

# Children's Lessons for Life Groups

All-In-One lessons for kids ages 4-12

from

All-In-One Sunday School, Volumes 2 & 3

Lesson 16



# God Guides

16

## LESSON AIM

To help kids understand that ★ God gives us joy in good times and bad.

## OBJECTIVES

### Kids will

- ✓ play a game to experience the ups and downs of life,
- ✓ learn how Paul and Silas sang hymns of praise in prison,
- ✓ discover how to find joy in the midst of difficult circumstances, and
- ✓ have an opportunity to make a commitment to be joyful.

## YOU'LL NEED

- used office paper
- markers
- masking tape
- photocopies of the "It's Your Life" handout (p. 95)
- a basket
- 1 red and 1 blue lei or scarf
- red and blue markers
- photocopies of the "Joy Box" handout (p. 96)
- scissors
- glue sticks
- pencils, erasers, or clean stones
- an X-Acto knife

## BIBLE BASIS

### Acts 16:16-40

Paul and Silas turned their missionary efforts toward the Greek city of Philippi. As they preached and taught in that city, they were bothered by a demon-possessed slave girl who for many days followed them shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and

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they have come to tell you how to be saved." While at first glance her proclamation might seem to have been positive, in fact the "Most High God" was just one of many gods of pagan religion. Even if she were referring to the one true and eternal God, her presence became such a distraction that Paul finally cast the demon out of her. This infuriated her owners, who had been making *their* fortune from *her* ability to tell fortunes. Freed of the demon, the girl lost her "fortune-telling" abilities, and her owners lost their income.

What happened next was not pretty. The owners had Paul and Silas dragged before city officials, accusing them of causing an uproar against mandated emperor worship. They were stripped, beaten, and thrown in jail.

It would be miserable enough to be humiliated, beaten, and jailed for doing something bad. But to have imprisonment set in motion by setting a slave girl free from a demonic spirit? Now there's cause for complaint. In the inner darkness of a foul, dank Philippian prison, did anyone hear Paul and Silas complaining? No—they heard the duo singing hymns of praise! Their midnight melodies caught the ears of the other prisoners, and before the night was over, God's love had captured the jailer's heart.

The joy that the Holy Spirit gives is not dependent on outward circumstances. It springs from knowing that God is in control, that our trust in him will always be rewarded, and that the ultimate victory is ours. Such joy cannot be altered or extinguished, and it's more contagious than the measles!

### **Galatians 5:22**

According to the NIV Exhaustive Concordance, the word *joy* or its derivative appears in Scripture more than 250 times. Now that's a recurring theme! Paul made joy second on his list of fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit works in us to guide our hearts and minds toward things we have to be thankful for, rather than allowing us to focus on pain and disappointment. Most of us are drawn to joyful people. Anyone can be happy when things are going right. It's those whose joy shines through adversity who truly light the path to God.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS

This media generation lives with certain basic misconceptions about life that are generated and perpetuated by television dramas, "reality" shows, and sitcoms. Those misconceptions can be boiled down to something along these lines: We should all be beautiful, healthy, slender, and well-toned; we should live in comfortable, well-appointed homes; and we should have enough money to dress stylishly and pursue a variety of leisure-time activities. These external things are supposed to equal happiness. Because this image is portrayed by so much of U.S. television, many people around the world who view the programs in syndication tend to think of Americans in these terms. No wonder our own children pick up on these ideas!

As children approach the middle grades, they begin to distinguish between joy, which springs from trust in God's never-failing love and care, and happiness, which depends on feelings. Use this lesson to teach kids that one of the distinguishing characteristics of a Christian's life is joy that does not waver when it's tested by difficult circumstances.

# The Lesson

## ATTENTION GRABBER

### The Game of Life

Before class, lay 25 sheets of used office paper on the floor in a curving game path. Write “Start” on the first sheet and “Finish” on the last one. You may want to secure the papers lightly with a small strip of masking tape. Cut apart the strips on the “It’s Your Life” handout, and place them in a basket.

When the first child arrives, mark his or her hand with the red marker. Mark the hand of the next child with the blue marker. Continue alternating colors until all the children have arrived. (Try to have a few readers on each team.) Have the teams line up near Start. Put the red lei on the first player of the red team and the blue lei on the first player of the blue team. Have both players stand with one foot on Start.

