Introduction

Fall 2019 examines Old Testament stories that reflect worship—ways we come before God in worship and ways in which God meets us, calls us, and sends us. Beginning with the beginning, in Genesis 1 we celebrate the grace, beauty, and joy in God’s good creation. Children hear that they are a part of God’s activity in the world—they are created in God’s image and God calls them very good. Our response considers Psalm 8, encountering the wonder of creation through praise.

The story of Moses’ call at the burning bush helps us to live into the promise that we, too, are recognized by God and called by name. In worship we are called to come just as we are, with our doubts and reservations, just as Moses stood before that bush wondering if he could do what God was calling him to do. Then as we receive the Word of God, we learn ways in which we love God and love others. As Moses and the Israelites offered their gifts and skills to create a tabernacle to represent God’s presence on earth, we, too, give thanks. Then as Joshua and the Israelites crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, carrying God’s Word with them, they stopped and remembered God’s activity in their lives, marking the moment with ritual.

God’s people have opportunity time and time again to dedicate themselves to following God. In the story of Ruth, we hear of an outsider, a woman, who has the chance to stay in her comfort zone. Instead she chooses to go with Naomi. Ruth’s words become an affirmation of faith, a commitment to follow God.

In two stories of David, where he brings the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem and his song in Psalm 122, we get a sense of the joy of worship. Both express the delight of worship.

In our last three sessions, we turn to aspects of our participation in worship through confession and repentance, what God truly desires from us, and life application. Jonah must confront his disobedience and turn back to God. Micah reminds us that God doesn’t want “stuff.” God wants us to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. Finally, Esther puts her faith into action “for such a time as this,” reminding us that we can live what we believe too.
Overview of the Fall 2019 Quarter
Session Dates, Titles, Scriptures, and Goals
The complete scope and sequence can be found at pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads.

September 1, 2019
God Saw How Good It Was
Genesis 1:1—2:3
Goal: To celebrate the grace, beauty, and joy in God’s good creation.

September 8, 2019
Praising God
Psalm 8
Goal: To praise God for the gifts of creation and practice caring for the earth.

September 15, 2019
Moses and the Burning Bush
Exodus 3:1–15
Goal: To learn that God knows us and calls us by name.

September 22, 2019
Loving God
Exodus 20:1–11
Goal: To name ways to love God.

September 29, 2019
Loving Others
Exodus 20:12–17
Goal: To name ways to love others.

October 6, 2019
The People Give God Thanks
Exodus 35:20–29
Goal: To give thanks to God with willing hearts.

October 13, 2019
What Do the Stones Mean?
Joshua 3; 4:1–8, 19–24
Goal: To mark times of God’s activity in our lives.

October 20, 2019
Your God Shall Be My God
Ruth 1:1–22
Goal: To trust and follow God.

October 27, 2019
David Brings the Ark to Jerusalem
2 Samuel 6:12b–15, 17–19
Goal: To celebrate God’s presence with worship.

November 3, 2019
Let Us Worship
Psalm 122
Goal: To worship with praise, thanksgiving, and prayer.

November 10, 2019
Jonah
Jonah 1—4
Goal: To recognize our mistakes and turn to God.

November 17, 2019
What Shall I Give?
Micah 6:6–8
Goal: To recognize what God desires from us.

November 24, 2019
Esther Saves Her People
Esther 4—7
Goal: To discover ways to turn our faith into action.
Resources and Session Components

Growing in Grace & Gratitude curriculum is available for fall, winter, spring, and summer in two formats: 1) print and ship, and 2) downloadable PDF. Each season’s material for the leaders includes:

1. Session plans for embracing children in the grace of God through engagement with the Bible

2. Session title, session goal, and background information
   - Recognizing God’s Grace helps leaders explore the Bible story with a focus on God’s grace in Scripture.
   - “In Your Children’s Experiences” and “In Your Relationships with the Children” provide leaders with an understanding of the children’s needs, abilities, and interests.

3. Three movements that echo Presbyterian and Reformed worship
   - Gathering in God’s Grace
     A hospitable welcome calls children to sing and pray to God, to hear and reflect on the Bible story.
   - Responding in Gratitude
     A choice of age-appropriate activities based on the group size and time available. Some activities (noted as “more prep”) require advanced planning and/or additional supplies.
   - Loving and Serving God
     An invitation to discipleship that inspires children and their families to practice hospitality, generosity, and love.

