

# Deep in Our Hearts

Our hearts call out to God – for healing, wholeness, mercy, salvation, wisdom. Jeremiah’s prophecy assures God’s people that God intends to draw close to us, claiming our very being as the centre of the new and everlasting covenant. Deep in our hearts, we will know God’s Word; we will live in God’s ways.

## Focus Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31–34

At the time Jeremiah began his work as a prophet – around 625 BCE – the Hebrew people were divided into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom, Israel, had been conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. Jeremiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom, Judah. It is helpful to recall that biblical prophets spoke God’s word to the Hebrew people. They challenged kings and officials; they called the people of God to account with God’s law.

Judah was in turmoil when Jeremiah spoke God’s word to them. Conflict between Babylon and Egypt seemed to be forcing a choice between acquiescing to the Babylonians or serving as the first line of attack for the Egyptian Empire. Jeremiah’s message to Judah was that the Babylonians were far stronger than they were, and should not be resisted. Jeremiah prophesied that Judah would not prevail against the Babylonians because the people had rejected God and turned to idolatry. Jeremiah was considered a traitor for saying that Jerusalem and the temple were vulnerable to defeat.

Beginning in 598 BCE, Jeremiah’s prophecy came to pass when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Judah and exiled many of its leading citizens to Babylon. The fall of Judah was complete in 587, when Jerusalem was destroyed and the second wave of exiles was taken to Babylon.

In the midst of national disaster, Jeremiah prophesies that God will renew the promise that God had made through Abraham and confirmed in the Exodus. This covenant, however, will be different. In the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, the focus was solely on God’s commitment. In this covenant, humankind and God will be present together. In a surprising turn, Jeremiah tells us that God will fulfill not only God’s part of the covenant, but humankind’s part also.

Jeremiah offers a glimpse of the world as God will have it. God’s law will no longer be an external agreement that can be broken by people’s unfaithfulness; the new covenant will dwell in the very being of each person. In God’s new world, community interaction will be radically different.

Repentance from deep in the heart of the psalmist is the focus of **Psalm 51:1–12**, a psalm traditionally attributed to King David following the murder of Uriah. The psalmist recognizes the extent of his sin (v. 5), yet still asks with confidence for forgiveness and total restoration – a clean heart and a renewed relationship with God. The alternate reading, **Psalm 119:9–16**, is a pledge to treasure God’s word “in my heart,” and live in the ways of God.

The depth of God’s steadfast and eternal covenant with humankind is evident in **John 12:20–33**. Choices about living in God’s way are required; judgment will be rendered according to those choices. However, God’s grace is continually offered. Jesus the Christ draws us close with saving love.

Jesus is cast as a high priest in **Hebrews 5:5–10**, appointed by God to bring saving love to all. The writer describes Jesus as a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek.” Little is known about Melchizedek. He is mentioned in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. Melchizedek is seen as greater than Abraham, because Melchizedek blesses Abraham.



Imagine a community where God’s people know the promises of God deep in their hearts – where God’s people sense that the power of God’s saving love is at the very core of their identity. What about God is written deep in your heart?



March 29, 2009

Focus Scripture  
Jeremiah 31:31–34

Additional Scriptures  
Psalm 51:1–12  
or Psalm 119:9–16  
Hebrews 5:5–10  
John 12:20–33

We seek you with our whole hearts, O God. Draw us into the embrace of your loving and merciful promise, and teach us to live in your ways. Then make us bold to reach out and draw others into the joy of living in communion with you. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

## The Focus for Ages 9–11

Knowing something “by heart” involves more than committing it to memory, and the children in this age group have begun to understand what that more is. They know they can memorize a list of new words, but never find a use for them in their daily conversation. They know they can memorize a poem to recite in class, and forget it a week later. To know something by heart means it is taken in more deeply and has become a part of you. What do you think the children in your group might know by heart?

While researchers like Maria Montessori and Robert Coles can help us understand that

children experience the Holy, or God, at an early age, children at these ages can speak of that relationship. They are becoming adept, when they are feeling accepted and secure, at speaking from their own hearts, out of their deep experience of God’s presence in their lives. However, some of the older children in this age group may be becoming self-conscious about sharing their private faith experiences as they move toward adolescence. These children may find comfort from the focus passage that God can be known deep inside, where words are not necessary. Pray that all the children in your group will deepen their relationship with God during this session.

March 29, 2009

PREPARE

### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Jeremiah 31:31–34, and the biblical background material (p. 27). What do you know “by heart”?