Say: **Welcome to It’s Your Life. We’re going to let representatives of each team take turns drawing slips of paper from the basket. When it’s your turn, you’ll read the slip aloud and then go forward or back the number of spaces it says. If you’re told to go back and you’re still at Start, you’ll just stay at Start until a player gets a slip that says to move forward. The first team to reach Finish wins. Ready? Here we go.**

Have both players draw slips, read them aloud—with help as needed—and move forward the appropriate number of spaces or remain at Start. Then have the next two players replace the first two on the game path, put on the leis, draw and read their slips, and move along the game path accordingly. Keep rotating players and passing the leis from team member to team member. Have players hang on to their slips as the game progresses. Play until one team reaches Finish.

Then collect the leis and slips, gather everyone in a circle, and ask:

◆ **What’s it like when you get a lot of “go back” slips and can’t ever seem to move forward?** (Really discouraging; it makes me want to quit.)

◆ **How is that like what sometimes happens in real life?** (Sometimes a lot of bad things happen right in a row; sometimes things seem to go from bad to worse.)

◆ **What can you tell us about a time like that in your life?** (My dad got sick and couldn’t work, and right after that our car broke down; my parents separated, and I started getting really bad grades in school.)

◆ **Share a time in your life when a whole lot of good things happened.** (My brother came home from the Army just in time for my birthday last year, and my sister won the city spelling

bee; my mom got well from cancer and got to go back to work.)

Say: **When you drew a slip out of the basket, you didn't know if it would bring something happy or sad. Each new day is kind of like that—we just don't know what it will bring. But today we're going to learn that ★ God gives us joy in good times and bad. And we're going to learn it from some guys who knew what it's like to have a *really* bad day.**

## BIBLE STUDY

### Paul and Silas (Acts 16:16-40)

Say: Our story is about two missionaries named Paul and Silas. It took place a few years after Jesus went back to heaven. At the beginning of the story, any time you want to, you may call out, "Hey, you!" But after I say the word "out," there'll be no more "Hey, you's"—you'll just listen quietly and wait for my next directions. Got that? Ask:

◆ **When will you call out, "Hey, you!"?** (At the beginning of the story.)

◆ **When will you listen quietly and wait for my next directions?** (When you say "out.")

Say: **Good. Here we go.**

Ignore kids as they call out, "Hey, you!" Just calmly tell the story.

Say: **Paul and Silas traveled together wherever God guided them. They preached and taught about Jesus as they went from town to town. In Philippi they stayed at the home of a wealthy merchant named Lydia who had come to believe in Jesus.**

One day Paul and Silas and some of their friends were on their way through town when they met a slave girl who was controlled by an evil spirit. Whenever she saw Paul and Silas, she cried, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved." Days went by, and each time the slave girl saw Paul and Silas, she would shout after them, just as you're yelling to me and interrupting me right now. Now the owners of this slave girl were greedy men. Because of the evil spirit, the girl was able to tell fortunes. So her owners made a lot of money from people paying to have the girl tell their fortunes. They didn't care one bit about how unhappy and frightened the girl was.

One day when the girl was following Paul and Silas and shouting to them, Paul decided that he'd had enough. He turned and said to the evil spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come *out* of her." Immediately the evil spirit left the girl, and she stopped calling out, just as you've stopped calling out to me.

If the slave girl's owners had been kind and compassionate,

they would have been glad for her. Instead, all they could think about was the money that they would no longer make since she couldn't tell fortunes anymore. These greedy men were so angry that they turned the crowd against Paul and Silas. The owners dragged the two missionaries to the marketplace and brought them before the authorities. Without any kind of fair trial at all, the magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped and severely beaten, then hauled off to prison.

"Guard these men carefully," the leaders ordered the jailer. So the jailer threw the bruised and bleeding missionaries into the dark inner room of the prison and locked their feet in heavy wooden stocks.

Let's see what that might have been like. I'd like you to move and form a large circle with a couple of feet of space between each person.

Scatter pencils, erasers, or clean stones on the floor in the spaces between the children. Don't join the circle yourself.

