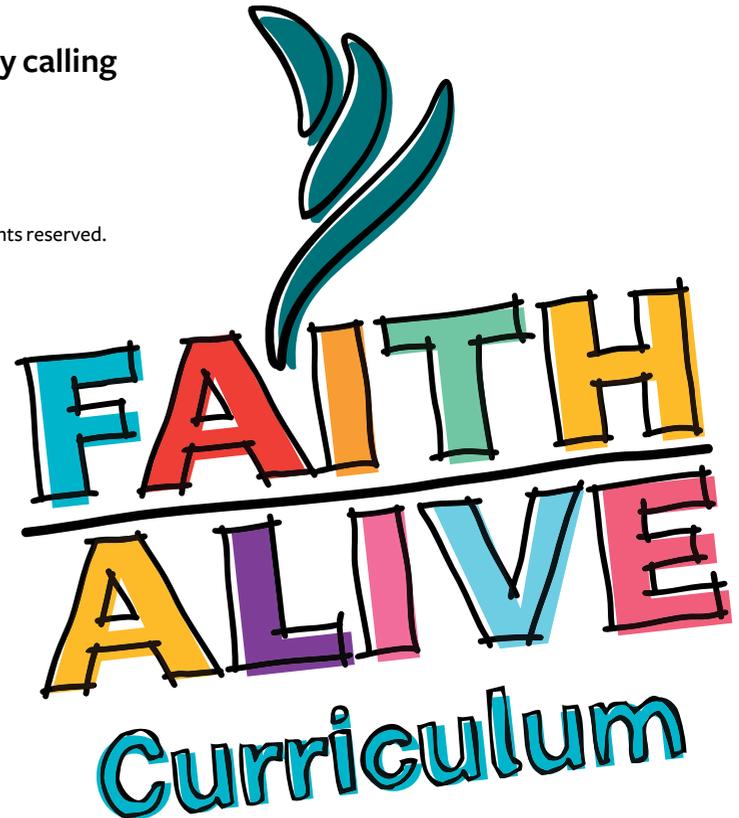


Sample

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Dear Family,

The unit theme we will be focusing on for the next four weeks is “Our God Is Faithful.” Through the stories of Esther and the return of God’s people from Babylon to Jerusalem, the children will gain in their understanding and appreciation of God’s faithfulness to us—even in very difficult times and circumstances.

Each week your child will be taking home a paper that will give you a glimpse of the stories and truths we are learning. If you’d like to read and talk about some of those stories as a family during the week, the following references may help:

Week 1: Esther (Part 1, Esther 1-4)

Week 2: Esther (Part 2, Esther 5-10)

Week 3: Home Again (Ezra 1, 3; Isaiah 14:1)

Week 4: New Hope for God’s People (Isaiah 9:6, 53:5-6; Jeremiah 33:15-16; Daniel 7:13-14; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9, Malachi 3:1, 4:2)

You may want to talk as a family about the many signs of God’s faithfulness in your lives. Spend some time praising and thanking our great God together for always being there for us—in good times and bad.

Sincerely,

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Sincerely,

Memory Challenge

You made them ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
—Psalm 8:6-9, TNIV

Psalm 8:6-9 (King James Version)

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:
All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;
The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.
O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Memory Challenge

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
—Psalm 8:6-9, NRSV

Drama: Danger at the Palace

Slowly read these statements to your actors, pausing to allow them to act out the lines. You will need the following characters:

- King Xerxes
 - Queen Vashti
 - Mordecai
 - King’s friends, princes, advisors, and nobles
 - Queen’s friends, princesses, attendants
 - Esther
 - Haman
 - Messenger
1. The mighty king of Persia, King Xerxes (*Zurk-seez*), was very proud that the Jews and many other people were under his power. “My empire stretches all the way from Africa to India,” he boasted, holding his hands far apart to show how far his empire stretched.
 2. To show off the greatness of his kingdom, King Xerxes decided to give a huge party. Celebrating at the party were all of the king’s friends, princes, advisors, and nobles—and many more besides. The celebration lasted six months. It ended with the men eating and drinking at a banquet that lasted seven days. The men were so full that they staggered around holding their stomachs and groaning.
 3. Queen Vashti and all her friends and attendants also had a banquet of their own. They laughed and told stories and had a great time together.
 4. While the queen and her friends were enjoying their dessert one night, a messenger from the king suddenly ran into their dining hall. “Your majesty, his majesty the king wants you to come to his banquet right now,” the messenger said to the queen. “He wants all the men at his banquet to see how beautiful you are,” he added with a smile. But the queen wasn’t smiling, not at all. “No way!” she said, shaking her head and stomping her feet. “I refuse! Go tell the king that I’m staying right here!”
 5. When the king heard that Vashti had refused him, he threw a royal fit. How did she dare refuse him in front of all the nobles and princes of his kingdom? He turned many shades of red. He pounded the table. He shook with anger. Finally he calmed down a little and asked his advisors what he should do.

