubled? How did Habakkuk overcome his struggle of understanding God when God allowed Babylon to conquer Israel? (The prophet Habakkuk understood that there will come a time that we may experience full enjoyment of our comfort but we should consider that there may come a time when we shall be stripped of them all. He understood that when all is gone, his God is not gone.)
4. What does Paul say about the surest formula for people to live in harmony and face life free from anxiety? (God's love and peace will never fail. God's people will always have access to God for all their requests in prayer with thanksgiving.)
5. Using the list of troubles experienced by the youth and their possible causes, how can they be helped by the truths made known in the three biblical texts? (The three texts talk about God's love and peace. These truths will assure the youth of this love of and peace from God as they face their life's challenges.)
6. How can the church be an instrument of God in helping her members to experience the love of and the peace from God? (The church ministries and programs)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How can the church assist God's people to experience joy amidst problems and difficulties in life? (The church will institute programs that will help people live a Spirit-filled and prayer-filled life.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Tell the class to go back to their triads at the beginning of the lesson and use their list of life's challenges. Using newsprint, encourage each group to write a prayer using the following template (to be presented to the whole group later):
Thank you God for (list their requests such as wisdom on what is the right thing to do when they have problems and the strength to do it by God's grace and mercy, etc.). As members of the church, help us to rejoice by (joyfully living our lives in harmony with others, gladly helping each other in times problems and difficulties, coming to you in prayer with thanksgiving, etc.).
2. Tell each student to write in their journal why they need to thank God for everything.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You" (HFJ # 9)
3. Closing prayer: "We have realized O God that you are the source of genuine joy. Teach us to acknowledge your goodness even in the hardest and painful experiences of our lives. Grant us the joy amidst our problems and difficulties—that when everything's gone, you will be there with us to comfort and supply us with all our needs. This we ask and pray in Christ's wonderful name. Amen."

Adult Level

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. list and discuss the different adversities the church experiences;
2. help the learner's see that we need to rejoice in God always, in all conditions;
3. show different ways on how to rejoice amidst adversities as a church; and
4. accept that to rejoice in God always is one of the privileges and responsibilities of a Christian.

II. Concept: The church rejoices amidst adversities.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), worksheets

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Loving God, we acknowledge you as our God. We praise and glorify your name for allowing us to build relationships with the people around us. We thank you dear God for enriching our lives with joy through the power of your truth. We offer to you our presence today and make us worthy as we receive wisdom and understanding from you. All these things we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen."
3. Opening song: "Rejoice, Give Thanks in the Lord Always" (HFJ # 174)

B. Getting Ready

Form triads. Let each group share their experiences as parents, siblings, guardians, elders or teachers of the church and the possible cause of such anxieties. Let them write the first three and be ready to share them to the whole group. (Before this lesson, the teacher can ask assistance from guidance counselors or psychologists to anticipate how to respond to the troubles experienced by parents, siblings, guardians, elders or teachers of the church. If there is member who can provide assistance, please do not hesitate to invite him or her.) Set aside the list for use later.

C. Learning Time

Tell the class to read the texts in unison. Explain that praising God is a way of acknowledging who God is and what God has done for us. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the biblical texts. As much as possible, provide each group a copy of the information they would need to discuss their assigned text.

1. *Psalm 100*. This psalm is attributed to King David.
 - a. Verse 1. *The Lord is the ruler of the whole creation and God created human beings for God's glory.* God commands us to make a joyful noise unto God.
 - b. Verse 2. *God wants us to praise and worship God as a service to the Lord.* We express this by singing joyfully.
 - c. Verse 3. We are reminded that God will always take care of us, despite everything. *God's abiding presence in all our circumstances, is something we, God's people, can rely on.*
 - d. Verse 4. *God wants us to come into God's presence with gratitude and thanksgiving.* We need to thank God for everything that happens to us because

God knows what is best for each of us.