#### Gather

- ❑ Bring *Bibles*, *basic supply kit* (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 7* and *CD player*.
- ❑ Prepare the worship table with *purple cloth*, *Christ candle*, *matches*, *offering basket*, and *Bible*.
- ❑ Bring *song “I’ve Got a Voice”* (p. 10 in *Music Section*, also #13 on *Seasons Music CD*), or small bell, and *song “Pulsing Spirit”* (p. 4 in *Music Section*, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring *poster “Reidele.”*

#### Engage

- ❑ Bring copies of *today’s resource sheet “God’s Messengers”* and (optional) *costumes*.

- ❑ Cut out a circle of *orange paper* for each child to make cobblestones for the mural path.

#### Respond

Gather and bring the supplies for the options you chose.

- ❑ **Finger labyrinth:** copies of today’s *resource sheet “Finger Labyrinth”*
- ❑ **God’s promise wall hanging:** black felt or heavy cotton squares (20 cm/8 in), red felt or heavy cotton, fabric paints or markers in light colours
- ❑ **Heartbeat drums:** *coffee cans with plastic lids*, *copier paper*, *heavier paper*, *song “Your Words”* (p. 5 in *Music Section*, also #15 on *Seasons Music CD*)

#### Bless

- ❑ Bring *song “To You, O God,” refrain only* (p. 1 in *Music Section*, also #17 on *Seasons Music CD*).

# Deep in Our Hearts



## Scripture

Jeremiah 31:31–34

**FOCUS** To reflect on what God's covenant means for us.

## GATHER

**Greeting** Welcome the children by name as they arrive, introducing newcomers to other children.

**Call to gather** Play "I've Got a Voice" (p. 10 in *Music Section*, also #13 on *Seasons Music CD*) or ring a small bell as a signal for the children to gather at the worship table. Invite a child to light the Christ candle. Look together at the path in the poster *Reidele*. Ask the children to imagine themselves standing in the woods, looking deep along the path. What might you see as you journey deeper along the path? Remind the children that we are in the season of Lent. Lent uses the colour purple. It is a season of journeys and paths that take us to Easter, when we remember how Jesus followed in God's way even when the way seemed confusing at times.

**Sing** "Pulsing Spirit" (p. 4 in *Music Section*, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*) as a child receives the offering.

**Pray** this prayer or one of your own:

God, you gather us here to learn about your way. Help us listen deep inside. Amen.

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the Gather ritual has ended.

## Connecting with the focus

**Knowing by heart** Ask:

- **What does it mean to know something "by heart"? (to have it memorized, to know it without being told or looking it up)**
- **What are some things you have learned "by heart"?**
- **When might it be helpful to know a thing "by heart" without having to look it up or ask someone?**

Explain that the heart is a symbol of our deepest selves and of what is most important to us. Note that today's Bible story will be about something God wants us to know "by heart."

## Preparing for the story

**Review of the psalms** **Note:** *The preceding four weeks' sessions are based on Psalm 25:1–10, Psalm 22:23–31, Psalm 19, and Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22. You may wish to refresh your memory by re-reading these passages.*

**God listens and responds** Have the group recall some of the concerns that the psalmists brought to God through the songs they wrote (*loneliness, impatience, injustice, lack of wisdom, illness...*). Invite them to recall some of the gifts from God that were celebrated in the psalms (*forgiveness, steadfast love, guidance, justice, God's law...*). In today's story, we hear about another gift of love from God, through the prophet Jeremiah.

## Bible story

**God's prophets** Distribute copies of the resource sheet "God's Messengers," pencils, and Bibles. Ask a child to read the information about prophets at the top of the page. Then have them work in pairs to complete the page. Point out the table

of contents in their Bibles so they can locate each book. Move about the group as they work so you can answer questions, help them find passages, and provide encouragement.

When everyone has finished, form three groups and assign one prophet to each group. Each group selects someone to portray their prophet and read the material in the speech balloon. If you have costumes, the children may enjoy dressing their prophet. Someone else in the group reads their research question and answer. Then have everyone turn to Jeremiah 31:31. The wonderful news is that God did not give up! Jeremiah 26–52 tells the people of Judah how they will survive. Ask for a volunteer to read Jeremiah 31:31–34 to hear God's promise.

## The Bible and our lives

**Discussion** Ask:

- **What is a covenant?**
- **How are the people of God included in the covenant that Jeremiah reports?**

## ENGAGE

God is giving God's way directly to the people in this covenant (Jeremiah 31:32-34). Ask:

■ **Why do you think God added this part about writing the law on their hearts?**

Explain that to the Hebrew people the heart represented the whole body. The heart was the place from which a person thought, felt, and acted. Ask:

■ **If the heart is the place where a person thought, felt, and acted, what do you think it means for God's law to be on your heart?**

**Cobblestones** Give each child an orange circle of paper to create cobblestones for the mural path. Ask them to write down a word or phrase from Jeremiah 31 that stands out to them and then illustrate that word or phrase on the cobblestone. Tape their "stones" to the mural path where last week's path left off. Ask:

■ **What would it mean to write the Ten Commandments or some other word from God on our hearts?**

**3**  
**RESPOND**

Choose one or two of these options.

