



God Makes a Promise

Goal: To mark the holy places in our lives.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Genesis 12:1-9, 15:2-6

Everything God created was good, but Genesis 3—11 tells us that little grace was in the world. Some people were unhappy, angry, or hungry. Brothers and sisters were fighting; people were behaving badly. What does God do in response? God initiates a fresh start with humanity.

God smiles on Abraham and Sarah; can you see it? Through them, God promises to be present to the creation forever. Abraham, Sarah, and their children often struggle to live gratefully as recipients of God's grace; however, we are assured that even through those times of struggle, God keeps the promise.

Having children, especially sons, was a family and a cultural expectation. It was both a religious duty and a sign of God's favor. And now here is Abraham, married to a woman unable to give him children. Abraham and Sarah had to live with disappointment and community disapproval.

In a time when the woman alone was blamed for childlessness, the burden must have been particularly hard for Sarah. The time of hope was over for Sarah and Abraham.

God offered a fresh promise for this defeated family. "Go from this place to a new land," God said. God spoke to the pair who were barren and made them a promise: "I will give you so many offspring, you will be the founders of a great nation." Abraham and Sarah expressed their confidence in God's promise: they erected an altar, signifying that they had met God in that holy place. It is a testament to the generations of God's grace fulfilled for all.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Scripture identifies holy places as locations where God meets people, calls people, and expects people to love one another and serve the purposes of God.

Churches and homes are seen as holy places to most children insofar as they experience a sense of belonging, acceptance, and protection. In the same way, the congregation creates a holy place where children are welcomed and feel that same sense of belonging by being recognized and called by name. When the church is holy ground and sacred space, children and adults alike experience care, affection, protection, and being part of God's family.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Help the children recognize the holy places in their lives, including religious buildings and sacred sites. Your meeting space is a holy space, in that God is present. How can you purposely create a space in which the children are welcomed, loved, and cared for? Help the children know that your meeting space is a holy place for you too. It's less about the furnishings and more about the heart.

*Lord, thank you for blessing me, my friends, and my loved ones.
Call us each day to be a blessing to others. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 2, 2a, 15, 17

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

natural or tan-colored
bedsheet

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

candle

Responding

Claiming

copies of **GN 2**

SCM 2b, 2c

Extra

copies of **GN 3**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the children arrive, post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker on a clothespin. Use the schedule to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

A bedsheet will be used during the next two sessions. If you choose not to use the bedsheet, plan to adapt the activities.

Welcoming and Preparing LG

Greet the children by name and with the words “Grace and peace to you.” Prompt the children to respond with the same words.

Show the children **SCM 2a** and tell them that today’s story took place more than 3,000 years ago. The story is about Abraham and Sarah and God’s call to them.

Explain that in that day, people built altars in particular places to thank God for God’s blessing. Altars were often made of stones or rocks. They marked holy places, places where people had experienced God’s gracious presence.

Invite children to prepare a worship space by creating an altar in a desert. Spread the bedsheet on the floor. Let the children make their own decisions about how to construct the altar using available objects. Provide a Bible and candle to include in the worship space.

Hand out copies of **GN 1** and crayons. Invite the children to decorate their paper stones with words or pictures of things that they want to thank God for. Add the finished stones to the altar.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

T *For children who struggle with transitions, consider a quick physical activity—such as squeezing your hands together and stretching—before story time.*

Singing L

Gather on the bedsheet, pretending it is the desert. Encourage the children to make room for all. Sing “Thank You, Holy God”—**SCM 15**. Help the children learn the song. Sing the words one phrase at a time, and ask the children to repeat. Add simple movements as the children sing.

Praying L

Turn on the candle as a reminder that God is present among you. Ask children to join you in this echo prayer:



Loving God, /
thank you for your promise /
to be with us forever. /
Amen.

Preparing to Hear the Story

B TD

Tell the children that today's story is about a promise. Sometimes when we agree to a promise, we shake hands. Invite the children to shake hands in two different ways. First, have pairs of children do a standard handshake. As they are shaking hands, ask one child in each pair to let go. Ask what happens when someone lets go. They may notice that the bond is broken and the hands become disconnected.

Next, have the pairs shake hands by holding each other's wrists. Ask one child in each pair to let go. As one child lets go, the other holds on. The connection remains intact. Ask them what happened this time. Do the second handshake twice so each child gets to hold on and let go.

Tell the children that when God makes a promise, God never lets us go! It is like the second handshake. Even if we let go, God holds tight.

Hearing the Story

L

Open the Bible to Genesis 12 so the children see and know that the story comes from the Bible.

Tell the children that they are going to listen to a story about God's gracious promises to Abraham and Sarah, and a trip they took.

Read **SCM 2**. Express the emotions of the story with your voice, facial expressions, and gestures. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Read the story again encouraging the children to listen for the word "promise" and what promises God made with Abraham and Sarah. Invite them to clap when they hear the word "promise." After the reading, ask what promises God made and what Abraham and Sarah did to remember them.

