

Ages 3-5

Growing



in
Grace & Gratitude

Year 1, Winter



Growing

in
Grace & Gratitude

Ages 3-5
Year 1, Winter



© 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, Winter 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: Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty with Reading and Writing	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

Advent begins with the prophet Micah’s promise of peace in the coming of the Promised One. As the story unfolds, God’s grace is poured out to Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and the world as we, in turn, respond in gratitude for God’s gift. With Mary and the shepherds, we ponder and rejoice at this miracle. With Simeon and Anna, we marvel in God’s grace. With the magi, we worship the newborn king.

Through the stories of Luke, we are introduced to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as he is baptized by John in the Jordan River and then is tempted in the desert for forty days. We are called on to wrestle with our own tests and temptations and are given the tools Jesus used—words of scripture and prayer—to face them.

In his synagogue appearance at Nazareth, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61 to announce the beginning of his ministry. Jesus’ words indicate that his focus would be on bringing relief to the marginalized members of society—the poor, hungry, and mistreated. God’s reign would mean justice for all, starting with the most vulnerable.

Then Jesus calls people to follow him, and they do. Men and women, youth and children, hear the good news proclaimed. They hear of God’s way of living, and they want to know more. Crowds gather. Jesus challenges his listeners to look at the world in an upside-down fashion. The most unexpected are blessed. We are challenged to consider God’s blessings and how we might be a part of God’s blessings to others. Jesus offers a new way to live, God’s way, a way that is loving, forgiving, and giving. Then, as a voice from heaven spoke at Jesus’ baptism calling him “beloved” and affirming him, God’s voice speaks again from the mountaintop as Jesus and his closest disciples are there to pray. This time God calls Jesus “my Chosen” and commands us to “listen to him.”

Overview of the Year 1, Winter Quarter

Session Dates, Titles, Scriptures, and Goals

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

The winter quarter begins with Advent 1 and goes through Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before Lent 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, Winter 1

God's Promise of Peace

Micah 5:2–5

Goal: To practice God's message of peace.

Year 1, Winter 2

Surprised by Grace

Luke 1:5–25, 57–66

Goal: To know that everyone is a beloved child of God.

Year 1, Winter 3

God's Gift of Love

Luke 2:1–7

Goal: To celebrate Jesus' birth by saying "thank you."

Year 1, Winter 4

Rejoice and Ponder

Luke 2:8–20

Goal: To rejoice in the birth of Jesus.

Year 1, Winter 5

Simeon and Anna Rejoice

Luke 2:22–40

Goal: To honor and celebrate wise elders who teach us the way of Jesus.

Year 1, Winter 6

It's Epiphany! Let's Worship Jesus!

Matthew 2:1–12

Goal: To follow the journey of the wise men and worship Jesus with them.

Year 1, Winter 7

You Are My Beloved

Luke 3:21–22

Goal: To explore baptism as the beginning of our lives of faith.

Year 1, Winter 8

It's Tempting!

Luke 4:1–13

Goal: To learn that we can put our trust in God even when we are tested.

Year 1, Winter 9

Good News!

Luke 4:14–21

Goal: To proclaim God's good news as Jesus did.

Year 1, Winter 10

Spreading the Good News

Luke 4:16–30

Goal: To discover ways that God's love turns expectations upside down.

Year 1, Winter 11

Follow Me

Luke 5:1–11, 27–28; 8:1–3

Goal: To identify ways God has called us to follow.

Year 1, Winter 12

Blessed Are . . .

Luke 6:17–26

Goal: To practice being a blessing by helping others.

Year 1, Winter 13

God's Way to Live

Luke 6:27–38

Goal: To practice God's way to live: loving, giving, and forgiving.

Year 1, Winter 14

Listen to Him

Luke 9:28–36

Goal: To consider what it means to listen to Jesus and to shine with his light.

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:

- **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: Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty with Reading and Writing LD

Some children struggle with reading and writing, which can be due to many factors. Children know when they are successful and when they are not. When they are unsuccessful, they may battle frustration, anger, and low self-esteem. When this happens, some may act out or set lower expectations for themselves. Praise their efforts without lavishing praise on all that they do—they, and other children, will see right through this. Be supportive but realistic.