Then say: **Now turn and lie down so your feet are near, but not touching, the head of the person next to you. Don't move any of the things on the floor—just lie down right on top of them.** Help children arrange themselves head-to-toe on the floor. When everyone is in place, say: **Good. It wasn't very comfortable sleeping on the floor in prison. Now to imagine what it might have been like for Paul and Silas to have their feet in stocks, I'd like you to reach up behind your head and grasp the ankles of the person behind you. Grasp them firmly, but don't squeeze hard.** Help children grasp each other's ankles. Make sure no one is being rough.

Say: **Now let me remind you that the prison was dark, damp, and smelly.** Ask:

◆ **How do you think Paul and Silas were feeling?** (Lousy; worse than I am right now.)

Say: **You know, if I were in that situation, I might be wishing for a really kind, gentle doctor or nurse to wash my wounds with warm water, to dress them with some kind of soothing ointment, and to give me some medicine to help the pain. I'd probably think of a soft, warm bed with a warm quilt, and maybe a nice goose-feather pillow. Do you think Paul and Silas might have been wishing for those things?**

Well, they weren't. In fact, they were thinking of something quite different, and all the other prisoners knew it. Do you know how they knew it? Because a strange sound started coming from that inner cell. It was the sound of singing! In that dark, stinking cell, bruised and bloody as they were, Paul and Silas started singing hymns of praise to God.

Maybe you'd like to sing a little song with me to show how happy you are right now. Let's sing "I've Got the Joy."

If your kids are unfamiliar with this song, teach them these simple lyrics:

**I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart!  
Down in my heart, down in my heart.  
I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart,  
Down in my heart to stay!**

**Say: Well, that wasn't exactly the best singing you've ever done, but I can forgive you, considering the circumstances. Why don't you sit up and get comfortable now?**

**It was precisely the miserable circumstances that made Paul and Silas' joyful hymns of praise so remarkable. And the other prisoners took notice. Paul and Silas taught them—and the jailer—the unforgettable lesson that ★ God gives us joy in good times and bad. Ask:**

**◆ What reasons did Paul and Silas have for not being joyful? (They'd been beaten and embarrassed in public; they'd been sent to prison without a trial; they were injured and in pain; all this had happened because they'd done something good.)**

**Say: The joy that Paul and Silas felt wasn't humanly possible. From a human standpoint, they should have been feeling wretched and angry. Their joy came from the Holy Spirit. When Paul later wrote about the fruit of the Spirit, he listed joy second, just after love. Ask:**

**◆ What thoughts do you think inspired Paul and Silas to sing hymns of praise in the middle of the night loudly enough to be heard by the other prisoners? (God had a plan; they were glad to be serving God, and that was more important to them than anything else.)**

**Say: We can never really know what Paul and Silas were thinking, but based on letters Paul wrote that are in the Bible, we can imagine. He believed it was a privilege to suffer for the cause of Christ. He was thankful for the young church that was starting in Philippi. And Paul believed that "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose." That's found in Romans 8:28. It's that attitude that makes God-given joy different from happiness. When we believe that God is in control and is working for our good in everything that happens, the Holy Spirit gives us joy that nothing can take away.**

**That's just the beginning of what happened that night. God sent an earthquake that shook loose all the chains and opened the doors of the prison. Thinking that all his prisoners would escape, the jailer was about to commit suicide. But Paul stopped him and reassured him that everyone was still there. The jailer fell before Paul and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" That night, the jailer and his whole family became Christians, and their entire household was filled with joy.**



## LIFE APPLICATION

### Joy in Tough Times

Ask:

◆ **Tell about someone you know who has joy when things are tough.** (My uncle lost his job but he's still happy; my grandma is sick but you would never know it.)

Say: I'm going to share with you three brief, true stories of people who experienced the worst kinds of discouragement. I'll tell each story in two parts. Between the two sections of each story, I'll give you a chance to tell me how that person might find joy. So listen carefully.

"It was so difficult when my husband died," said Darlene, a middle-aged woman. "Taking care of him was a full-time job. I hadn't worked for so long that we were terribly in debt. There was no way I could make my house payments. And I needed a car."

Ask:

◆ **How could Darlene find joy in this situation?** (She could trust that God has a plan; maybe a friend could live with her.)

Say: Let's hear the rest of Darlene's story.

"The people at church were so amazing. They made my house payments for three months. And one Sunday someone just came up to me and handed me the keys to a car and said, 'It's yours.' It was just one miracle after another. God kept all his promises."

Say: Here's the next story.