Reflecting on God's Grace

L C

Explain that today's story describes God's grace. When God promised to bless Abraham, Sarah, and all their children, it was an expression of God's delight in them and all the families of the world. Abraham and Sarah built an altar in that holy place to tell others that they trusted God's promise.

Share a personal story with the children about beginning something new. Express how you felt. In what way did you know God was with you? How did you mark the new beginning to remember God's grace and love? How is that memory a holy place for you?



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.



Singing

Sing the refrain and stanza 1 of “God’s Promises”—**SCM 17**.

Help the children learn the song. Sing the words one phrase at a time and ask the children to repeat each phrase. Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God’s Grace C

Take an imaginary trip to explore holy places in your community.

Cut out strips of stones from copies of **GN 2**. Give each child a strip and crayons. Invite the children to color the stones and cut them out.

While they color, spread **SCM 2b** and **2c** on a table or the floor.

Explain that the children are taking the stones on an imaginary journey through your community using two pictures: **SCM 2b** and **2c**.

Ask the children if they remember what a holy place is. If necessary, tell them that it can be a place where they feel that God is with them.

Locate different places on **SCM 2b** and **2c**, such as the school, and wonder which places may be holy places and why they might be.

Invite the children to suggest other destinations. At each location, invite children to name a spot that is a holy place for them. Invite them to mark holy places on the pictures with their stones.

A *Adapt any activity to suit your children’s needs. Ask yourself, “How can I change this activity so that this child can do it?”*

Celebrating God’s Grace A C MS

Play a game to recognize when God is present.

Select a child to be the caller and stand on one side of the room.

Explain that the caller will ask the question, “God is with you, when . . .”

Invite the rest of the children to line up on the opposite side of the room, standing side by side.

Tell the children that when the caller turns away from them, they walk forward. When the caller turns back toward the children and says, “God is with you, when . . .” each child stops and raises their hand if they want to complete the sentence. The caller selects a child who has her or his hand up. Each child who responds gets to take a giant step forward. If children have difficulty responding, allow them to move with the other children if they are thinking of a similar situation. Play until everyone is standing with the caller.

Repeat the game inviting others to take turns being the caller.



Salt-dough stones are another possibility for this activity. Mix together 1 cup of salt, 1 cup of plain flour, and ½ cup of warm water. Divide the dough into portions, and place them on a baking sheet covered with parchment paper. Bake at 200 degrees for three hours or until the stones are hardened throughout.

GN 3 Solution:

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you.

Praying God’s Grace



Remind the children that when Abraham reached his destination he built a stone altar to tell others that he stopped there to thank God for God’s blessing.

To make gratitude stones, invite the children to write words or draw pictures on paper bags of things they are thankful for. Give each child a paper bag to cover with his or her words and/or drawings. Have them stuff their bags with crumpled newspaper and tape the ends closed.

When the stones are finished, arrange them on the floor. Gather around the gratitude stones and pray, thanking God for food, shelter, family, friends, and other things children named—all God’s blessings!

Variation: Take a walk outside to look for stones. Use permanent markers or paint pens to write on the stones.

Extra Activity



In gratitude to God, for God’s blessing, Abraham and Sarah built an altar to God. The altar was a place to remember where God blessed them. Hand out copies of **GN 3**. Allow time for the children to decode the puzzle. The letters go on the lines below the stone wall. Offer assistance as needed. Suggest that children who finish the puzzle first help those who need assistance.

LD *Word puzzles can be difficult for non-readers. Help these children feel confident by helping them recognize letter shapes and encouraging them to match the shapes of the surrounding letters. Older children often enjoy helping younger children.*

LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Gather around the altar you made in “Welcoming and Preparing.” Sing the first two stanzas of “God’s Promises”—**SCM 17**.

Ask the children which holy places they may see this week. Challenge them to recognize holy places throughout the week and to show gratitude for those places. Invite them to ask their parents and caregivers to share their holy places. Encourage them to place a paper stone from **GN 2** (see “Claiming God’s Grace”) in each of those special places. Challenge them to encourage their family members to do the same.

