

Ages 3-5

Growing



in  
Grace & Gratitude

Year 1, Fall





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### Introduction

In the fall quarter, verbs, or as children would say, “action words,” take center stage. Many of us remember diagramming sentences or at least learning the basics of grammar as a child. A declarative sentence, in its simplest form, has a subject (the one doing the action) and a verb (the action). To increase the complexity of a sentence, you could add a direct object (the one to whom the action is happening). So, according to the core grammar of our faith, God is the subject acting, and the people in the stories of the Old Testament are the recipients, or direct objects, of God’s action. And so are we! God breathes life into Adam and Eve, and God gives life to us. God hears the prayers of Daniel, and God hears our prayers too.

These thirteen stories reveal God’s gracious acts. God made a home for God’s creation. God promised a future for people. God blessed all in the family, giving dreams of hope. God saved people from bondage and oppression, providing sustenance and nourishment. God proclaimed a time for rest and restoration. From choosing a leader to sending another person to help, from whispering in the silence to calling all ages and hearing all prayers, God’s mighty acts resound through the ages and into our hearts.

And who are the recipients of such grace? Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Ishmael, Joseph, the Israelites, Deborah, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Daniel are. From creation to our ancestors in faith, from salvation and oppression to faithful prophets, the stories of God’s action on behalf of God’s people encourage us in faith and hope. Certainly, God’s people are not perfect. They disobey, question, laugh, take matters into their own hands, brag, complain, doubt, and fear, and still they are the direct objects of God’s faithful action. God continues to be the subject and never stops acting with us—the objects of God’s grace and love.

Throughout the quarter, the children will have the opportunity to hear these stories in a variety of ways and reflect on the “grace moments” found there. They will find grace moments in knowing that God makes and keeps promises and that God calls women as leaders and youth as messengers of God’s Word. With gratitude for God’s actions, the children can claim God’s grace in their own lives and celebrate this grace with one another. They will observe times of prayer in response to God’s actions and opportunities to take actions of their own with each other, the congregation, or the community as the recipients.

God acts. And, thanks be to God, we are the recipients of such grace!



## Overview of the Year 1, Fall Quarter

### Session Dates, Titles, Scriptures, and Goals

The complete scope and sequence for Year 1 can be found at [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads).

The fall quarter typically begins with the first Sunday in September but occasionally is the last Sunday in August. It ends with Christ the King Sunday, the Sunday before Advent begins.

Since the date of Easter changes every year, the number of Sundays after Epiphany and before Lent and after Easter will fluctuate from year to year. Additional sessions are provided, but check your calendar and plan accordingly. You may not use one or more sessions in one year, and you may use extra sessions in another year.

#### Year 1, Fall 1

God Makes a Home

Genesis 2:4b–9, 15–23

Goal: To show gratitude to God for the gracious gifts of creation.

#### Year 1, Fall 2

God Makes a Promise

Genesis 12:1–9; 15:2–6

Goal: To be thankful for God's promises.

#### Year 1, Fall 3

God Blesses Ishmael and Isaac

Genesis 16; 21:1–7, 9–13

Goal: To know that God loves us.

#### Year 1, Fall 4

God Gives Joseph Dreams

Genesis 37:1–11

Goal: To know that God is always with us.

#### Year 1, Fall 5

God Saves the People

Exodus 12:31–42

Goal: To give thanks to God for helping us.

#### Year 1, Fall 6

God Provides Food and Water

Exodus 16:1–8, 13–15; 17:1–7

Goal: To know that God is faithful and provides for God's people.

#### Year 1, Fall 7

God Proclaims Jubilee

Leviticus 25:1–12, 25–28, 35–42

Goal: To rest and celebrate God's gracious gifts.

#### Year 1, Fall 8

God Chooses Deborah as a Leader

Judges 4:1–10

Goal: To be a helper like Deborah.

#### Year 1, Fall 9

God Sends Elijah to Help

1 Kings 17:8–16

Goal: To hear how God provides for a woman in need.

#### Year 1, Fall 10

God Speaks in Stillness

1 Kings 19:1–18

Goal: To practice attentiveness to God.

#### Year 1, Fall 11

God Calls Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:4–10

Goal: To practice telling about God's love.

#### Year 1, Fall 12

God Calls for Justice

Amos 1:1; 5:6–8, 10–15, 21–24

Goal: To recognize God wants us to be kind and to be fair.

#### Year 1, Fall 13

God Hears Daniel's Prayers

Daniel 6:6–23

Goal: To know we can pray to God everyday.

## Resources and Session Components

*Growing in Grace & Gratitude* curriculum is available for fall, winter, spring, and summer as downloadable PDFs. 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 and Melodies:** Song lyrics sheets are gathered in the back of the resource.



## Free Supplemental Resources

Download the following supplemental resources at [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads):

- **Music & Melodies** are song tracks with familiar lyrics as well as new child-friendly tunes.
- **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.
- **Audio stories** of the weekly Bible stories are available to listen to online or download.

