



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**

Praying

brown paper lunch
bags, quarter-sheets of
paper

Offering

GN 3

Extra

copies of **GN 4**

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.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing **LG**

Greet the children by name and with the words “Grace and peace be with you, (*Name*).” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.”

Tell the children 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, a place to remember and worship God. Spread the bedsheet on the floor. Let the children make their own decisions about how to construct the altar using available objects. Provide a candle and Bible to add to the worship space as well.

Give each child a copy of **GN 1**. Invite the children to write or draw on the stones things that they want to thank God for. Have the children cut out and place the finished stones on 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. Ask for a volunteer to practice reading the scripture passage.

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 children to ensure those around them have enough space.

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

C

Turn on the candle as a reminder that God is present among you. Invite a volunteer to pray the following prayer or one of their own: “Loving God, thank you for your promise to always be with us and the many ways we experience your presence. Amen.”

C Give children time to respond and to share, understanding that, for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.

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

LD L VI

Invite a child to find Genesis 12 in the Bible. Tell the children that they will listen to a story about God’s gracious promises to Abraham and Sarah, and a trip they took. Ask if any have used maps on family trips.

Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 12:1–9. Conclude the reading saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible in the worship space.

Refer to the map on **SCM 2a**. Invite the children to identify where the journey began in Haran. Challenge them to identify locations on the map when they hear them as you read the story again from **SCM 2**, a retelling of the story. Express the emotions of the story with your voice, facial expressions, and gestures.

Reflecting on God’s Grace

C

Wonder together how God is active in this story. 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.



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.

Share a personal story with the children about a time you felt God was active in your life. Express how you felt. In what way did you know God was with you? Did you mark the moment, remembering God’s grace and love? How is that memory a holy place for you?

Invite the children to name some of their holy places.

Singing

Sing “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 after you sing it.

Turn off the candle.


RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God’s Grace

Invite the children to explore living grace-filled lives in response to God’s promises. Supply them with copies of GN 2, pencils, and crayons.

Encourage the children to imagine they are Abraham or Sarah. God has spoken, telling them to go on a journey, but God hasn’t said where the journey will lead. It is the day before they leave. Ask the children to imagine that they can take only five things with them to their new destination. Invite them to write or draw their five items on GN 2 and then explain to the group why they chose those special items. Play “Harp Music” in the background. After the children are finished, give thanks that God’s amazing grace will be with them in all of the journeys they make.

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

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.

Invite the children to make blessing stones. Give each child a brown paper lunch bag to decorate to look like a large stone. The children may want to write “My Blessing Stone” on one side of the bag.

Provide quarter-sheets of blank paper. Invite the children to write or draw prayers of thanksgiving and blessings, and then stuff their prayers inside their bags. When the bags are full, have the children seal the bags with tape and take them home as a reminder of all God’s blessings and their prayers of thanksgiving.



If the children do not completely fill their bags with prayers, leave the bags unsealed. Invite the children to take them home for people in their households to help fill the bags with prayers of thanksgiving and blessing.



Offering God's Grace

MS B

*Before the children arrive, choose destinations in and around your church building that show the many things people in your church do to worship God, care for one another, and learn about or care for the world. Use the clues on **GN 3** or create your own.*

Invite a guest to stand near each clue along the way and to be prepared to say something about the ministry in that location, considering the question: "Why is this a holy place in the ministry of our church?"

Be sure that the route is accessible and safe for any child who uses assistive devices to increase mobility.

Remind the children that the oak tree of Moreh was a holy place in today's story. Tell the children that there are holy places that are related to the ministries of your church too. Explain you are going on a journey to find them.

Give them the first clue and explain that, at each stop, they will need to find the next clue and decide on a route to the next destination. Return to your room after the last clue is discovered.

Following the journey, invite the children to discuss what they discovered. Ask questions such as:

- ▼ What did you learn about our church?
- ▼ What kinds of things do people in our church do?
- ▼ How do children participate in the caring, learning, and worship of our church?
- ▼ How do you think God calls us or invites us to be part of these kinds of activities?
- ▼ How might we know God is with us when we do these things?

Encourage the children to select one of the ministries identified and become involved. Help them make connections with the appropriate volunteers to do so.

B *Providing opportunities for boys and girls to explore the church helps them understand their surroundings during worship. However, it can also provide opportunities for unwanted behavior such as being disrespectful in a holy place. Help children focus on respecting others and being polite.*



GN 4 Solution:

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



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

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 **GN 4**. Allow time for the children to decode the puzzle. The children will need to solve the problems. The letters go on the lines below the stone wall.