"Grandma Jones lives in terrible pain all the time," the pastor told his family. "An operation could help a lot, but her heart is too weak. The operation could kill her. So her doctor tells her she just has to live with the pain."

Ask:

◆ **How could Grandma Jones be a joyful person?** (Maybe they could give her medicine to help her pain; she could pray.)

Say: Here's what else the pastor told his family.

"But every time I leave the nursing home after visiting her, I feel so full of joy. Her face is always aglow with smiles. She looks forward to heaven so much—it's all she thinks about. I go in there to cheer her up, but she ends up cheering me up! Heaven is so real to her. Visiting her makes me look forward to heaven, too."

Say: Remember, these are based on true stories. And I have one more for you.

"When my dad lost his job, our family hardly knew what to do," Brenda explained. "Then my mom got a job offer in another state. None of us wanted to move away from our home, our church, and our friends. We all cried when the 'For Sale' sign went up in front of our house."

Ask:

◆ **How do you think Brenda's family could find joy?** (They might not have to move after all; they could make new friends.)

**Here is what Brenda said happened: "Less than a month after our move, Dad was hired at the same company where Mom was working. It was the kind of job he'd always dreamed of. It turned out that Dad losing his old job was the best thing that could have happened."**

Ask:

◆ **What did the people in these three stories have in common?** (They were all hurting; terrible things happened to them.)

◆ **How were the people in these stories like Paul and Silas?** (They all found joy even when things were terrible.)

Say: **All these people found out that ★ God gives us joy in good times and bad. The way we learn to hang on to joy in bad times is to realize how much God loves us and cares for us. Let's have fun making little "Joy Box" jukeboxes that will remind us to rely on God's care in tough times.**

## COMMITMENT

### Joy to Go!

Before class, prepare the "Joy Box" handouts by using an X-Acto knife to open the slits between the two sets of dots on the front of the jukebox.

Distribute the "Joy Box" handouts. Show kids how to cut off the strip of verses and then cut out the jukebox on the heavy lines. Make mountain folds on the dotted lines, and fold the sides down around the front to create a jukebox shape. Have kids rub a glue stick on tabs A and B and secure the tabs behind the front of the jukebox as shown on the handout.

Demonstrate how to slip the strip of verses through the slits so the verses are displayed on the front of the jukebox. Then have kids glue the ends of the verse strip together to form a loop.

As kids are cutting and assembling their Joy Boxes, mingle and discuss the following questions:

◆ **What can you do with your Joy Box to encourage you when you're going through a difficult time?** (I could read the verses and remember that God cares for me; the verses could remind me to trust God no matter what.)

◆ **How could you use it to encourage someone who seems to have no hope or joy at all?** (I could share it with them; I could tell them about Paul and Silas and read them the verses.)

◆ **What is the secret to having joy in good times and bad?** (To trust God; to remember that God loves me and that he is in control and will take care of me.)

Say: **When we truly trust God and realize how very much**

### Teacher Tip

*Ask older kids to help out the younger ones with the assembly of their Joy Boxes. Then they can read the verses to younger kids as well.*



God loves us and wants the best for us, God gives us joy that nothing can take away. That doesn't mean that all of our moments will be happy ones. But we can trust in God's love and care for us. That's how ★ God gives us joy in good times and bad.

## CLOSING

### Sing It Out!

Say: As I mentioned earlier, joy is second in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit.

Say: I guess after today's story, we've learned that Paul knew what he was talking about. The same man who sang when he was beaten and bloody in prison is the man who wrote this list. So let's sing out for Paul.

As you teach kids the following song, you may want to have them follow along in their Bibles.

#### The Fruit of the Spirit

*(to the tune of "Rock Around the Clock")*

Love and joy.

Love, joy, peace.

In your heart may they increase.

We're talking patience, kindness, goodness, too.

And faithfulness to last your whole life through.

Gentleness and self-control—

God's Spirit in you!

*(Repeat.)*

Say: I hope you'll let the Holy Spirit work in your heart so all these wonderful things will become part of you. This week, remember that ★ God gives us joy in good times and bad. No matter what happens, hang on to that joy!

Remind kids to take their Joy Boxes with them as they leave.