4. Grace Notes (GN)
   - Black-and-white reproducible pages that provide activities and crafts.

5. Stories, Colors & More (SCM)
   - Colorful resources are provided to aid in the flow of the sessions.
   - The Support Map offers practical suggestions for working with children who have difficulty communicating, transitioning, reading, or writing and children who are visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, or in need of mobility support. The Support Map also provides tips for celebrating the strengths of children through leadership, generosity, and fairness.
   - Colorful illustrations of the Bible stories spark imagination. The stories appear on the back of the illustrations to make it easy for the leader to show the art while reading the story.
   - Other colorful resources, such as teaching pictures and maps, are now organized in session order.
   - Music & Melodies: Song lyrics sheets are gathered in the back of the resource.
Supplemental Resources

- **Music & Melodies (MM)** includes tracks with familiar lyrics as well as new child-friendly tunes. *Music & Melodies* is available as a separate purchase. Purchase one CD per age level.
- A free, downloadable e-book includes the same colorful illustrations and Bible stories from weekly sessions.
- Free *Grace Sightings*, an online resource to print or email home, includes a summary of the week’s session and age-appropriate activities for home use.
- Free story audio of the weekly Bible stories.

Basic Supplies

All materials beyond this list will be specified in the supply list for each session:

- Bibles
- CD player
- cleanup supplies
- coffee filters
- cover-ups or smocks
- craft supplies (e.g., cotton balls, craft sticks, glitter, stickers)
- crayons, large and small
- cups, napkins, plates, utensils, drinking straws
- glue and glue sticks
- hole punch
- office supplies (paper clips, rubber bands, self-adhesive notes)
- paint, paintbrushes
- paper (card stock, construction, drawing, index cards, mural paper, newsprint)
- paper bags (lunch-sized, grocery-sized)
- pencils, colored pencils, markers, pens
- pipe cleaners
- plastic bags (ziplock, garbage)
- play dough
- rhythm instruments
- ribbon, string, yarn, scarves
- round-tip scissors (some left-handed)
- stapler, staples
- tablecloths
- tape (duct, masking, painter’s, transparent)

Reusing Materials

Encourage church members to collect a variety of materials for art projects, such as:

- buttons, ribbon, yarn
- clothespins
- egg cartons
- plastic containers
- shoe boxes
- old magazines, catalogs, newspapers
- paper tubes (from gift wrap, paper towels, or toilet paper)
- used gift wrap and cards
Including Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

Create an environment that helps children of all abilities experience God's grace by becoming familiar with the developmental terms, descriptions, and icons on the Children with Disabilities and Special Needs Support Map (in *Stories, Colors & More, SCM iii–iv*). Colorful icons (from the map and notes about specific needs are incorporated into each session to offer ways to adapt activities. (Note: While many of the activities could fit in multiple categories on the support map, for simplicity only those that require particular attention have been identified.)

Use the Visual Schedule (in *Stories, Colors & More, SCM i–ii*) to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group. By consistently using these tools, you will help your faith community discover and practice grace-filled ways to be the body of Christ with and for all children.

Support Highlight: Transitions

Children deal with transitions differently; some move fluidly from one activity or area to the next, while others require advance warning and reminders. Keep in mind:

- Waiting can cause some children anxiety.
- Set parameters and expectations ahead of time to lessen stress and allow children to prepare for situations.
- Using a visual schedule such as the one provided on *SCM i–ii* allows children to see the progression of the session and anticipate change times.
- Use verbal cues such as, “In three minutes, we will move to story time.”
- Use strategies to smooth transitions, such as singing a song or using a snap-clap sequence.

Learning what works for your group helps all the children feel secure in their setting. *Growing in Grace & Gratitude* provides transition tips in many of the sessions.

Ideas for Working with Pre-readers

- Keep small pieces of scratch paper handy so you can quickly write a word for a child to copy.
- If a child is struggling with an activity that calls for writing a word, write the word using dotted lines so he or she can trace it.
- Form pairs to solve puzzles. Encourage children to help one another—there’s no need to cover their papers so others can’t copy!
- If you observe a child struggling to work independently on an activity, offer to be his or her partner. If many are struggling, work as a group to complete the activity.
- If a child seems frustrated by writing an answer, suggest that he or she draw a picture of the response or act it out. You also might offer to write what the child dictates to you.
- Offer old family-friendly magazines with pictures that can be cut out and used to illustrate a response or complete a project.
- When a child is trying to sound out a word, don’t be too quick to jump in and help. Whether he or she finally decodes the word or you provide it, affirm the new skill of reading and how hard the child is trying.
Flyaway Books

Flyaway Books (flyawaybooks.com) is a children’s picture book imprint from Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. These books reflect themes of diversity, inclusivity, kindness, compassion, self-esteem, and care for our world, as well as retelling familiar religious stories in new ways. Flyaway Books titles are available at pcusastore.com.