Provide children choices such as drawing a response instead of writing or choosing to listen and follow along rather than read aloud. These choices give the children an opportunity to be successful and feel as though they have some control in the matter.

Positive feedback can give children the confidence to successfully manage group situations. Making them feel that they are valued members of the group is key.

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 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.

Sharon J. Harding wrote 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.

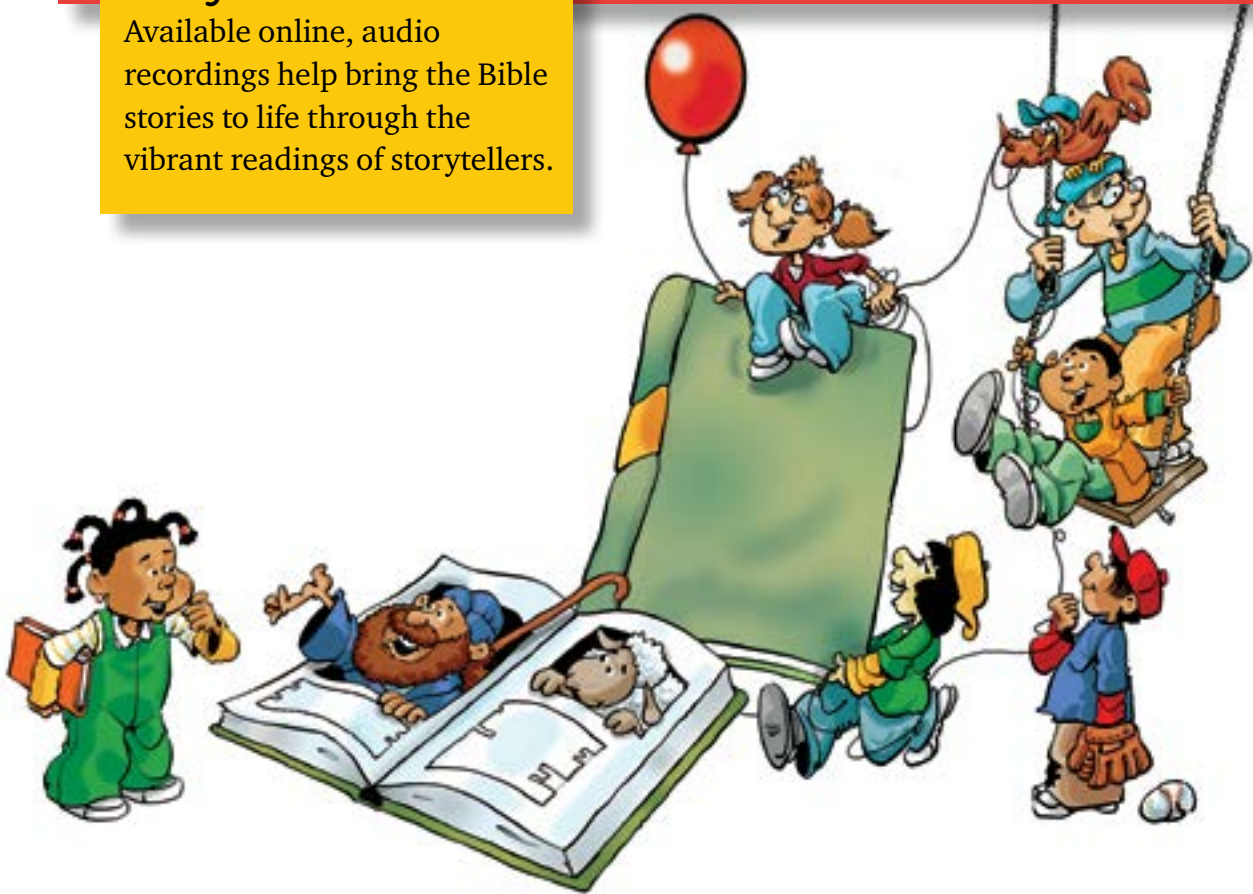
Free!

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

