

Growing



in
Grace & Gratitude

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Ages 5-7
Year 1, Winter



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

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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 commit to be God's peacemakers.

Year 1, Winter 2

Surprised by Grace

Luke 1:5–25, 57–66

Goal: To recognize moments of God's surprising grace and share it with others.

Year 1, Winter 3

God's Gift of Love

Luke 2:1–7

Goal: To recognize God's surprising love in Jesus Christ.

Year 1, Winter 4

Rejoice and Ponder

Luke 2:8–20

Goal: To ponder and rejoice in the good news of Jesus' birth.

Year 1, Winter 5

Simeon and Anna Rejoice

Luke 2:22–40

Goal: To rejoice, like Simeon and Anna did, as we recognize God's promise in Jesus.

Year 1, Winter 6

It's Epiphany! Let's Worship Jesus!

Matthew 2:1–12

Goal: To explore Epiphany as a way to worship Jesus with the wise men.

Year 1, Winter 7

You Are My Beloved

Luke 3:1–22

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 reflect on the good news of Jesus' ministry and our call as disciples of Christ.

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 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 (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: 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.

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 Holy 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*.

- Give each child a few sheets of paper folded in half and stapled to make a word book to keep in the room. When an activity calls for children to write a word, name, or simple sentence, let them know you are happy to write it in their word books so they can copy it.
- 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 hold up 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 (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.

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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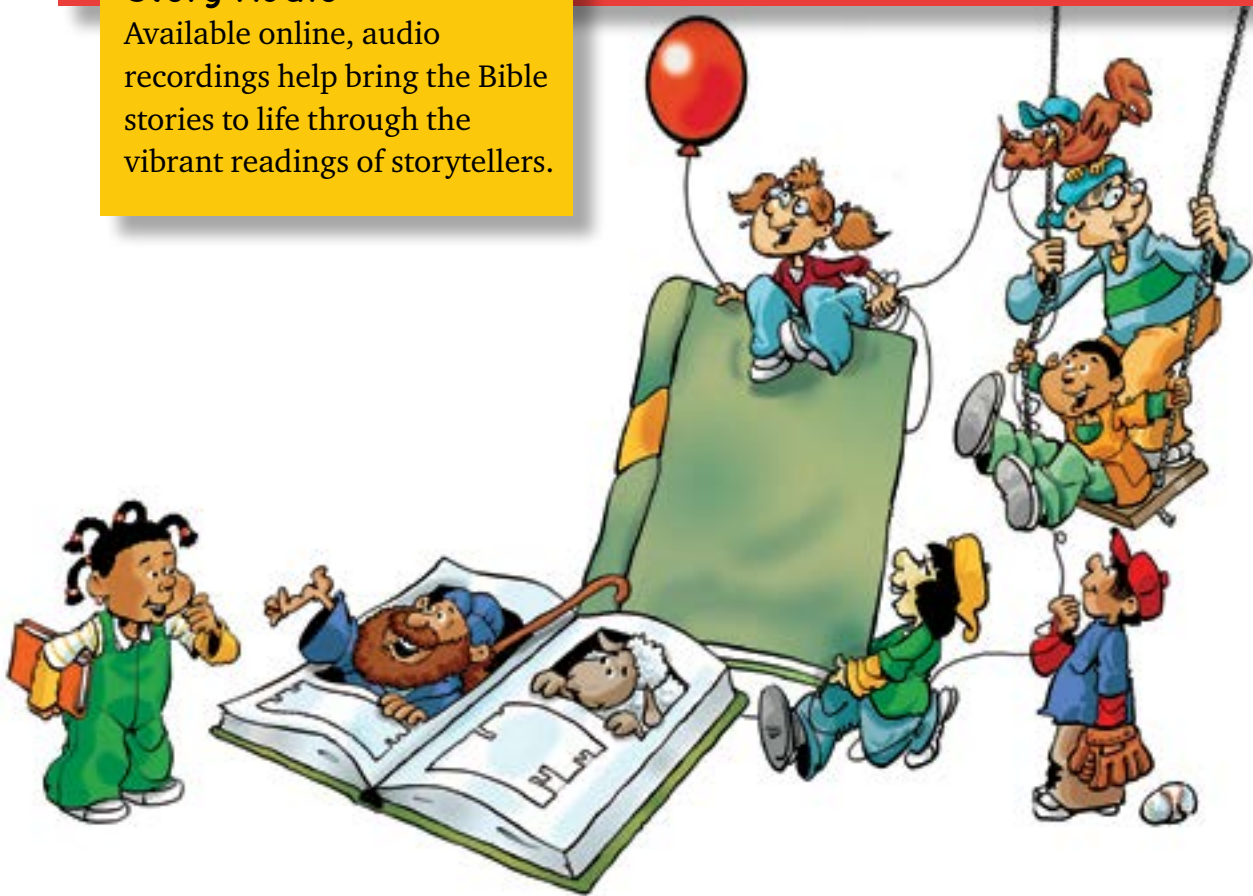
Free!

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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