# IT'S YOUR LIFE

*Cut apart the slips, and place them in a basket.*

Your mom got a promotion at work. Move ahead 2 spaces.	A storm took the roof off your house. Go back 3 spaces.	Your best friend had to move to a different state. Go back 3 spaces.
Your family won a magazine sweepstakes. Move ahead 5 spaces.	You won the citywide spelling bee. Move ahead 3 spaces.	Your dad's job was cut, and he's looking for work. Go back 3 spaces.
You got a great report card. Move ahead 2 spaces.	You broke your ankle and have to miss the whole soccer season. Go back 2 spaces.	Your neighbor's house was robbed, and you're afraid the same thing might happen to you. Go back 1 space.
Your family got the new car you wanted. Move ahead 1 space.	Your favorite team won the World Series. Move ahead 1 space.	You didn't come home on time and got grounded for a week. Go back 1 space.
Your favorite uncle is coming to visit. Move ahead 1 space.	It's Christmas! Move ahead 3 spaces.	You got a raise in your allowance. Move ahead 1 space.
You got a new puppy. Move ahead 1 space.	Your fish died. Go back 1 space.	It's your birthday! Move ahead 2 spaces.
You had your tonsils out. Go back 3 spaces.	You didn't get the part you wanted in the school play. Go back 1 space.	You get to go to Walt Disney World for vacation. Move ahead 3 spaces.
You made a new friend. Move ahead 1 space.	You lost your tickets to an NBA game. Go back 1 space.	The neighborhood kids are mad at you. Go back 1 space.

"Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them sing joyful praises forever. Spread your protection over them, that all who love your name may be filled with joy"

(Psalm 5:11).

"God's anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but joy comes with the morning"

(Psalm 30:5).

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"

(Romans 15:13, NIV).

"The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing"

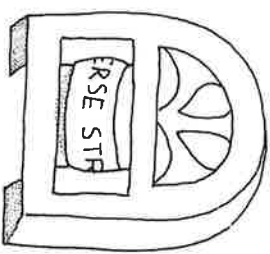
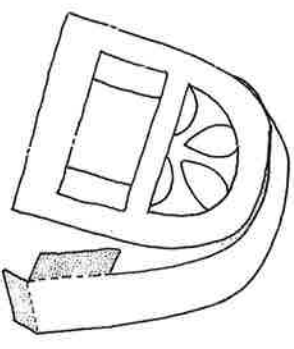
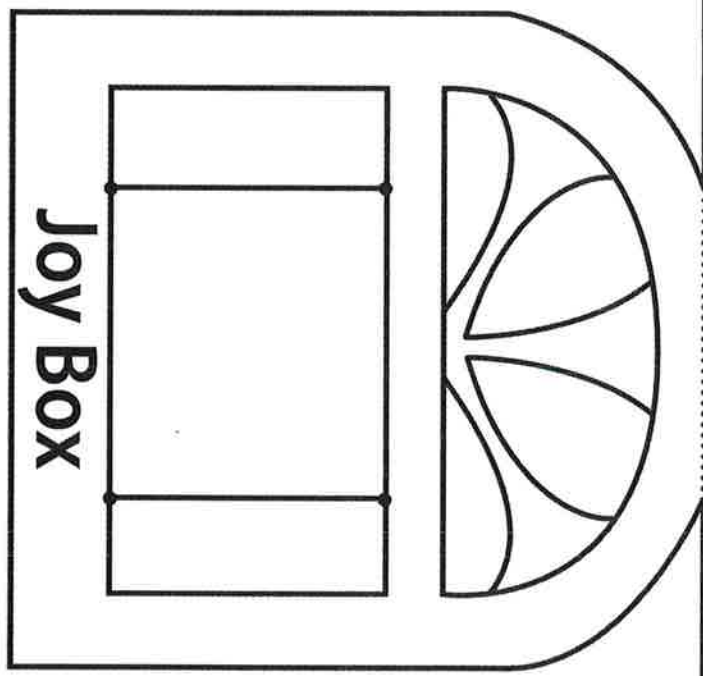
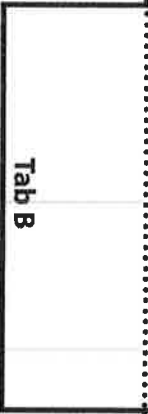
(Zephaniah 3:17, NIV).

"Lord, when doubt fills my mind, when my heart is in turmoil, quiet me and give me renewed hope and cheer"

(Psalm 94:1, TLB).

"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them"

(Romans 8:28).



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