



Rhinos = Year 5 – 6



Tigers = Year 3 – 4



Meerkats = Year 1 – 2

Wildlife – Journeying with God (8/8)

In Wildlife we have been looking at an 8-week series focused on Old Testament characters and their journeys with God, in particular how their faith is tested and grows. So far, we have looked at Noah's journey of faith, how God used Moses for amazing things even though he felt like he wasn't good enough, Gideon's journey in finding strength in God, Ruth's loyalty, Hannah's faithfulness to God despite being bullied, David's obedience to God's plan and Solomon's Wisdom!

*Each week also has a **gospel element** threaded through where we will be using these O.T characters to point to Jesus (the series will end by looking at the whole purpose and meaning of Easter).*

Session 8: Ezra the Encourager

Teaching point: This is week 8/8, the final week in our series 'Journeying with God' and looking at how different people's journeys of faith were (and are) so different! This week we are going to be looking at the story of Ezra! Ezra was a descendant of Aaron (the brother of Moses) and was chosen by God to help encourage the people in their obedience and staying true to God!

Introduction

Welcome back to Wildlife online! I hope you all found the session interesting, rewarding and maybe even fun! If you were able to do last week's session, do you remember what it was about? Or should I say who? That's it, it was all about King Solomon and his wisdom. Now this week is our last week in this series 'Journeying with God' where we have been looking at how everyone's journeys with God are different. And yet Jesus shines through all of them!

This week we're going to be finishing up the series looking at a little book in the Bible towards the end of the Old Testament. The person we're going to learn about became very important in looking after the Israelites, and his name is... (any guesses?) Ezra! [No not George Ezra! This Ezra was super encouraging, and **definitely** not a pop singer!]

Message

Teaching Point: This is the story and the teaching part of Wildlife! Feel free to read all of the message prepared or summarise bits, or just read the story straight from the Bible. If you want to read from the Bible (which might be good for the older Rhinos) we will be looking at Ezra 8:15-35 in particular.

So, who was Ezra and what was his journey with God? Well, before you dig into his story let's just do a little recap on what has happened in the Bible using the timeline below!



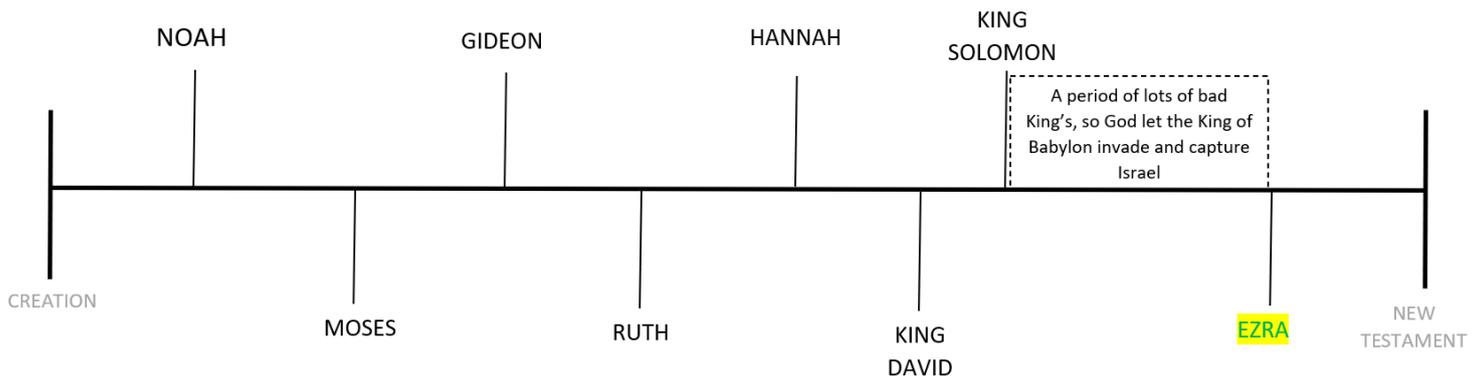
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So, after King Solomon, the nation's that made up Israel began to disagree and so they split off into 2 areas, 'Israel' and 'Judah', each with their own king. But most of these king's were bad and ignored God, doing what **they** wanted instead of **what God wanted** and what was right! And so God let his people be taken into captivity by the King of a local country/nation called Babylon. They stole all of Israel's gold, silver and animals. They destroyed towns/cities and the temple that King Solomon had built! And the Babylonians made all of the people slaves. This wasn't a very happy time and it must have felt like God had turned his back on them.

This is where the story of Ezra comes in! The beginning of the book is all about how (some years later) the King at that time (King Cyrus) sends people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. But there are a lot of issues with people not trusting or believing the Israelites, and so the rebuilding is slow progress!

Now Ezra is a descendant of Aaron the priest, do you remember him? Moses brother. And Ezra knows the law of Moses **really** well! He trusts God and is obedient to him, just like David was. Ezra is with the second wave of people who return from Babylon to Jerusalem. And Ezra gets the job done!

It says in chapter 7 and verse 6 that '*... the hand of the Lord was on Ezra*'.

He was special and chosen by God to lead the Israelites and encourage them! And even whilst Ezra and all the people returning to Jerusalem were travelling, Ezra made sure to encourage them to behave how God wanted them to behave. In those days this was about fasting (which means eating no food and often no drink!) and praying to God. Because of Ezra and his trust in God's strength and his encouragement to the people, they returned safely praising God!

And we too can be encouraging to others. This might be at these times just messaging or phoning your friends and making sure they're okay. Or maybe looking after a little brother or sister who might be scared at the moment.

When we pray to God and ask him for strength, we can trust that he will look after us! And then we can encourage other people to do the same! God loved his people then, and we see this in how he chose and helped Ezra to lead and look after them. **But he also loves us as much today! So much that he sent Jesus to die for us!!**



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Game

Since this week is all about building and rebuilding, why not try and play a game all about building! You could play a game of Jenga. Or if you have building bricks or Lego you could have a competition to see who can build a tower or maybe a church building the quickest!

Or what about a challenge to see if you can build a really strong building. You can then test it by balancing objects on top, or if you're feeling more destructive then maybe by throwing objects at it to see if it breaks (but **soft objects** like a bean bag, or a small cushion, or toilet roll).

[Feel free to send me some pictures of any masterpieces created! I might even include some pictures in next week's Wildlife pack!]



Connect Activity: Craft

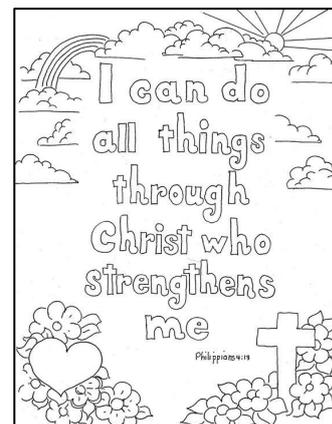
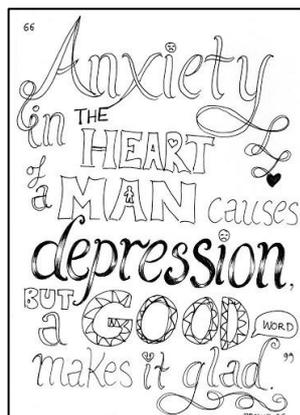
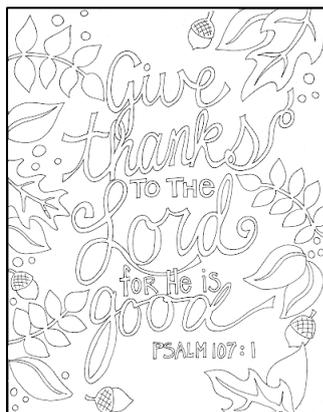
Let's be encouraging in this time of worry and people being scared! So why don't you design a really happy picture to stick in your window so that anyone who walks by your house can see it!

This could be something like a drawing of a really fun time you had with your friends or family – maybe playing football, or going swimming, or going on holiday or having a water fight in the summer! Anything that makes you feel happy and might encourage other people. If you do this it would be really great to put something that God says that is really encouraging at the bottom as well! **Because God's words bring strength and encouragement to those who read them.**

Here are some ideas of things you could write:

- 'When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.' Psalm 56:3
- 'Jesus told them, "Don't be afraid, just believe." Mark 5:36
- 'Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers them up!' Proverbs 12:25
- 'Do not be afraid, or discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.' Joshua 1:9
- 'When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer.' Psalm 94:19

Or, you can print off the templates attached below with a bible verse on them and decorate these to stick in your window!





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Rhinos Discussion questions:

Spend time **watching the video** linked below which provides a summary on the book of Ezra. It's quite full on but well worth a watch – even just to understand the wider story and context of Ezra!

- 1) **So why was Ezra so special?** [Because he encouraged the Israelites when they returned to Jerusalem to follow God and be obedient to his laws]
- 2) **What do you think Ezra's journey was? And how do you think he might have felt having such a key role in the people returning to Jerusalem?** [Maybe he felt honoured that God chose him? But it must have been hard work! Encouraging and leading others is a massive responsibility!]
- 3) **Can you remember the name of the other main people mentioned in the book of Ezra (and the summary)?** [Nehemiah, Zerubbabel (what a funny name!), King Cyrus, King Artaxerxes]
- 4) **Ezra was a very important leader for the people, encouraging them and helping them stay obedient to God. In what ways do you think Ezra and Jesus are similar?** [Both loved and chosen by God, both encouraged people in their faith and obedience to God. But Jesus came as the ultimate sacrifice to save us!]
- 5) **What practical ways can we be encouraging one another? This is especially relevant at the moment when we can't see people and everyone is more worried/stressed!** [Practical ways to encourage friends = phoning/texting/checking in with them. Family = maybe encouraging them by being there for people to talk to, or helping your family do the dishes or do some cooking!]

Why don't you have a go at making something encouraging to put in your windows so people walking past can see! This could be using the bible verse templates below, or you could make your own picture and add one of the encouraging/uplifting bible verses that are mentioned in the craft section above!

And remember that encouragement isn't about doing things for you but for other people!



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Worship

Teaching Point: In Wildlife we like to worship together, and whilst it won't be the same as when we're all together in Wildlife that doesn't mean we can't worship! Why not play the songs and dance to them together? Or put worship songs on whilst you're all getting lunch ready? [Links to songs are listed below]

This is the last week of our series (Journeying with God) so let's make the most of singing the song '**All Through History**'! I have attached a link to both YouTube videos below – one with a video and lyrics, and one with the actions. How much do you know of the song by now?

You could also sing/dance/listen to the song '**Way maker**' which we have been learning in Wildlife recently!

And if you'd like to listen to more worship songs – especially ones that we have been singing in Wildlife – then head over to the Ascot Life Church website, click on 'Children' and have a browse under the sub-section 'YouTube Worship'!

Links:

Video summary of the book of Ezra -> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2mHeaHjWII>

All Through History song -> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQS2HHayr38>

Actions for 'All Through History' song -> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ixs2l2hzv4>

Waymaker -> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wyotu9Twko>



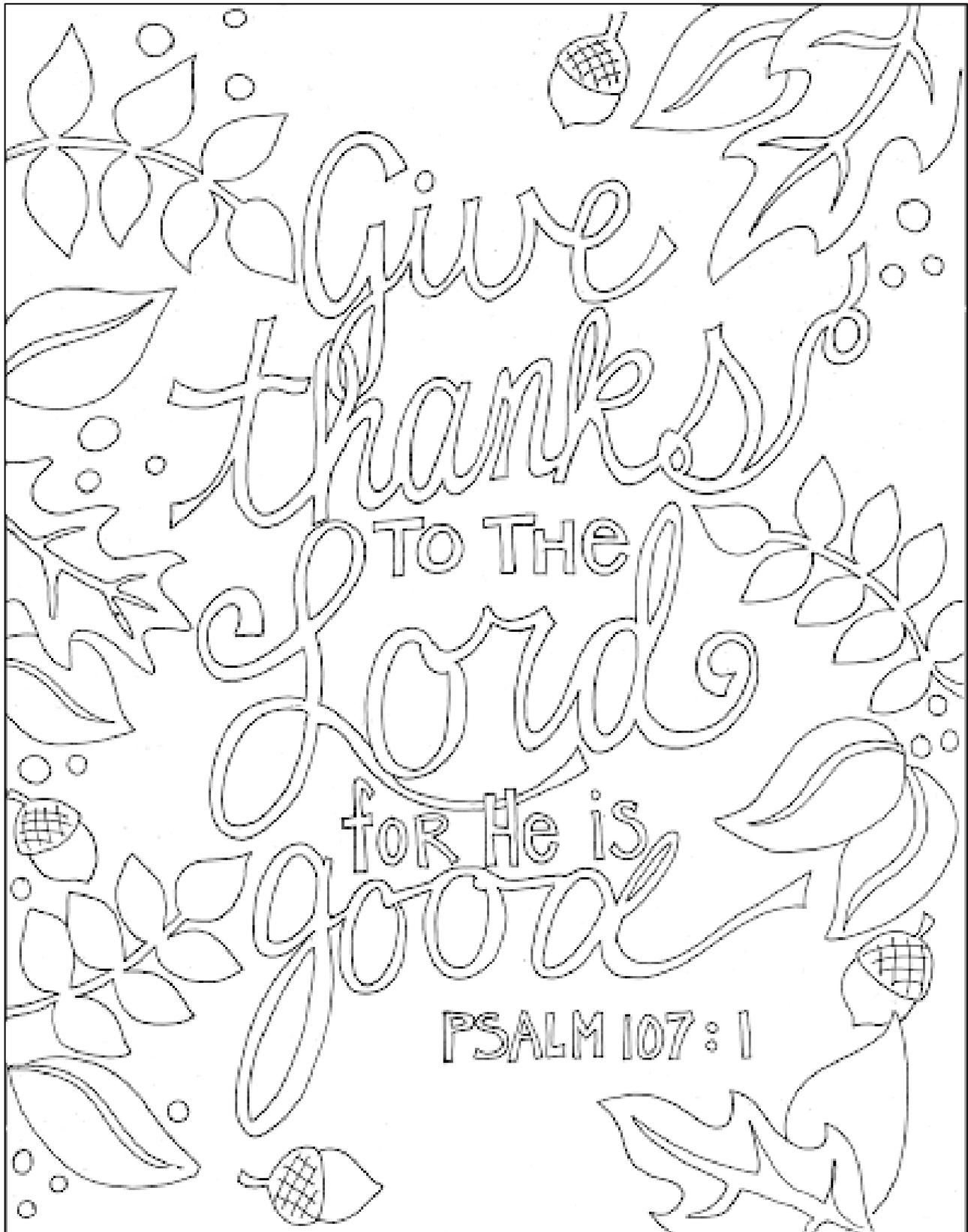
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Anxiety
 in THE
 of HEART
 a MAN causes
 depression,
 BUT a GOOD WORD
 makes it glad.