Scheduling Tips for Ages 3–5

Here are some suggestions for scheduling, depending on how long your group meets:

- If children are attending a session for one hour or less, allow ten to fifteen minutes for each session component, including cleanup and other needs.
- If children are attending a session for two hours or more—with some children arriving and leaving between the hours—allow fifteen to twenty minutes for each session component, repeating guided play, story time, and activities without repeating snack. Allow time for cleanup and other needs between components.

Using Guided Play with Ages 3–5

Guided-play activities are part of the initial moments of the session, when children focus on a particular activity that encourages them to pretend and play. If your group meets in a room that is already set up for toddlers or three- to five-year-olds, it may have areas prepared for specific activities such as reading, building, pretending, or drawing. If so, use these areas for guided play. If your room is not organized in that way, use the suggestions provided in the session for setup and content. You may have other ideas. Feel free to design your own guided-play areas.

What Do Children Ages 3–5 Need?

Young children need extended playtime for their physical and emotional development. You do not have to fill the whole session with structured activities. Your most important task is to show God’s grace and love to each child.

There are big differences in children who are three years old and children who are five years old. You will need to adjust some activities depending on the ages of the children in your group. For example, five-year-olds may have experience with structured activities; three-year-olds are just learning those skills. Allow the children to be involved in activities at their level of ability and interest. Some children may just observe, and others may want to tell the Bible stories themselves.

Each session will include structured opportunities for experiencing God’s grace and a response of gratitude. Those activities begin to teach the children about God’s love and about ways they can respond thankfully in their lives, and they also provide children with opportunities to follow instructions and do what the group is doing. Exercise grace in inviting and encouraging them to participate, but also be graceful in allowing for flexibility and being aware of their needs.

Be alert to what activities your children enjoy, and don’t be afraid to repeat their favorites. Repetition helps children learn.
A Note about Candles

Growing in Grace & Gratitude suggests the use of a candle in the worship space for most sessions. Jesus said: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). The lighting of the candle reminds us of this and signifies presence of the Holy Spirit with us. Most churches have a policy around candles and either lighting real candles or using battery-operated candles. While we simply state “candles,” Growing in Grace & Gratitude recommends using battery-operated candles for safety around children.

Team of Contributors

The development team of Growing in Grace & Gratitude is grateful to have an amazing team of educators and writers to collaborate in the production of this curriculum.

Elizabeth Caldwell wrote the “. . . In Your Children’s Experiences” and “. . . In Your Relationships with the Children” sections. She is visiting professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School and served on the faculty of McCormick Theological Seminary for more than thirty years. Lib previously served as an educational consultant for three Presbyterian churches in northwest Alabama. She is a member of the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education and the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators and was selected as APCE’s 2004 Educator of the Year. She serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Childhood and Religion and was a member of the editorial board of the Common English Bible. Lib is the coeditor of Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible and coauthor of God’s Big Plan, both from the children’s book imprint Flyaway Books. She is the author of The Ministry of Teaching: Christian Formation Today, part of the Being Reformed Workbook series from Geneva Press.

Sharon J. Harding contributed to our stories. She is a Christian educator and writer of a variety of curriculum materials for children, including Feasting on the Word Curriculum, Whole People of God, and children’s sermons for pastors. She has worked in ministries for children and youth at churches in Quebec and Alberta in Canada.

Deborah Huggins is our consultant for children with disabilities and special needs. She is the writer of Children with Disabilities and Special Needs Support Map. She is a Presbyterian teaching elder and church educator, with an MDiv from the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. Deborah was a special-education teacher. She is working on a PhD in special education, researching access and inclusion for people with disabilities in communities of faith. Deborah is married to Jeff Huggins; they have three children.

Don McKim wrote the biblical background in “Recognizing God’s Grace.” He is an honorably retired Presbyterian minister who has been an editor for Congregational Ministries Publishing and Westminster John Knox Press, a seminary theology professor, and an academic dean. He is the author and editor of a number of books on Reformed theology, including Introducing the Reformed Faith; Presbyterian Beliefs: A Brief Introduction; Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers; More Presbyterian Questions, More Presbyterian Answers; and the Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology. He lives with his wife, LindaJo McKim, in Germantown, Tennessee. They have two married children and two grandchildren.