□ **Finger labyrinth** The closer our hearts are to God, the more love we have to share with others. Use today's resource sheet as a meditation to remind the children that deep in our hearts, God's love can teach us how to live.



□ **God's promise wall hanging** One symbol for our deepest selves, where God has promised to write a law of love, is a heart. Provide each child with a black fabric square and red fabric. Have children cut a heart from the red fabric, and trace an outline of this heart onto the black square. Inside the square, invite children to write or draw a reminder of God's love. Glue or staple the red heart at the top over the outline on the black square to create a curtain that can be lifted to reveal the message. Encourage them to hang these wall hangings at home to remind themselves of God's love deep in their own hearts.

□ **Heartbeat drums** One way to write God's word on our hearts is to speak God's word with the rhythm of our heartbeats. Have the children locate their pulses at wrist or neck, and try imitating the beat using their voices. Make drums from coffee cans with plastic lids. Cut two triangles in the plastic lid. Glue a piece of copier paper under one triangle and a heavier paper under the other triangle. Put the lid on the can and decorate the can. Thump the lid and each paper triangle lightly to hear three different sounds.

Have the children choose a phrase from Jeremiah 31:31-34, such as "I will be their God" or "They shall be my people." Establish a simple beat, similar to the heartbeat, as the children tap their drums. Then add the phrase, speaking it softly to the beat of the drums. Or have the children beat to the rhythm of the song "Your Words" (p. 5 in *Music Section*, also #15 on the *Seasons Music CD*).

**4**  
**BLESS**

**Gather** When the children have gathered at the worship table, light the Christ candle.

**Sing** the refrain of "To You, O God" (p. 1 in *Music Section*, also #17 on *Seasons Music CD*).

**Reflect** together on what the group has learned so far in Lent by looking together at the mural path.

**Pray** Stand in a circle and pray this prayer or one of your own:

"God, we thank you for the promise you made to Jeremiah and the people and to us too. Amen."

**Blessing** Send each child out with the words, "(Name), remember you are included in God's promises of love."

**REFLECT**

In what ways do the children recognize that the promises of God are for them too? If the children will not be together on Easter

Sunday, how will you adjust the session plan for Palm Sunday?



# GOD'S MESSENGERS

**P**rophets are people called by God to present God's word to God's people. Often, the people did not want to hear what the prophets had to say. Many times, their words were warnings because the people had turned away from God.

My name is Jeremiah. You call me a major prophet because my words take up a whole scroll. Well, they aren't exactly my words. They are God's words, of course, but my friend Baruch is also included in my book. Truth be told, many others contributed to my book, but their names have been lost.



My name is Malachi. I guess you call me a minor prophet because my words from God only take up four chapters. But my book is the last one in the Hebrew scriptures, so you might say I also have the last word. The last verses of Malachi tell the people that another prophet will come. Who is he?



**J**eremiah's words from God were to a suffering nation. Jeremiah 1–25 reminded the people of Judah how they got to this terrible state of affairs. Despite God's pleas, they chose to follow false prophets. Finally, they were taken as captives to Babylon. How many years did Jeremiah try to convince the people to turn back to God? See Jeremiah 25:3.

Find Micah 6:8. What three things does God want us to do?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



# FINGER LABYRINTH

The closer our hearts are to God's, the more we can feel God's love, ready for sharing with others. Deep in our hearts, God's love can teach us how to live. We can use a labyrinth to help our hearts listen for God's loving messages for us.

1. Decorate the path of this labyrinth with all the colours that remind you of God's wonderful love.
2. Use your finger to trace this labyrinth slowly, deep into the heart of God's love, and then back out into the world.

You may wish to repeat the following prayer, either silently or aloud, as your finger moves slowly into the labyrinth:

God of Love,  
I am listening for your voice  
deep inside my heart.

As your finger moves slowly out of the labyrinth, you may wish to repeat this prayer, either silently or aloud:

God of Love,  
show me  
how to  
share your  
love with  
others.



## What is a labyrinth?

A labyrinth is a special path for praying. It is walked in two directions: in toward the middle, and back out again. Some labyrinths are a permanent part of the floor tiles in churches or meeting halls. Some labyrinths are outside, laid out in gravel or chalk in gardens or on lawns. Some labyrinths are painted on cloth and can be taken anywhere. Some are drawn with a stick on a sandy beach and are washed away in the next tide.

Labyrinths can be different sizes. Some are very big, big enough for several people to walk on at once without bothering each other. Other labyrinths are so small that only your finger can "walk" on the path. Many people all over the world have used labyrinths for hundreds of years to help focus their hearts and minds in prayer.