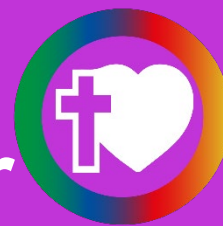




Faith Adventures for Children Together



*Committed to URC Children Together:
enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus
together in the home, church and beyond.*

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link:
<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf>

Joel 2: 28-29 – God is.... Spirit

Theme: Involve God in everything because God’s involved in us

Contents:

Introduction	1
Together	1
Experience	2
Explore	3
Express	5
Handouts	8

Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning?

This reading from Joel emphasises the message that God’s Spirit is for everybody, not just the rich, or the important – but the least in society too (in Old Testament times, that would have been females, children, servants and slaves). The focus of this passage is not just on the people who will be filled with the Spirit (everyone!) but God’s desire, and promise, that the Spirit will fill everyone.

The recommended translation uses some less than inclusive language – talking of sons/daughters, young/old, women/men. This may not be something which is an issue for your group, but be aware that you might need to explore this a little more – is the Spirit not available to the middle-aged or people who don’t identify fully with only one gender? Being poetic language, and also written in a time when it might have been taken for granted that the Spirit would be given to some, may give some insight into the way it was expressed.

One of the questions to ask in ‘talking together’ is about the difference between a dream and a vision. Ask yourselves this question to help you prepare. Do we dream about things that have happened, and have visions about things that might happen in the future? If so, how does Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech fit? Perhaps a dream is passive but a vision is active – and that’s why the Spirit will give old people dreams, but young people visions?

What is clear in the passage is that being filled with the Spirit requires us actually to do something – to proclaim (share) the good news of God’s love for God’s creation with the people we meet.



And, remember, if our children and young people have dreams and visions, the Church (and church) has to give them opportunity to share and to help them realise that future – not continually give them reasons why “it’ll never work.” What might that mean in your situation?

Together

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend

(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,

(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,

(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better,

(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family

(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three ‘steps’ as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN

(Two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.

Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.

Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,

Adventuring together with you wherever we may go.

Amen

In-person Game – Full to the brim

This is a fun and simple game to play with a group of two or more. It’s a lovely way to play with the idea of pouring out.... like God pours out the spirit.

Everyone has a bottle of water or a shared jug.

There is a large glass on the table.

The leader starts by half filling the glass and explaining that we will all take it in turns to add some water – let’s see how long we can keep it going before it overflows. You might want to show them this clip. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/FpRFeH5iSjk>

You can always have a consequence for the one who makes the water spill.



Alternative game – Flapping Fish and Feathers

Each individual, or team, playing the game will need a paper shape (roughly 3 or 4 cut-outs per A4 page is a good size) or a coloured feather and a piece of A4 paper or card. Agree a starting point for the competitors to line up and mark a finish line with masking tape.

After a countdown or whistle start, those taking part fan their shape or feather along the floor, towards the finish line with their piece of paper. Anyone touching the feather with their hands or feet should be disqualified.

The winner is the player whose feather or shape crosses the line first.

Experience

For this story we recommend using the Good News Bible

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joel+2%3A+27-29&version=GNT>

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: How is 1 GOD 3 Different Persons? https://youtu.be/km3iVR_tSik

Over fives: Who is the Holy Spirit? Douglas Talk. God is the Holy Spirit (Older children)

<https://youtu.be/b9yN5VcHTQ0>

Songs to support the story

Under fives: Song – Holy Spirit <https://youtu.be/T4eW2Hvizul>

Five to eevens: Not By Might (Zechariah 4:6; Joel 2:28) Memory verse song

<https://youtu.be/hqynsEohXi8>

Explore

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A way to explore the story

We suggest two parts to explore together. Firstly, What is the Holy Spirit? and secondly, Prophecy as a key theme of the passage.

Part One

Begin by asking the group, 'What do we know about the Holy Spirit?' Capture their ideas and comments in some way, perhaps on a large board. Resist the urge to comment or correct too much at this stage.

Explain or clarify that God is in three aspects/parts. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can see God as Spirit all through the Bible.



The Holy Spirit through the Bible

You could do a remembered Bible approach here if you have time. Ask the children to draw or write parts from the Bible that spoke about the Holy Spirit, then put them in Bible order as a group.