6. “Get a new queen!” his advisors said. “Yes!” shouted the king, jumping up and down. “That’s exactly what I’ll do! Yahoo!”
7. So, because the king was powerful and could do anything he wanted, he ordered all the beautiful young girls throughout the land to be sent to the palace so he could look them over and decide who would become the new queen. These girls had no choice. They had to obey the king, leave their families, and go live at the palace.
8. Among those selected was Esther. She was a beautiful Jewish girl whose parents had died. Her cousin Mordecai was taking care of her. Mordecai made the trip to the palace with Esther. There he got a job that would allow him to keep a watchful eye on his cousin.
9. “Do not tell anyone at the palace that you are from a Jewish family,” Mordecai whispered to Esther before leaving her at the palace. “The people in power here don’t like the Jews,” he said. “Remember, we are a nation that Persia conquered. We are living here in their land as their subjects. So say nothing about your nationality, you understand?” Esther nodded. She would obey Mordecai.
10. Everyone at the palace liked Esther. She was given special food to eat and received special beauty treatments for over a year. She probably got a little tired of being doused with perfumes and lotions all the time. And of course, she must have missed her old life, her old friends, and her cousin Mordecai, who was like a father to her.
11. But the king thought Esther was a star—in fact, that’s what her name means in Persian. She delighted him far more than any of the other girls who had been taken to the palace. In fact, he was so delighted with her that he set the royal crown on her head and declared her queen instead of Vashti. They had a huge celebration, with all of the king’s friends and all of Esther’s friends attending. Esther could not believe that she—a Jewish girl—was the new queen!
12. Meanwhile Mordecai landed a nice job at the palace—watching the gate to be sure not just anybody would come waltzing into the

palace. One day he overheard two of the king's men plotting to kill the king. Immediately Mordecai sent a messenger to tell Esther so she could tell the king. The king's soldiers seized the men and put them to death. Thanks to Mordecai, the king was safe.

13. In the king's court was a wicked noble named Haman. He constantly flattered the king, putting his arm around him and telling him what a great man he was. The king fell for Haman's flattery. "I'm making you the most powerful man in my kingdom—except for me, naturally," said the king, putting a fancy ring on Haman's finger. "I'm commanding everyone in my court to bow down when they see you, just like they do for me."
14. After that, wherever proud Haman went, he expected people to flop down in front of him as if they had been hit by lightning. Then he would look down on them and remind himself how great he was. One day, though, he ran into Mordecai, on duty at the palace gate as usual. Of all things, Mordecai flat-out refused to bow down! Haman nearly lost it right then and there. And to make matters worse, the same thing happened again and again and again.
15. "I have to get that miserable Mordecai," thought Haman. He thought and he thought and he thought some more. Finally, he smiled an evil smile. "I'm going to kill Mordecai and every other Jewish person in the kingdom," he said to himself. He drew a number out of a basket to determine when the killing would take place.
16. The next day Haman went to see the king. He put on a sad face and told the king how grieved he was that a certain group of people in the kingdom refused to obey the king. "Sire, you can't let these wicked people live," said Haman, wiping big crocodile tears from his eyes. "If you agree to have them destroyed," Haman said, "I'll put twenty million dollars into your treasury."
17. "You are a good man," said the king, patting Haman on the head. "Keep your money. I'll issue a decree that all these bad people will be killed, just as you wish." The king did not know, of course, that his new queen, Esther, was one of the people he had just ordered to be killed. Esther had never told him that she was a Jew.
18. A few days later, Haman sent messengers to all parts of the empire. They posted a decree saying that that the Jews in the kingdom— young and old, men, women, and children— must be killed on the 28th day of February of the following year.
19. When Mordecai heard the terrible news, he wept aloud and tore his clothes and put on old mourning clothes. Esther saw Mordecai from her palace window and wondered what was wrong. She sent a messenger to Mordecai with new clothes to replace his torn ones.
20. But Mordecai refused the fine new duds. He gave the messenger a copy of the king's decree saying all the Jews must be killed. And Mordecai sent a message to Esther urging her to go to the king and beg for the lives of the Jews.
21. "Oh no, I can't do that!" Esther thought when she received the message. Then she started shaking with fear. She knew that no person—not even the queen—could pop in on the king like that. No, the king first had to invite someone to see him. If she went uninvited to the king and he did not extend his golden scepter to her, she'd be history! She could be killed for her foolishness. She twisted her hands together, worrying, not wanting to disobey Mordecai but not daring to disobey the king either. So she sent a messenger to Mordecai, telling him of the danger his request would bring her.
22. But Mordecai sent the messenger right back to Esther with another message. Esther sat down and slowly opened it. It said: "Esther, do you think you will escape there in the palace when all the other Jews are killed? Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the kingdom for just such a time as this." Esther shook her head, but she knew Mordecai could be right. Could she have been chosen for such a time as this? Had she been chosen queen so that she could speak up now and save her people?
23. Esther was afraid. She needed the support of her people. She sent the messenger back to Mordecai with this message: "Mordecai, go and gather all the Jews in this area and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days and nights. My maids and I will do the same. Then, though it's strictly forbidden, I will go see the king. And if I die, I die."