- e. Verse 5. *God is good. God loves us eternally. God's love for us never fails. God remains faithful to us forever. God seeks to give us a future and a hope.*
2. *Habakkuk 3:17-18.* Habakkuk is a prophet who wrote and spoke during a difficult time when God used Babylon to conquer Israel and punish it for its iniquities. He speaks gratefully for and sings joyfully unto God for Who God is and God's unchanging love for God's people. His use of the words "although" and "yet" explain his undying trust and devotion to God.
 - a. *Thank God anyhow.* Although people may experience troubles, yet, they need to thank God.
 - b. *Thank God. God's love, power and sovereignty change not.* Although we are not certain about God's plan for our lives, yet, we are certain of God's love and care for each of us and we know God has the best plan for each of us.
 - c. *Thank God. God's plan of salvation ceases not.* Although we experience life's troubles and our hands are tied, yet we are assured of God's deliverance and rescue for each of us.
 - d. *Thank God for God's strength fails not.* Although in our human sight, we are troubled on all sides, yet, the peace of God, the peace that can come only from God will make us stand according to God's will and power.
3. *Philippians 4:4-7.* Paul writes this letter to the church in Philippi and its central message is to rejoice in the Lord for everything.
 - a. Verse 4. This verse talks about *gentleness of spirit* that should be made known to everyone. Gentleness is a product of rejoicing unto God. It is a product of knowing that *God is near* and that God watches over us and protects us.
 - b. Verse 5. Paul tells us to free ourselves from anxiety because we have the *peace of God*. This peace can make us free from being anxious for life's challenges. To free us from unwanted worry, we are reminded to *make all our requests to God in prayer with thanksgiving*.
 - c. God's peace will make sure that we can rely on God for spiritual blessings that will accompany us in our life's journey. *God's peace will guard our hearts and minds against anxiety.*

D. Deepening Activity/ Sharing Time

Ask questions:

1. Which of the following concepts is/are common to the three biblical texts? Explain your choice.
 - a. God loves us forever.
 - b. God's people will experience troubles in life.
 - c. God's peace will free us from our anxiety.
 - d. God listens to all our requests in prayer done with thanksgiving.
 - e. God wants us to sing, praise, and worship God joyfully.
2. Why do you think David wrote Psalm 100? (David personally experienced God's love and peace. He wrote this psalm because he wanted to express his gratitude to God for all the blessings he received.)
3. Why do you think Habakkuk was troubled? How did Habakkuk overcome his struggle of understanding God when God allowed Babylon to conquer Israel? (The prophet Habakkuk understood that there will come a time that we may experience

- full enjoyment of our comfort but we should consider that there may come a time when we shall all be stripped of them all. He understood that when all is gone, his God is not gone.)
4. What does Paul say about the surest formula for people to live in harmony and face life free from anxiety? (God's love and peace will never fail. God's people will always have access to God for all their requests in prayer with thanksgiving.)
 5. Using the list of troubles experienced by the parents, siblings, guardians, elders or teachers of the church and their possible causes, how can they be helped by the truths made known in the three biblical texts? (The three texts talk about God's love and peace. These truths will assure the parents, siblings, guardians, elders or teachers of the church of this love of and peace from God as they face their life's challenges.)
 6. How can the church be an instrument of God in helping her members experience the love of and the peace from God? (The church ministries and programs)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: How can our church encourage her members to rejoice amidst diversities? (The church, through its ministries and programs, institute regular prayer, fellowship, and counseling activities for individuals, age-groups, families, and cell groups to find ways of rejoicing in the Lord amidst diversities.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

Create/plan out church programs for regular prayer, fellowship, and counseling activities for individuals, age-groups, families, and cell groups that would help those who are experiencing hardships/adversities. Use this sample template.

Suggested Program/Activity: *Prayer Group*

Rationale: *God recommends us to constantly pray and make known to God all our requests. In prayer, we can seek direction, support, and assurance of joy.*

Persons involved:

Timeframe:

Expected outcomes:

Budget:

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You" (HFJ # 9)
3. Closing prayer: "Sovereign God, we delight ourselves in you. Let our thoughts be filled with your words that our joy will be found when we rejoice in your name at all times and in all conditions. Remind us always, dear God, that it is our duty and privilege to rejoice in you even in times of suffering and affliction. Grant us always the wisdom to always call upon you in prayer that we might be directed towards you so that we may always rejoice in the thought that you are with us amidst adversities in life. We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray with thanksgiving in our hearts. Amen."