

# Teaching the Joy of Service

## Concept

In trying to teach small children The Joy of Service, we are taking on quite a challenge. Not many children are born with a gift for sharing and serving. Often they are too self-occupied to think of or understand the beauty of sharing and service. But they are particularly capable at this formative age of learning both.

Thank goodness for Christmas. Even though it seems that this season could be another reason for children to be self-absorbed, it can provide the perfect atmosphere to teach the principles of sharing, service, and giving, which is what this unit is all about.

*We realize that some families who do Joy School are not Christian and may hesitate to have their children participate in the Nativity Play that is included as part of this unit. But if the story is simply presented as the story upon which the celebration of Christmas was originally based (like the story of Saint Valentine that spurred the celebration of Valentine's Day, the story of Saint Patrick that spurred St. Patrick's Day, or the origins of All Hallows Eve and All Saints Day that spurred Halloween), you may find that the nativity play will work well for all children and families. If, however, your group decides not to include the simple little Nativity play that is part of the program that children will prepare and present in this unit, they can simply present the other parts of the program (there are several songs about giving and loving that are not religious in any way).*

And thank goodness for Thanksgiving which offers the great opportunity to talk about and teach gratitude, an important prerequisite for sharing and giving. (If you live in a country that doesn't celebrate Thanksgiving at this time of year, you will see that the lessons are designed to focus on gratitude itself, not on the holiday and there is an optional lesson included for those who do celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday.)

This unit takes direct aim at the giving and serving aspects of the Christmas season, something that is generally celebrated at this time of year by Christians and non-Christians alike. While there are some references to Santa Claus, they are not the major theme of this unit. The children get enough of that elsewhere.

In order to get "in the mood" for this unit as parents, let's think through what sharing and serving can mean in the life of an adult. Ponder the illustration given at the beginning of the Sharing and Service Chapter of the book, *Teaching Your Children Joy*.

I have a friend who taught me a lesson about joy. He is a public person: that is, the public knows him. (I would guess that 50 percent of all persons in the western world recognize his name, 95 percent of those interested in sports.) One conversation we had drifted to pleasure. What did we do with our spare time? What did we do with those rare moments — rarer for him than for me — that we really had to ourselves? (Keep in mind, he could do anything, go anywhere, have anything that money could buy.) He said, “When I have a moment for myself, I try to use it to find some way to help someone. That’s where I find real happiness. It’s so much more fun than doing something for yourself.”

I’d heard that you could judge a man by what he does with his spare time. I used that criteria and judged this man as being great; maybe more importantly, I judged him to be joyful, because the joy of giving is so great. We know that is true, or should know it, because it was taught by the greatest giver of all time, in the meridian of time. (It’s interesting how, as I write, the words give and great keep knotting together.)

“He that loseth his life shall find it.” The joy comes from losing oneself in helping others, from dismissing self-worries to make room for other-worries. We make our living by what we get, but we make our life by what we give. Emerson said, “See how the masses of men worry themselves into nameless graves . . . while, here and there, a great, unselfish soul forgets himself into immortality.”

I was traveling on business, two full days away, meetings all day, free evenings. The first night I treated myself (hard day, I deserved it) to the finest meal at the finest restaurant. I went to bed satisfied, dulled. The next evening on my way to the same spot, I noticed a blind man sitting with his dog in front of a little shop, selling baskets he had made. I stopped, talked for an hour, bought a basket and a stool, cheered him up, listened to him, and learned from him. (“I’ve lost one sense and gained four,” he said.)

I told him that I liked his company, liked him as a friend, that I’d be back. I saw tears in his blind eyes as we shook hands. I went to bed that night thrilled, tingling, and, in a small but deep sort of way, a better man.

