

Ages 3-5

Growing



in
Grace & Gratitude

Year 1, Spring



Growing

in
Grace & Gratitude

Ages 3-5
Year 1, Spring



© 2024 Growing Faith Resources, an imprint of Presbyterian Publishing Corporation

Published by Growing Faith Resources
Louisville, Kentucky

Growing in Grace & Gratitude, Year 1, was published as quarterly curriculum in fall 2021 through summer 2022. Additional sessions have been added to provide a sufficient number of sessions when needed.

Note that websites and bit.lys listed throughout this curriculum may have changed or disappeared since publication.

All rights reserved. Portions of *Growing in Grace & Gratitude* may be reproduced without special permission for one-time use only, for educational purposes, by congregations, provided that no part of such reproduction is sold, directly or indirectly. For information, address Growing Faith Resources, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and used by permission. In some instances, adaptations have been made to make the language inclusive.

Scripture quotations marked CEB are from the Common English Bible, © 2011 Common English Bible, and are used by permission.

Every effort has been made to determine whether texts are under copyright. If through an oversight any copyrighted material has been used without permission, and the publisher is notified of this, acknowledgment will be made in future printings.

Printed in the United States of America

Table of Contents

Introduction	iii
Overview of the Year 1, Spring 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: Listening	viii
Ideas for Working with Pre-readers	viii
Flyaway Books	ix
Scheduling Tips for Ages 3–5	ix
Using Guided Play with Ages 3–5	ix
What Do Children Ages 3–5 Need?	ix
A Note About Candles	x
Team of Contributors	x

Introduction

This spring quarter moves from Lent to Easter and Eastertide to Pentecost. We listen to Jesus as we explore some of the stories, the parables, he told. We learn about what is required of us: to love God and love our neighbor by practicing what it means to be a good neighbor. Through Jesus’ stories about the kingdom of God, we learn that it grows and grows and grows, and that it is going to be a party where everyone is welcome. We hear Jesus’ stories about being found and how happy the finder is for the one who is found; so much so, there is great rejoicing and celebrating! These stories tell us that God—the shepherd, the woman, the father—will not stop searching for us when we lose our way. We will be welcomed home.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus is welcomed into the city of Jerusalem with cheers and celebration—a parade! But we can’t leap past the events of Holy Week. By the end of the week, Jesus is crucified. That story must be told too.

On Easter morning, the light breaks forth. Death cannot hold Jesus in the tomb. Christ is risen! Through the eyes of Luke, we hear about the joy of Easter and then the surprising appearance of Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

Eastertide—the time when the liturgical color is still white to celebrate the glory of resurrection—is a time for expressing gratitude for God’s grace and love. We hear it in the story of forgiveness for the woman who has sinned and expresses her gratitude in pure devotion. We encounter Martha and Mary, the sisters who both demonstrate service and devotion, and learn what it means to spend time with Jesus. In the story of the ten people who were healed, we learn that praise and thanksgiving can be as simple as saying “thank you.” And, as we heard in Jesus’ story about the father who welcomed his prodigal son home, so Jesus came to Zacchaeus, called him down from the tree, and welcomed him. It is truly a time for expressing gratitude for God’s grace, love, and embrace.

Through prayer and discernment, the leadership Jesus had formed led the disciples to Matthias. Then with the rush of a mighty wind and flames igniting the spirits of the followers of Jesus, more were added to their number. The Day of Pentecost became the “birthday of the church” as the good news was heard and many believed.

Overview of the Year 1, Spring Quarter

Session Dates, Titles, Scriptures, and Goals

The complete scope and sequence for Year 1 can be found at www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads.

The spring quarter begins with Lent 1 and goes through Pentecost Sunday.

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, Spring 1

Who Is My Neighbor?

Luke 10:25–37

Goal: To practice being a good neighbor to others.

Year 1, Spring 8

Our Eyes Were Opened

Luke 24:13–35

Goal: To recognize the gracious presence of Jesus.

Year 1, Spring 2

Little to Big

Luke 13:18–21

Goal: To explore how the kingdom of God can grow.

Year 1, Spring 9

Forgiveness

Luke 7:36–50

Goal: To express gratitude to God for forgiveness.

Year 1, Spring 3

Party Time!

Luke 14:15–24

Goal: To imagine God's gracious kingdom as a party.

Year 1, Spring 10

Martha and Mary

Luke 10:38–42

Goal: To express gratitude for God's grace by putting God first in our lives.

Year 1, Spring 4

Lost and Found

Luke 15:1–10

Goal: To know that each person is important to God.

Year 1, Spring 11

Return with Thanks

Luke 17:11–19

Goal: To express gratitude by praising and thanking God.

Year 1, Spring 5

Welcome Home

Luke 15:1–2, 11–24

Goal: To know that God loves us and forgives us.

Year 1, Spring 12

Welcoming Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1–10

Goal: To express gratitude for God's grace by welcoming others.

Year 1, Spring 6

The King of Glory Comes

Luke 19:28–40; 23:32–47

Goal: To hear the story of Jesus' welcome into Jerusalem and his death.