Or simply prepare a Holy Spirit timeline and show it to the group, allowing space for questions and comments. You might want to ask what was the spirit doing at each stage?

For example:

Creation – God's Spirit was over the waters at creation, Genesis 1: 2

Jesus birth – Holy Spirit came upon Mary, Luke 1: 35

Jesus' baptism – We see the Holy Spirit come down like a dove, Matthew 3: 16

Joel/prophets – God's Holy Spirit speaking through others to give encouragement or warnings, Joel 2: 27-29

Pentecost – God's Spirit given freely, poured out for everyone – God with us always through the Holy Spirit, Acts 2: 14

Final piece is a question mark, asking what does the Holy Spirit do for us today?

From beginning to end, the Holy Spirit has always been active: In the beginning, creating, and at the end of the story, tending to us. The Spirit comforts us, helps us, guides us, reminds us, teaches us, comes along side us, counsels us, and intercedes and advocates for us.

Part Two

One of the things this passage talks about is seeing through God's Spirit and speaking God into situations: Prophecy, dreams and visions.

Game – Say what you see

Play this simple game to explore the idea of people passing messages on from God, and how people heard or not.

One person looks at a shape or image - it can be a picture or perhaps a shape made from building blocks. They then need to describe it to everyone else (who cannot see it). The hearers must try to follow the instructions to create the same image. Encourage them to be as descriptive as possible without using the obvious words, as prophecy was often quite poetic language/imagery. For example, "place a yellow block" might be said as "place one block the colour of the sun" or "draw a green square" could be expressed as "draw a shape with four equal sides that is the colour of grass".

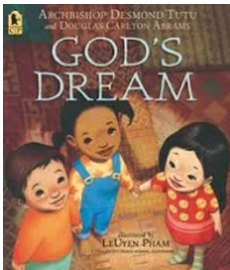
Once the communication has taken place, compare the original with the images created by the hearers.

Wonder together about what this can tell us about God, prophets and those who heard the prophet's words. Did the hearers always understand fully? Did they always follow the instructions given by God? How might that link with our experience or expectations today?



Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too.



'God's Dream' by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams
<https://youtu.be/TnDDvOkdHgM>

Talking together: How might we talk about the story together?

- What does God's Spirit look like?
- How do you know when God's Spirit is in you? What does it feel like?
- What is the message you want to share? What do you want to speak God into?
- How can you share God's message and get people to listen to you?
- If you thought you had a message from God, who would you talk to about it?
- I wonder what the difference is between a dream and a vision?

Wondering together: suggested questions to use during activities

- I wonder what your dreams are – for you, for your family, for your community, the world?
- I wonder what you want to share with others about God?

What's in the box (for under fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing "what's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). You could tap the top of the box twice after the word 'box'. Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- Bubbles – blow some bubbles around the children. Talk about God's spirit being everywhere and all around us
- Paper chain people – we are all connected through God's spirit and the message passes from one person to another
- A big thought bubble – God has big dreams of us all. I wonder what you dream of?
- A dove – the Holy Spirit is sometimes depicted as a dove. Talk to the children about images they can see around the church which may represent the Holy Spirit. (If you don't have many in your church maybe put some images up in a hall.)
- Some feathers – God's Spirit is gentle but strong. Feathers help birds to fly and God's Spirit helps us to live
- An LED candle – God's Spirit is sometimes described like a fire – fire keeps us warm and helps us see in the dark
- A paper windmill – blow and make the windmill go round. God's Spirit is like the wind – we can't see it but it makes amazing things happen
- A set of play people to act out the story or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (e.g. stones, felt, twigs etc)



Express

Praying together: how can you involve the children actively in prayer?

Creative Prayer – Kingdom Coins

You will need:

- card circles (just a little smaller than a paper side plate) that have been painted/coloured gold or yellow
- marker pens

Our reading from Joel promises that God has poured out the Spirit onto everyone – so that must mean that there are already signs of the kingdom with us now – if we look hard enough. In the Good News as told by Matthew (13:44), Jesus says that the kingdom of God is like a treasure. How much gold do you need to have a 'treasure'? Is one gold coin a treasure? 10? 20?

I wonder if we can find enough signs of God's kingdom to create a treasure?

What you do:

Give everyone a blank gold 'coin' and a pen.