## Tips and Reminders

1. Encourage the parents to read the chapter on Sharing and Service in *Teaching Your Children Joy*. [eyresfreebooks.com](http://eyresfreebooks.com)
2. This unit includes TWO extra lessons. One is a Thanksgiving lesson (this lesson isn't included in the regularly scheduled lessons because it doesn't apply to Joy Schoolers outside the United States). The other is a Senior Center Visit lesson (you'll likely need to do this visit/lesson at a time that is different from your regular Joy School time and you'll need to have most of the parents in your group involved in helping with this visit/performance so it works best do to it on a separate day.)
3. Some of the lessons in this unit are a bit more extensive in their preparation than those of the earlier units. . But we think you will agree that they are worth it. Some will work best if two parents work together on them (depending on how many children are in your group). It is crucial for two parents to lead the group on the day of the Christmas program. (Three may even be needed, if your group is large.) Ideally the parent who takes Lessons 4.3 and 4.4 should also help with the "show" as she knows best what is supposed to happen.
4. Each parent who teaches the December lessons will need to learn the dramatization and all the songs for the Christmas program. Since the children do not have speaking parts for the Nativity Play (only "going through the motions" is required), we suggest you emphasize the learning of the songs you will perform. Each parent is encouraged to listen and teach the songs at home to help the children be better prepared.
5. No parent should try to undertake the actual Christmas performance by themselves. You will need one parent to read the script and at least one (two is even better) other parents to dress the children and keep them to one side until their turn. This is especially important if one child is playing two or three parts, which is often necessary.
6. The lessons include the suggestion that children put on the Christmas program a second time — an evening Joy School party/fundraiser performance for all parents, family members, and friends. The "audience members" are invited to "pay admission" by putting a donation in the amount of their choice in a donation box. The proceeds have been earned by the performers and the children get to give "their money" to a charity or cause that your group selects in advance. You'll want to plan the date for this party/fundraiser right away as December gets so busy. This event should take place after lesson 4.6 which includes preparation for the event. (Further details in the lesson overviews below.)

## Lesson Overviews

### Optional Thanksgiving Lesson

This lesson has great songs and activities which all center around gratitude and awareness of the many good things we have (an important factor of the Joy of Service). The children will learn the story of the first Thanksgiving and will be making the traditional corn bread for snack time. It works best if this lesson is presented just prior to Thanksgiving.

### Lesson 4.1: Gratitude

### Lesson 4.2: Acts of Service

The children will learn about the concept of gratitude and make a thankful list. They will get to do some secret services and do a special service for a neighbor. They will be bringing home a service chart at the end of 4.2 which should be filled out by a parent and sent back to Joy School next week, for lesson 4.3..

### Lesson 4.3: Giving of Ourselves

### Lesson 4.4: Christmas Teaches About Sharing - Program Introduction

This week children learn about how to “give of themselves” and begin preparations for the “Christmas Show” that they will be performing for elderly/disabled people and for their families. If it is possible for the parent who best teaches songs to take this week, it would be very helpful. The better the children learn the songs, the greater their satisfaction and “carry-over” will be. Consider teaming up and having two parents at the second lesson for this week when children will be working quite extensively on their songs and Nativity Play.

You may find it helpful to watch these short videos of some different renditions of Joy School Nativity Plays and Programs:

[Joy School Nativity Slide Show](#) (this video was made as a keepsake for the children at their final rehearsal before their performance)

[Joy School Nativity Play](#) (at a family performance)

[Full Christmas Program](#) (includes Nativity and songs and giving out gifts at a rest home)

## Lesson 4.5: Straw in the Manger and Program Practice (To be followed by the Rest Home Visit Lesson)

### Lesson 4.6: Preparing for Family Program

This week includes the “visit to (or from) the grandpas and grandmas” and preparation for the Joy School Family Christmas Party/Fundraiser.

#### Senior Center Visit Planning and Scheduling

The actual “Senior Center Visit” (or whatever you decide to do) will need to happen on a separate day and time from your regularly scheduled Joy School time and will need to involve 2-3 parents taking the group to the performance (perhaps while the other 2-3 parents in the group watch any younger siblings of Joy Schoolers).

It is ideal for you to do your “Senior Center Performance” right after lesson 4.5 has been presented (this is the lesson that includes all the final preparation for the Rest Home performance). So if your group usually meets on Mondays and Wednesdays, a Tuesday would be ideal for the Rest Home visit/performance. If you usually meet on Tuesday and Thursday, Wednesday would be the ideal time.

This activity is so important to the theory of this unit. It accomplishes some things that are virtually impossible in any other setting. We found almost unanimous resounding success with this experience in the past years. If this is your second or third experience, you may feel you know some of the “old people” involved and look forward to it even more.

#### Tips for Success:

- If this is your first year, it is important to make **early** arrangements with a rest home, nursing home, assisted living center, senior center, or home for disabled people to bring the children there to present a short program. When asking about whether you can bring your group to do a little performance, let them know your performance would only take about a half an hour and offer some flexibility on times that you could come (but do all you can to secure a day that will fit well with your lesson schedule as suggested above).
- Choose a venue that is not too far from your neighborhood or invite elderly neighbors to the designated home for the show.
- Visit the place where you will be performing in advance to learn about what they children should be prepared for (Are the people responsive? Do they have disabilities the children should be prepared to see?) and to learn what facilities are available. (Is there enough space for the children to perform? Will a microphone be necessary? Can you hang a star above the “stage?” How many residents will you need “gifts” for, etc.)

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- Many Senior Centers are swamped with program offers at Christmastime and you may have to schedule yours early. It might be best to choose a relatively small one so you won't need to make too many gifts.