For Such a Time as This

Read each situation and check a response that most closely matches the way you think you could help out.

- The reporter for the evening news show goes to a local soup kitchen. She informs listeners that four hundred children were served at the soup kitchen this month. That's an increase of fifty children from last year. She also says that more families than ever before are homeless. You wonder what it would be like not having your warm bed at night and what it would be like to have to eat in a soup kitchen. You decide to
 - find out about volunteer opportunities at the soup kitchen.
 - find out what groceries the soup kitchen needs and talk to a teacher at school or church about organizing groups to collect those groceries.
 - bake brownies or cookies and bring them to the soup kitchen.
 - eat with your family at the soup kitchen so that you know better how to serve or pray for those in need.
 - other idea: _____
- A new family moves into your neighborhood. You wonder what it would be like to be in a new place and not know anyone. So you decide to
 - bake something with a parent or older sibling and bring it over as a welcome gift.
 - find out if the new family has any kids. Invite them to your house after school to play games or do something else that's fun.
 - make a welcome card for the new family.
 - offer to help them clean up the yard, wash windows, or walk their dog.
 - make a list of the best things to do in your area and the best places to eat. Give them the list and perhaps a map or a few coupons.
 - other idea: _____

- Pictures of an apartment fire flash across your TV screen one evening. The next day the newspaper describes how many people lost all their belongings. A collection site is set up at the local fire department or at your church. You decide to
 - open your piggy bank and give some money.
 - join a group of young people who are washing cars or doing some other fund-raiser to raise money for the victims.
 - gather items such as blankets, clothing, or food.
 - make story cards for the children who lived there to encourage them and to let them know someone is thinking about them.
 - other idea: _____
- People with disabilities who come to your church struggle because of the steps and doors that are hard to open. You decide to
 - mention the problem to an adult in your church so that they see something must be done.
 - visit other churches to see what they do to make their building accessible. Give the suggestions to an adult.
 - make yourself available to hold open doors when people start to arrive.
 - make a list of all the problem areas. Brainstorm with a few friends about what can be done.
 - other idea: _____
- A neighbor of yours is old and lives alone. You decide to cheer her up by
 - making a card every week or so and putting it in her mailbox.
 - praying for her.
 - getting your church school class to send her cards and visit her.
 - doing small chores for her that she can't do herself.
 - other idea: _____

Scroll Story Scenes

Read the continuation of the story of Esther. Then cut apart the three sections of the story and tape or glue them to your Esther scroll.

Though she risks her own life, Esther appears before King Xerxes without an invitation. In terrible suspense, she waits before the throne. Then the king holds out his golden scepter to her, showing that she is welcome! Esther invites the king and Haman to her first banquet.

King Xerxes and Haman attend Esther's banquet, and Esther invites them both to a second banquet. On the way home, Haman meets Mordecai, who doesn't bow down to Haman. This makes Haman hate Mordecai more than ever. Haman listens to the advice from his wife and builds gallows on which to hang Mordecai.

That night the king can't sleep. For entertainment on this restless night, the king's servants read the records of his kingdom to him. He hears that the Jew Mordecai prevented two nobles from killing him. In the morning King Xerxes decides to honor Mordecai. He asks Haman to think of a reward for a special citizen. Haman thinks the reward is for him, so he suggests a ride on the king's horse through the city. When Haman finds out the honor is for Mordecai, he is more eager than ever to hang Mordecai on the gallows.