## 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 (zip-closure, 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: Tactile Defensiveness



Tactile defensiveness is a sensory processing issue where children struggle with textures such as glue, clay, finger paint, cotton balls, and chalk. These, other textures, and even physical touch, cause real anxiety and discomfort. A child may feel overwhelmed and react with displeasure or even fight or flight.

If a child has tactile defensiveness, talk with their parents about techniques to use so as not to cause undue stress on their child. Allow for and encourage children to explore textures without pressure or expectation. Provide opportunities to wash hands, if necessary. Find ways for children to participate in activities at their comfort level or other ways they can be involved, such as an assistant, a timekeeper, a line leader, a reader, and so forth.

### 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.

## 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.

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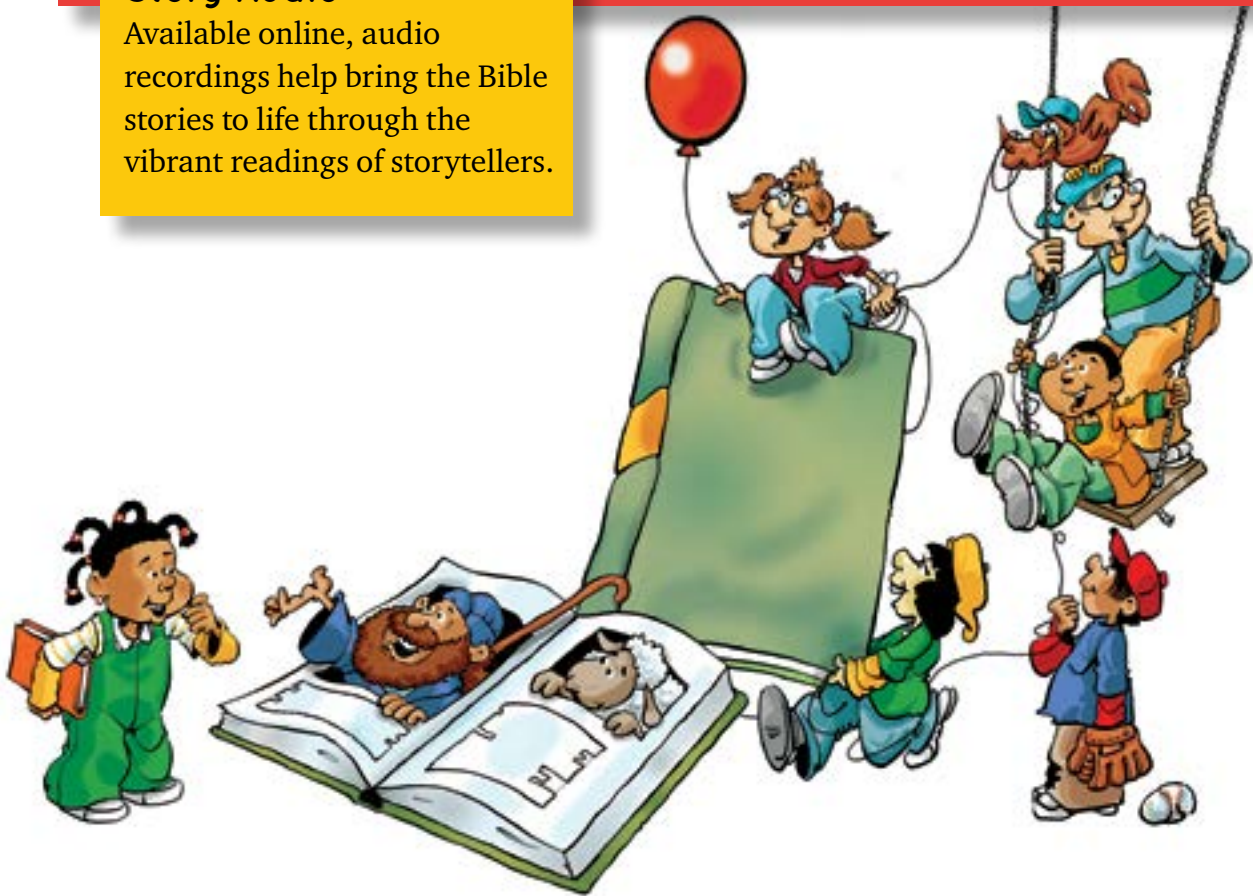
Free!

### ***Grace Sightings***

This online resource includes the story from the week's session and age-appropriate activities for children to do at home with their parents or caregivers. Each week's pdf shares the same colorful illustrations and Bible stories used in weekly sessions. With *Grace Sightings*, sessions reach beyond Sunday morning, encouraging children to live their lives as an expression of God's grace at home and at school.

### **Story Audio**

Available online, audio recordings help bring the Bible stories to life through the vibrant readings of storytellers.



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