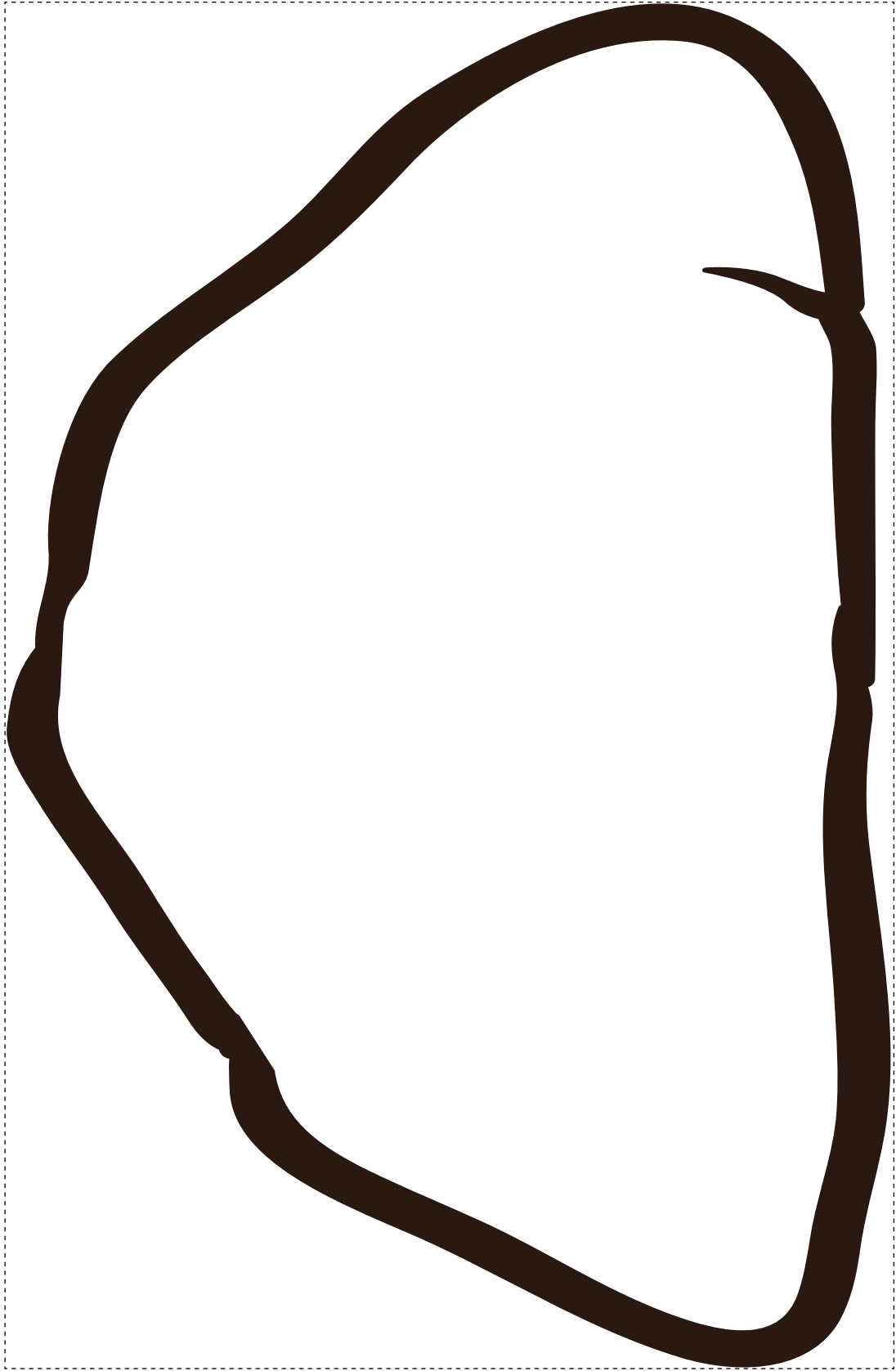
Practice shaking hands (see “Preparing to Hear the Story”) to remember that God always keeps promises and never lets us go. Challenge the children to shake hands when they make a promise.

As the children leave, say: “(Name), the grace of God is with you.”

Remind the children about the free e-book and challenge them to read the story during the week.

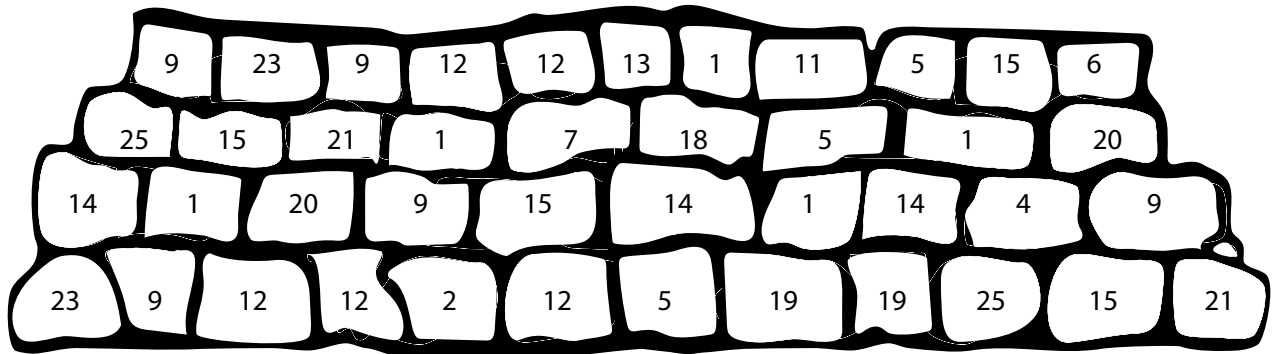


Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusasstore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).



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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z



_____ L L _____ A _____

_____ A _____ A _____

_____ A _____, _____ A _____

_____ L L _____ .