King Xerxes and Haman go to Esther's second banquet. This time Esther names Haman as her enemy and the enemy of her people. She reveals that Haman tricked the king into agreeing to a law that said all the Jews must be killed. The king is furious! Haman pleads with the queen for his life, but he is hung from the same gallows he prepared for Mordecai.

Esther pleads for a new law that will save her people from the attack that Haman had planned and that the king had approved. Mordecai also appears before the king. Mordecai asks for a new law that will allow the Jews to protect themselves against those who attack them. The king puts his seal on this law and honors Mordecai with blue and white garments, a golden crown, and a purple robe. The new law is proclaimed throughout the land. The leaders in the land decide to be on the side of the Jews.

On the thirteenth day of Adar (February 28) the enemies of the Jews attack. But the Jews strike down all their enemies with the sword. On the fourteenth day of Adar the people rest and feast. They give presents to each other and gifts to the poor. Their sorrow has been turned into joy. It is a day that the Jews will celebrate each year as they remember how they were saved from wicked Haman. Their day of celebration is called Purim.

Secret Messages

Cut apart coded messages with answer keys. Place one message on each chair.

Message 1

7 15 4 9 19 20 8 5 15 14 5 23 8 15 19 1 22 5 19 21 19
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Message 2

14 30 8 18 38 40 16 10 30 28 10 46 16 30 38 2 44 10 38 42 38
2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40 42 44 46 48 50 52
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Message 3

F N C H R S G D N M D V G N R Z U D R T R
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
Z A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Message 4

H P E J T U I F P O F X I P T B W F T V T
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
Z A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Salvation Messages

Cut these five messages apart, attach to a small treat, and place in a basket.

Esther and Mordecai saved God's people from an evil law that would have destroyed them. It only happened once.

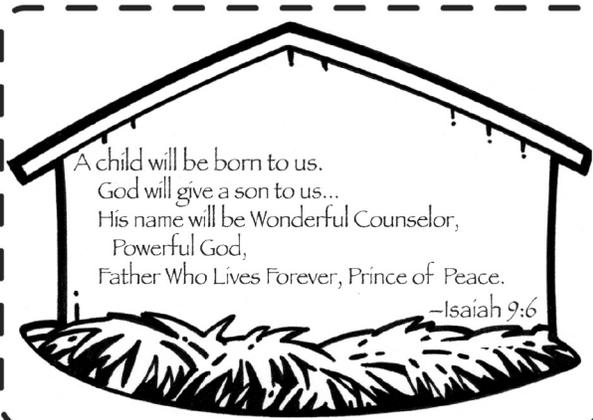
Moses brought the people out of Egypt and saved them from Pharaoh. It only happened once.

Gideon saved the people from the Midianites. It only happened once.

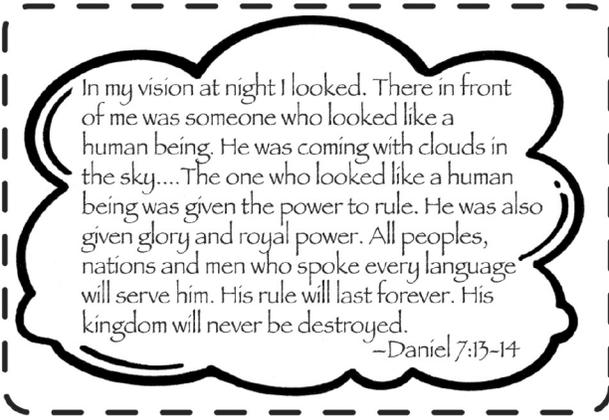
Samson destroyed many Philistines when he caused the building to fall down on them. It only happened once.

Jesus saved God's people when he died and rose again. Jesus also saves his people today, and he will save them tomorrow. Jesus saves forever!