Invite them to think about examples of what might be signs of God's kingdom that are already present in our world today. This could be friends, people who love us, people who take care of us, things from nature that are beautiful, or situations that are peaceful.

Invite them to write their ideas onto a 'kingdom coin' (younger ones might need help with this).

When everyone has finished, gather the coins into a big pile and, together, thank God that signs of God's kingdom are already here on earth.

Alternatively:

The reading from Joel also talks of dreams and visions. Dreams and visions show us how God's world could be. On the other side of the coins, write dreams and visions for God's world. It could be things on a large scale like there being no more wars or the hungry being fed or the climate crisis stopped, or it could be things on a more personal scale such as a younger sibling not being bullied at school or getting more chance to go outside at church.

When everyone has finished, gather the coins into a big pile and, together, ask God to hear your prayers and help you bring God's kingdom just that little bit closer by doing what you can do to make a difference.

(With thanks to Dorking URC for the idea)

Spoken prayer

God of love,

You want us to be your friend, help us to be open to your friendship

You want to give us your Spirit which helps guide us each day

Help us to share your message of love and friendship

To those around us and to the world,

put your dreams and your visions in our minds

and help us to share our dreams and visions with you too.

Amen



Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond. [See here for more suggestions.](#)

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

Wind sock

The spirit is something which cannot be seen but can be felt a bit like the wind. We know it is there because we feel it and the effects of it. Creating this wind sock helps illustrate this idea.

You will need:

- card
- pens
- sticky tape
- hole punch
- ribbon
- scissors



What you do:

Decorate a rectangular piece of thin card with different coloured patterns.

Place a few holes evenly spaced on the end of one of the longer sides of the card and tie ribbon through the holes.

Bend the card into a cylinder shape and attach using sticky tape.

Use the hole punch to create 2 or 3 holes at the opposite end of the cylinder to the ribbons and tie some ribbon to enable the wind sock to be hung up.

Attach outside

(Be aware this isn't water proof, to create a water proof version consider laminating the paper before placing ribbon on it)

Filling the jar

This activity will be an opportunity to think a bit more about God's spirit.

You will need:

- A glass jar
- Some medium stones
- Some small stones
- Some sand
- A jug of water
- A tray



What you do:

Stand the jar on a tray to catch any spillages!

Our lives get filled with all sorts of things. Think of the different things that are part of life – e.g. school, church, clubs etc. Fill the jar with medium sized stones.

In around them we squeeze in other things – think of what these might be – e.g. watching TV, playing games, doing homework or chores. Fill the spaces in the jar with small stones.



Anyone would think there wouldn't be room for anything else – but the love of our families and friends surrounds us and is there for us throughout our lives. Think of who these people might be. Fill the spaces in the jar with sand.

Now the jar is full. But is it? The holy spirit fills every part of our lives and fills us to the brim with God's love. Pour in water until the jar overflows.

Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- Go outside for a walk and see where you can see evidence of the wind blowing, whether it is stormy weather or just a gentle breeze. Think about how the wind can make things happen, even though you can't see it, just like God's Holy Spirit. Thank God that the Spirit is for you just as much as anybody else.
 - When you say your prayers, make some time just to be quiet and listen for God. You may not hear God speak, but if you are still and patient, you may find yourself knowing what God wants to say to you.
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We hope you enjoyed exploring the story from **Joel** with us.

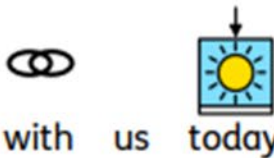
Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk

Why not have a look at next week's resource on **The Trinity**?

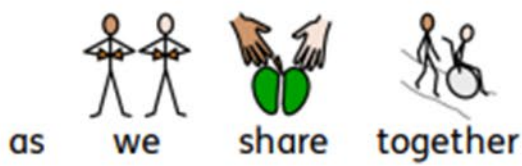




Jesus our friend,



be with us today



as we share together



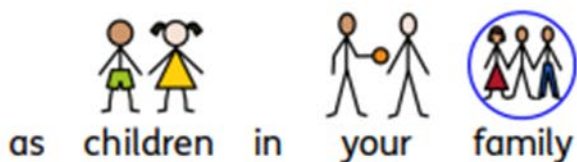
pray together



play together



and get to know you better



as children in your family



Amen





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