PROV 12:25



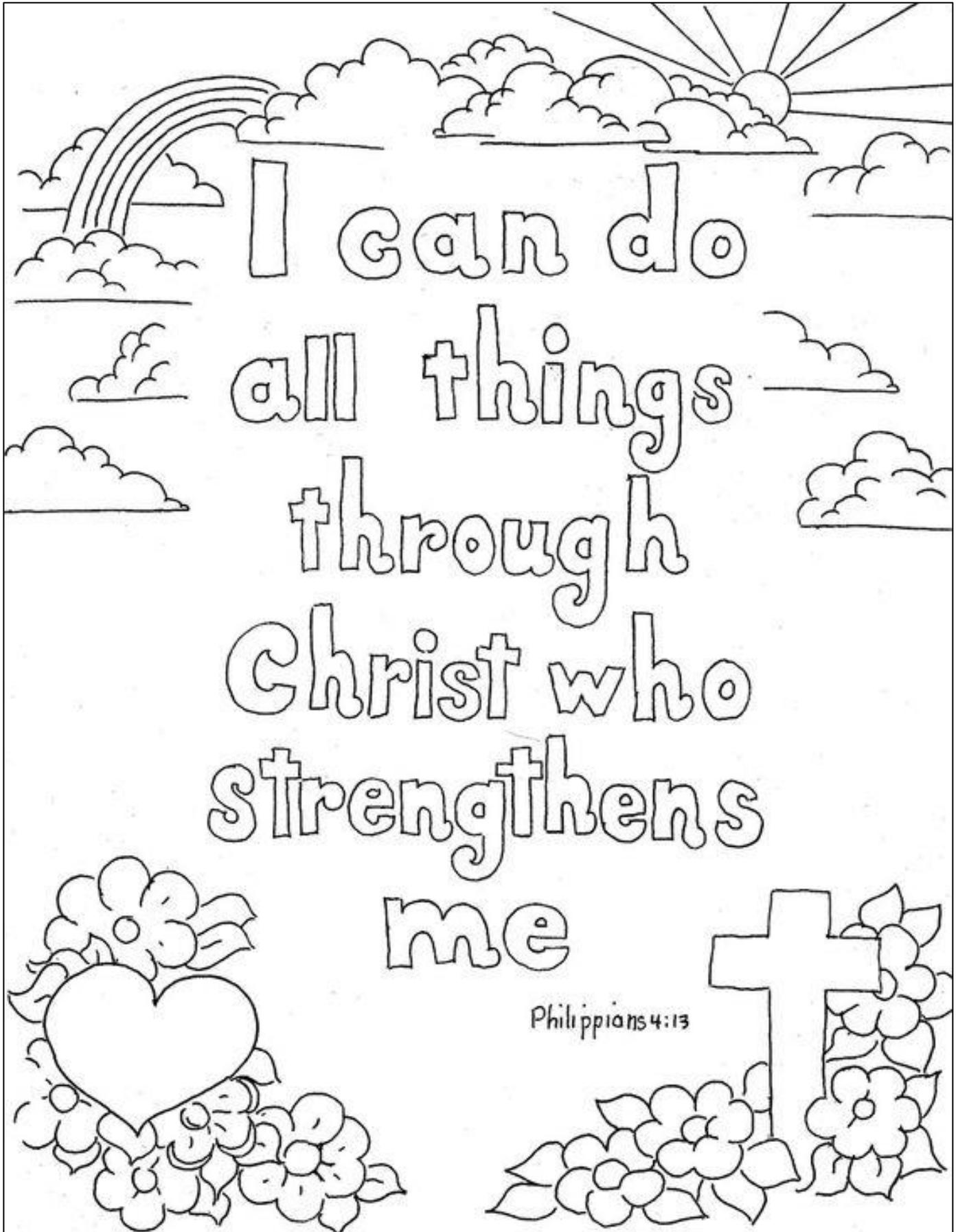
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I can do
all things
through
Christ who
strengthens
me

Philippians 4:13