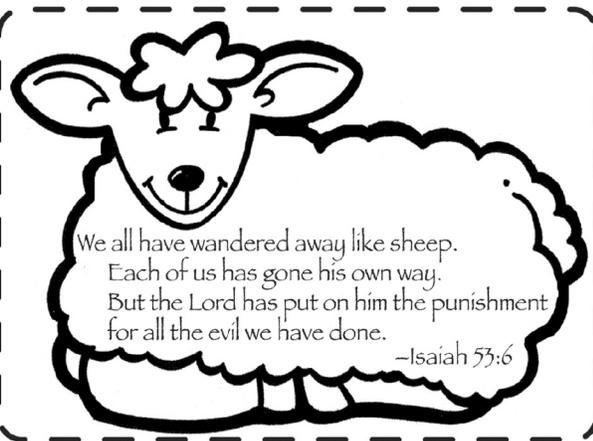
Prophet Timeline



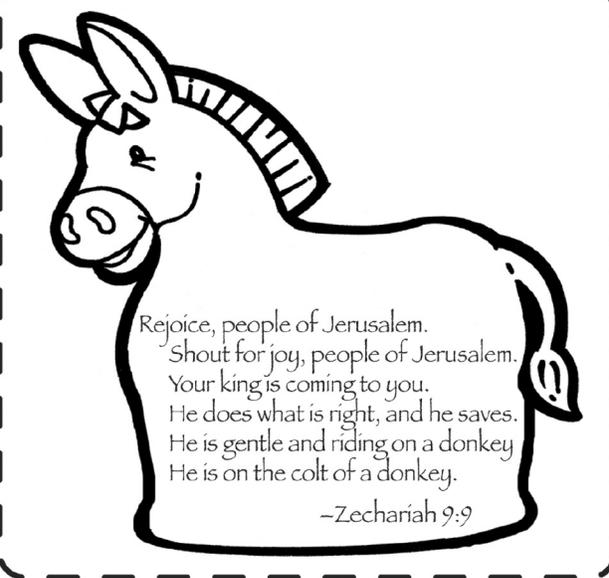
A child will be born to us.
God will give a son to us...
His name will be Wonderful Counselor,
Powerful God,
Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.
—Isaiah 9:6



In my vision at night I looked. There in front of me was someone who looked like a human being. He was coming with clouds in the sky.... The one who looked like a human being was given the power to rule. He was also given glory and royal power. All peoples, nations and men who spoke every language will serve him. His rule will last forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed.
—Daniel 7:13-14



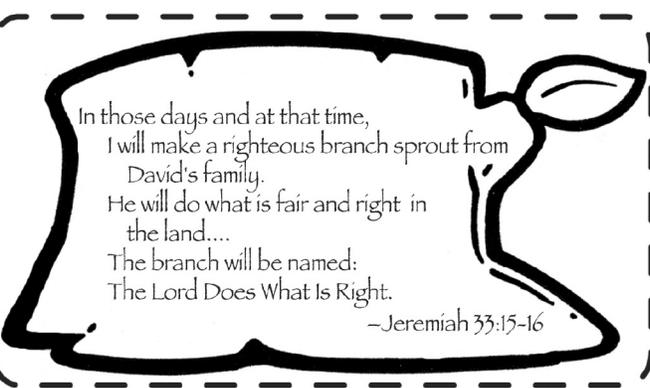
We all have wandered away like sheep.
Each of us has gone his own way.
But the Lord has put on him the punishment for all the evil we have done.
—Isaiah 53:6



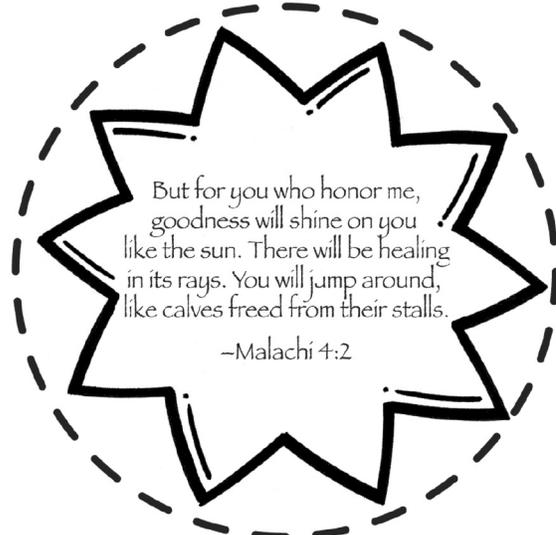
Rejoice, people of Jerusalem.
Shout for joy, people of Jerusalem.
Your king is coming to you.
He does what is right, and he saves.
He is gentle and riding on a donkey.
He is on the colt of a donkey.
—Zechariah 9:9

BETHLEHEM

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are one of the smallest towns in Judah.
But from you will come one who will
rule Israel for me.
—Micah 5:2



In those days and at that time,
I will make a righteous branch sprout from
David's family.
He will do what is fair and right in
the land....
The branch will be named:
The Lord Does What Is Right.
—Jeremiah 33:15-16



But for you who honor me,
goodness will shine on you
like the sun. There will be healing
in its rays. You will jump around,
like calves freed from their stalls.
—Malachi 4:2

Make a Scroll

Photocopy and cut out the scrolls (one per child).