Year 1, Spring 13

A New Disciple

Acts 1:12–14, 21–26

Goal: To imagine what it means to be a church leader.

Year 1, Spring 7

He Is Risen!

Luke 24:1–12

Goal: To find joy in the surprises of Easter and share that joy with others.

Year 1, Spring 14

The Spirit Unleashed

Acts 2:1–13

Goal: To celebrate the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the church.

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 front 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.

Free Supplemental Resources

Download the following supplemental resources at 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 (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: Listening



Children with listening comprehension issues don’t necessarily have hearing problems. Their brains process the sounds they hear differently than other children and can cause them to be easily distracted. They may have trouble repeating a verse or may be struggling to follow conversations. They may respond “Huh?” or “What?” frequently, or they may ask you to repeat what was said.

Support these children by minimizing background sounds that can distract them and looking at them when you are talking. Try seating them where they can see and hear you best. Use visual cues that reinforce the words they are hearing. To help build comprehension, ask the children to summarize what you said. Encourage them to ask questions when they don’t understand.

These children are not ignoring you on purpose. Be understanding. Supporting them can help develop the skills they need to listen and learn more effectively.

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 (www.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 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 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.

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.

SAMANTHA HASSELL has served as a Christian educator since 2001. She loves imagining ways for children to experience Scripture and deepen their faith.

Deborah Huggins is our consultant for children with disabilities and special needs. She is the writer of the 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 three grandchildren.

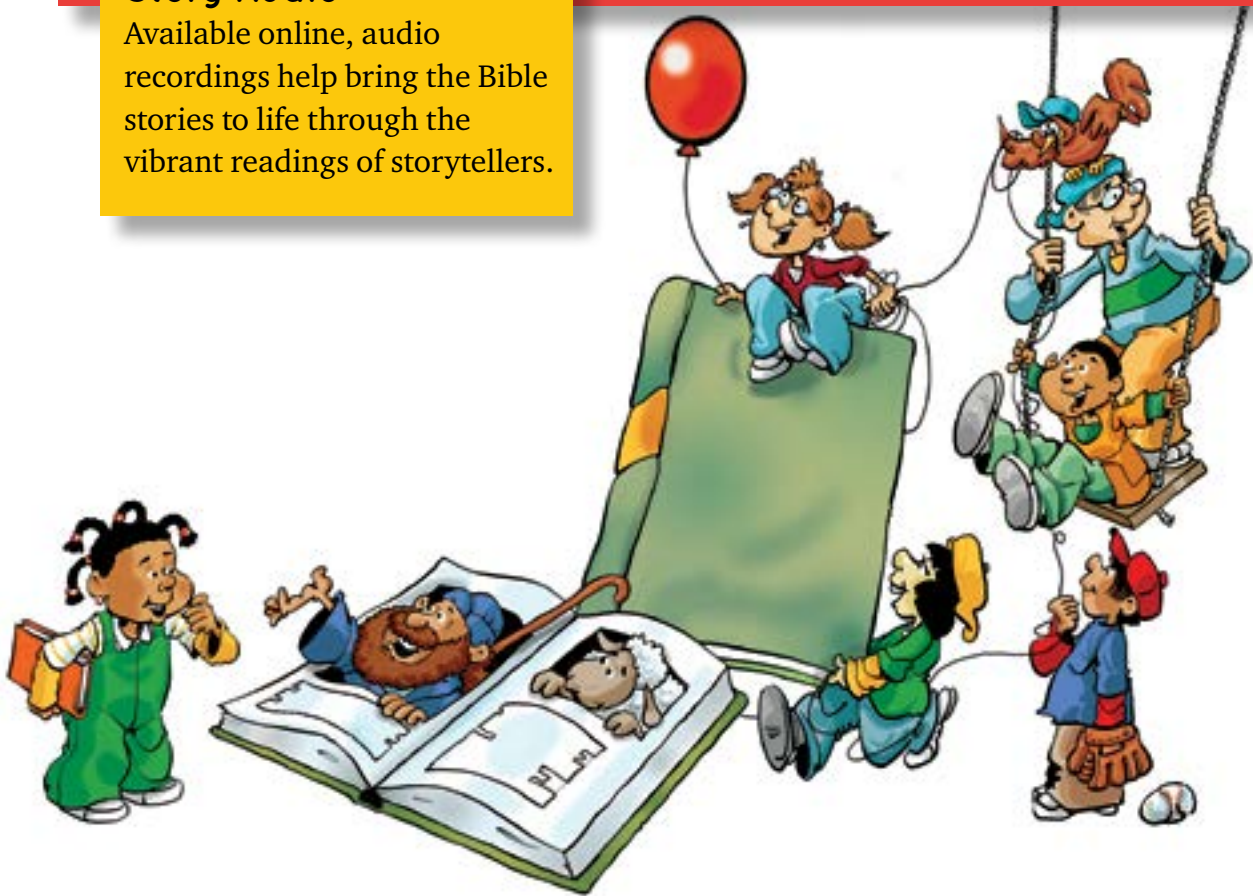
Free!

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.



To Find These Resources & More, Visit Us
at www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads

