

Growing

in
Grace & Gratitude

Ages 3-5

Fall 2023



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Introduction

Living as God’s people isn’t always easy, but we have stories in the Bible of people who have tried their best to follow God’s ways. As God’s people, we can also look to these stories as examples, learn from them, and try our best to be faithful children of God. This fall we will explore people from the Old Testament, our ancestors in the faith, as they exhibit characteristics of faithful living.

In the story of Noah, we find a man who is known as one who “walks with God.” In the midst of people who have turned away from God, Noah is chosen for his faithfulness to save humanity and the animals.

Our next example of faith doesn’t start out that way. Abram and Sarai are chosen by God, for no particular merit of their own. God simply asks them to trust and obey, and they do, and in doing so become father and mother of God’s people. Their grandson, Jacob, steals the blessing and inheritance from his twin, Esau. Though an example of cheating and trickery, Jacob ultimately wrestles with God for his true inheritance and seeks forgiveness from his brother.

After Moses leads the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, it is Miriam, his sister, who embodies the exuberance of freedom as she dances and rejoices, praising God. As the people prepare to enter the Promised Land, God gives them the most fundamental method for being a faithful person: love God and love others.

Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz show us examples of welcome, hospitality, and kindness. The shepherd boy David, long before he becomes king, shows us what it means to trust in God as he faces the warrior and bully Goliath.

Abigail, a woman and a wife caught between a foolish husband and a possible battle because of her husband’s greed, steps in as a peacemaker. She shows us how an act of kindness and food can reduce tensions. The prophet Elisha helps a woman and her family. A young slave girl shares her faith with her captor, providing him not only relief from his ailment but faith of his own in God. Queen Esther acts bravely to save her people.

As we approach Advent, we hear from the prophet Micah about peace and justice. Micah shows us how to be people who act in just ways.

Overview of the Fall 2023 Quarter

Session Dates, Titles, Scriptures, and Goals

The complete scope and sequence can be found at www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads.

September 3, 2023

Noah and the Ark

Genesis 6:8–8:22

Goal: To imagine being on the boat with Noah's family and the animals.

September 10, 2023

Rainbow Promise

Genesis 8:22; 9:8–17

Goal: To remember God's love when we see a rainbow.

September 17, 2023

Abram and Sarai Went

Genesis 12:1–8

Goal: To trust and obey God.

September 24, 2023

Jacob Sees the Face of God

Genesis 32:1–33:15

Goal: To ask for forgiveness and fix broken relationships.

October 1, 2023

Miriam Rejoices

Exodus 15:20–21

Goal: To express joyful gratitude for God's gracious presence.

October 8, 2023

Love God, Love Others

Deuteronomy 6:1–9;

Leviticus 19:1–2, 9–18

Goal: To show God's love in our everyday actions.

October 15, 2023

Welcome the Stranger

Ruth 2:1–4, 14–23; 4:13–22

Goal: To offer God's grace in the kindness we show to others.

October 22, 2023

The Shepherd Boy and the Giant

1 Samuel 17

Goal: To be brave when facing bullies.

October 29, 2023

Abigail Makes Peace

1 Samuel 25

Goal: To explore ways that showing hospitality to others can help bring peace.

November 5, 2023

Elisha Helps a Family

2 Kings 4:1–7

Goal: To hear how God helps a family.

November 12, 2023

A Girl Shares Her Faith

2 Kings 5:1–14

Goal: To practice sharing our faith with others.

November 19, 2023

Esther Saves Her People

Esther 4–7

Goal: To discover ways to turn our faith into action.

November 26, 2023

Work for Peace and Justice

Micah 4:1–8

Goal: To learn what peace and fairness feel like.

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 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.
- 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.
- The *Grace Sightings* and audio recordings are available at www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads.

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
- shoeboxes
- 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 (LG T) 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: Behavior

B

Clear Expectations—Let children know what the rules are in the classroom. If you do not want children to touch each other, tell them that before they touch each other. Using the included visual schedule is an excellent way to provide clear expectations.

Positivity—Positive supports for behavior are more effective than negative ones. The next time you are helping children with challenging behaviors, think about practicing Behavior-Specific Praise (BSP). Praise helps children learn, as does a warm, welcoming, and positive environment. Specific praise helps focus children and let them know when they get it right.

Purpose—Get to the bottom of why a child is struggling to meet your expectations. Sometimes misbehavior masks a need.

Adult Helper—Churches are communities of faith. Don't be afraid to draft an adult who is willing to shepherd a child.

Parents and Caregivers—Ask parents and caregivers what works in other situations. Let adults know what the child does well. Establishing a good relationship with parents and caregivers makes your job easier and helps children feel they belong.

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 www.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 gracious 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 the 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.

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