Because Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor, I _____.

Because Jesus is a Mighty God, I _____.

Because Jesus is the Everlasting Father, I _____.

Because Jesus is the Prince of Peace, I _____.

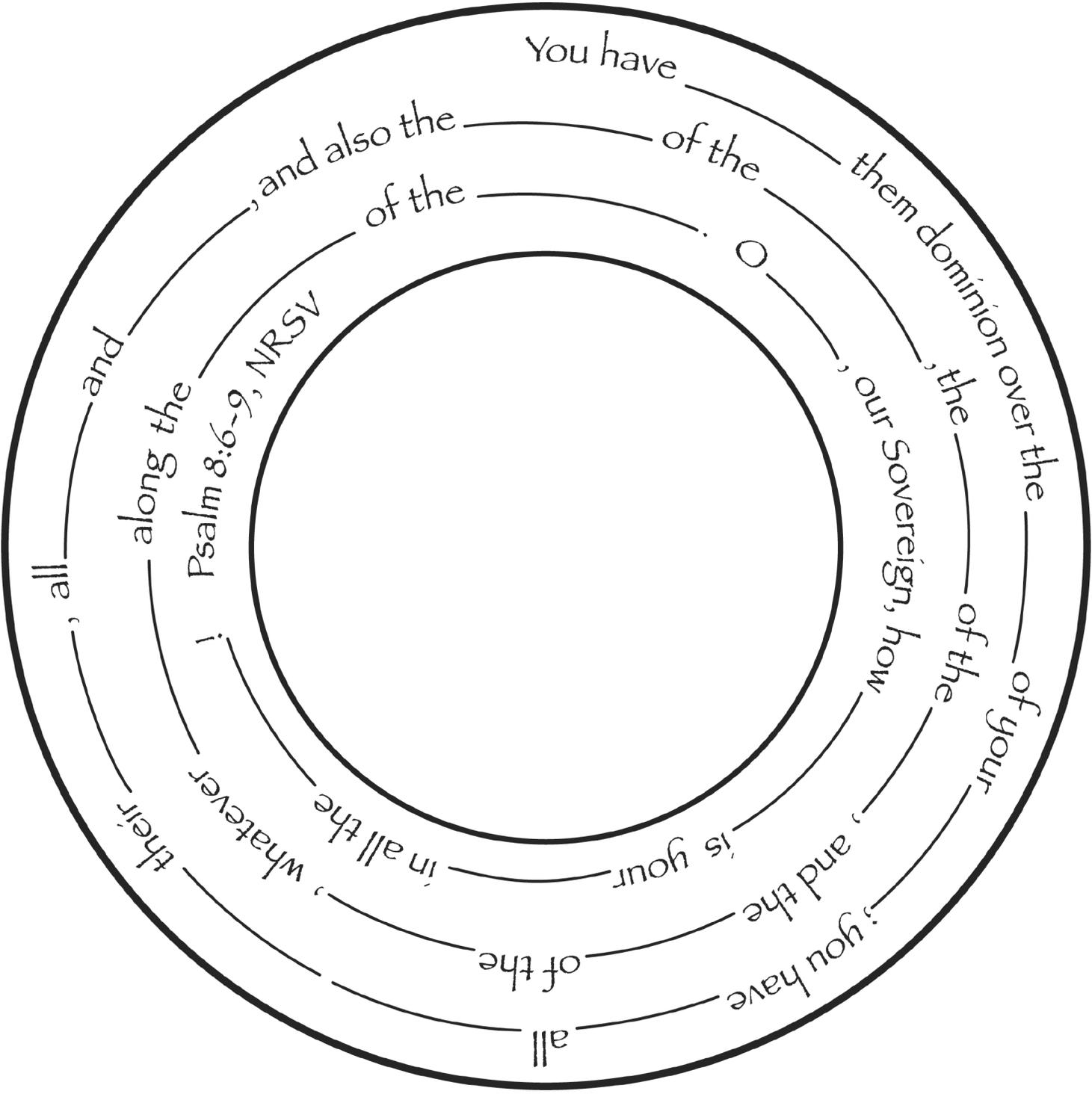
Because Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor, I _____.

Because Jesus is a Mighty God, I _____.

Because Jesus is the Everlasting Father, I _____.

Because Jesus is the Prince of Peace, I _____.

Memory Challenge Frame



Memory Challenge Frame