If you do choose a Care Center with very elderly and/or disabled people, be sure to explain to the children that many people will be sick (in body and mind) and may do things that seem unusual, but that it's just their way of communicating because they are so old. (This is reiterated in the lesson plans.)

If you can't arrange for a visit to an assisted living center, the program can be adapted for presentation to some elderly or disabled person in their own home, or you might just invite some elderly widows or widowers from the neighborhood into your home. Some feel that this is a simpler and better idea. Bring a camera — you will get some choice pictures!

### **Family Christmas Party/Optional Fundraiser Planning and Scheduling**

This will be a lovely summation of a month of Sharing and Service for the children. Children will have a chance to share the Christmas Program (Nativity Play and songs) that they've worked so hard on with their families (and more friends and relatives if your group chooses to make this a fundraising event).

As December can be really busy, we suggest you choose a time well in advance for this event. Many groups find that a Monday evening can work very well for all the Joy School families to gather together for this event. As lesson 4.6 involves final preparation for this party/performance/fundraiser, you'll need to pick a date AFTER lesson 4.6 will have been presented.

## **By the End of This Unit...**

By the end of this unit you will find that not only will the children have a new sense of the importance of gratitude but as parents you also will have a new appreciation for the value of thanksgiving!

Whether or not you are Christian, what the children will have learned by the end of this Unit during the Christmas season about how joyful it is to share and serve others in a meaningful way will be priceless! Through the years we have heard from myriads of parents who have found that the lessons and special programs of these units have created joyful memories that have lasted for a lifetime.

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## Discussion Questions for Group Meeting

While you are together, discuss, make decisions and make assignments based on the needs for this special Unit:

- Decide when/whether to include the optional Thanksgiving lesson.
- Is everyone comfortable with the Nativity Play being included in the program the children prepare?
- Do you think it will work best to present the children's Christmas program at a Senior Living Center or would you like to invite some elderly or lonely people to attend a special performance held at one of your homes? What connections or ideas do parents have as far as a venue/group that the children could present their program to as a special service to brighten some people's holiday season?
- Which parent would like to set up the venue/audience for this performance?
- Decide on the date and time for the Rest Home/other group performance and lesson. (Needs to be after Lesson 4.5 where they do all their practicing and preparing for this performance.) It can work well to simply add a Joy School day to the week when Lesson 4.5 is being presented (i.e. if your group usually meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays, you could do the rest home performance on a Wednesday morning or afternoon).
- Would your group like to make your Joy School Family Christmas Party (where the children put on their performance for family) into a fundraising event where children have the chance to "earn" money to give to a charity they learn about or a needy family?
- If so, which charities/causes would your group like to support? (It's great if the charity/cause you choose has pictures and/or videos on their website that you can show to the children.)
- What will be the date/time for your Joy School Family Christmas Party or Fundraiser? You will need to choose a date that falls AFTER lesson 4.6 has been presented (as this is the lesson where they prepare for the Family Party.). Many groups find that a Monday evening works quite well. Around 6:30 or 7pm, when parents are done with work and families are done with dinner, is usually a good time.

- Is everyone comfortable with the Nativity Play being included in the program the children prepare?
- Which parent would most enjoy/do the best job leading the children in learning and putting on the program (Nativity Play and songs)?
- Do you think it will work well to present the program at a nursing home, rest home, or hospital? Would you like to invite some elderly people to attend a special performance held at one of your homes? What connections or ideas do parents have as far as a venue/group that the children could present their program to as a special service to brighten some people's holiday season?
- Which parent would like to arrange the venue/audience for this performance?
- Would your group like to make your Joy School Family Christmas Party (where the children put on their performance for family) into a fundraising event where children have the chance to "earn" money to give to a charity they learn about or a needy family?

## Book List

*Bold number: needed for that lesson. Other books might help during Mellow Time or Gathering Time.*

<b>4.1</b>	<i>Saying Thank You Makes Me Happy</i>	Wanda Hayes	This classic book demonstrates the joy of gratitude. If unavailable, choose from below.
<b>4.4</b>	<i>The Christ Child</i>	Maud and Mika Petersham	Illustrated as though in Palestine 200 years ago and follows King James' Bible account from Matthew and Luke.
	<i>Share and Take Turns</i>	Cheri Meiners	Concrete examples about sharing.
	<i>How Do Dinosaurs Play With Their Friends</i>	Jane Yolen, Mark Teague	This rhyming book helps kids see that it's better to share and be kind.
	<i>Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed</i>	Emily Petersen	One little girl's kindness sets off a chain reaction that betters the world.
	<i>How Kind!</i>	Mary Murphy	Farm animals do nice things for each other in, passing along kindness.