

Growing

in
Grace & Gratitude

Ages 5-7

Fall 2023



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Published by Growing Faith Resources
Louisville, Kentucky

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Printed in the United States of America

Table of Contents

Introduction	iii
Overview of the Fall 2023 Quarter	v
Resources and Session Components	vi
Supplemental Resources	vii
Basic Supplies	vii
Reusing Materials	vii
Including Children with Disabilities and Special Needs	viii
Support Highlight: Behavior	viii
A Few Notes about Children and Reading	viii
Flyaway Books	ix
Ideas for Working with Pre-readers	ix
A Note about Candles	ix
Team of Contributors	x

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 act faithfully as Noah did.

September 10, 2023

Rainbow Promise
Genesis 8:22; 9:8–17
Goal: To remember the story of Noah and God's promise.

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 recognize forgiveness and reconciliation as a way to 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 have courage 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 recognize that God provides for us in unexpected ways.

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 explore ways we can work for God's justice and peace.

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 story 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 (🧠 🗣️) 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.

A Few Notes about Children and Reading

All versions of the Bible are above second-grade reading level. *Growing in Grace & Gratitude* tries to provide a way to share the Bible stories while engaging both pre-readers and readers. Since the Scriptures were written for adults, curriculum writers try to choose sections of Scripture that children can understand. Still, at times, the children in your group may seem to struggle to understand a verse or passage. When that happens, assure them that God will help them understand the Bible in new ways as they grow. Encourage a sense of wonder at God's amazing ways. Reassure the children of God's grace, a grace that does not depend on how much they know or understand.

Some of the following strategies may enhance your time with the children:

- When you write something for children to read, print the words. Many of them cannot read cursive writing.
- If an activity sheet has something to read, ask for a volunteer to read it aloud rather than calling on an individual child. Even better, have the group read it aloud in unison. If most children in your group are pre-readers, ask them to point to the words on the page as you read them aloud.
- Make a poster with church vocabulary words. Each week, add a word to learn, such as *God, Jesus, love, Bible, pray, bless, thanks, disciple, praise, and worship*.

- Expect children of this age to occasionally reverse letters (for example, using “b” for “d”) and to make errors in spelling. It is not important to correct such errors during the session.
- If children need to know a repeating response for a litany or drama, write it on newsprint. Invite them to read it with you in unison several times before beginning the litany or drama. Adding actions to the words will help children remember them.
- Many children love learning through rhymes and songs. Try to include music in each session.
- Many children enjoy acting out stories. Invite them to act out certain parts of the story as you read it aloud. Challenge them to act out what they think happened next in a story. Some children will be able to act out responses to questions more easily than writing them.
- Be careful not to characterize children for whom reading comes easily as being somehow “better.” Resist putting them in the role of leader.
- Affirm each child by name—whatever his or her reading and writing skill level—two or three times each session.

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.

Ideas for Working with Pre-readers

- Keep small pieces of scratch paper handy to 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, 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.

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 about 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 with 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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