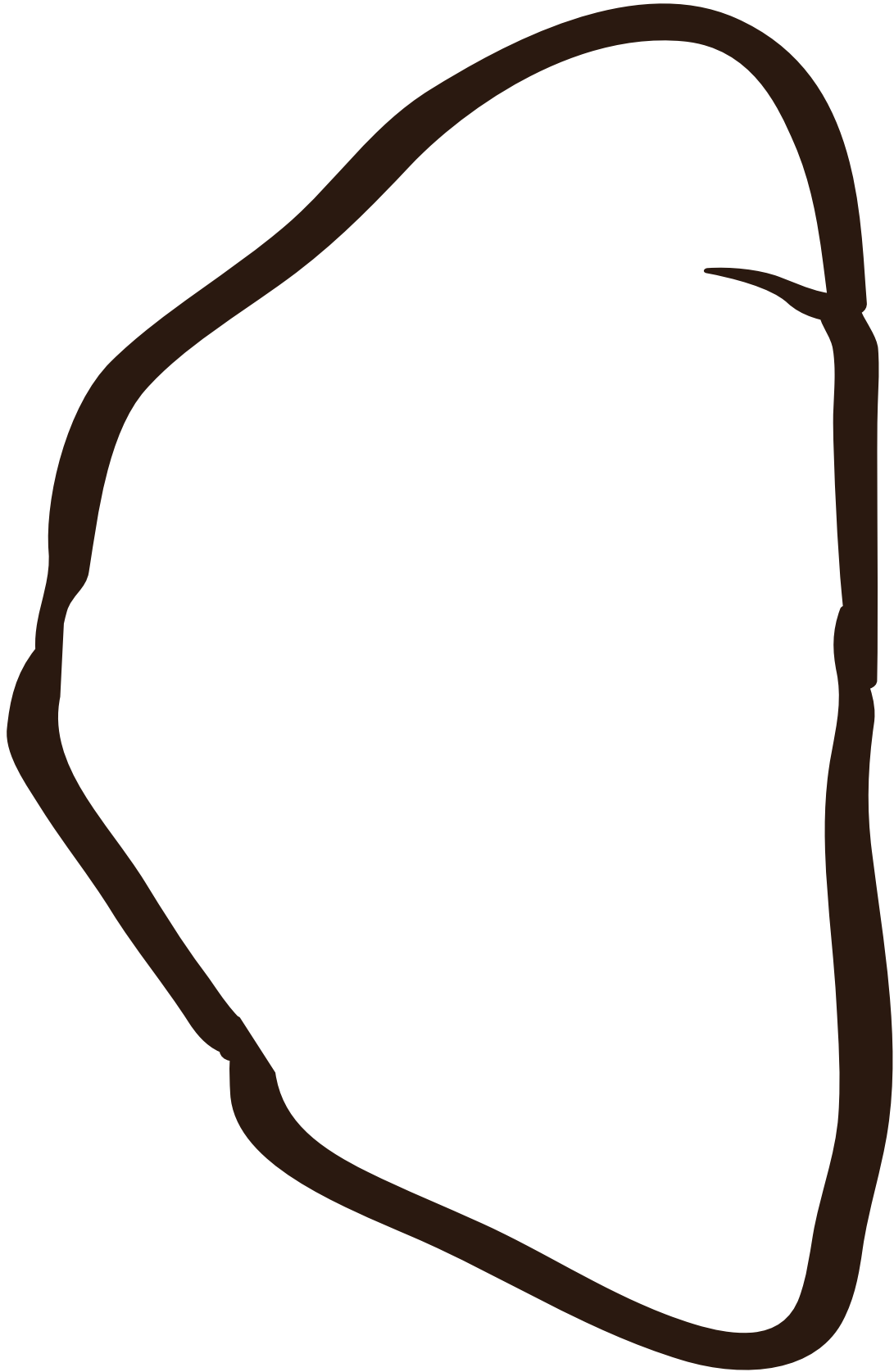
LOVING AND SERVING GOD

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

Encourage the children 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 find a small stone and place it 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, bless each one, saying, "(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.





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God has spoken, telling you to go on a journey, but God hasn't said where the journey will lead. It is the day before you leave, and you can take five things with you:

What five things will you take?

Why did you choose those things?

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Clue #1

Where do the choir members keep their gowns?

Clue #2

(placed in the choir room)

The minister phoned someone who was lonely. Which phone did the minister use?

Clue #3

(placed in the minister's study)

Someone scrubbed the bathroom sink. Where did that person find the cleaning supplies?

Clue #4

(placed in the custodian's closet)

Someone cares for little children. Where are children cared for?

Clue #5

(placed in the nursery)

Someone came to the church for food or other help. Where did that person find food to eat or other help?

Clue #6

(placed in the food closet, kitchen, or minister's office)

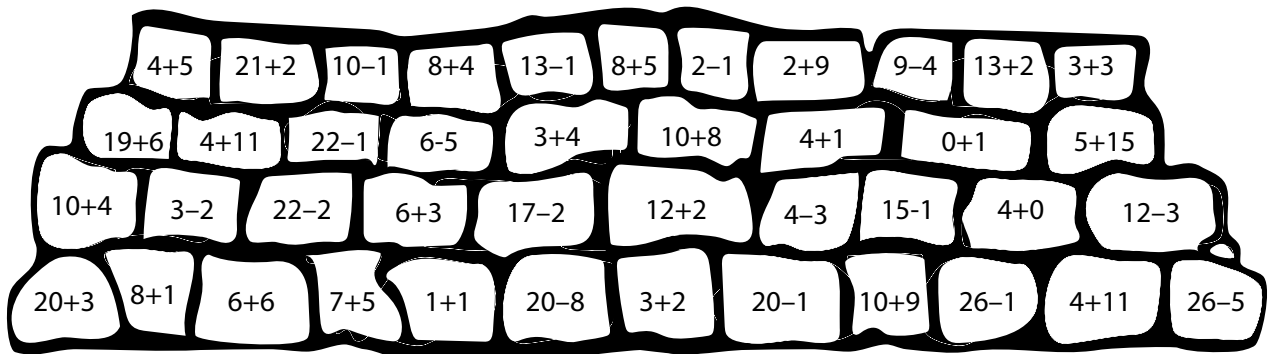
Someone led the congregation in prayer. Where did that person stand to lead the prayer?

Clue #7

(placed in the sanctuary pulpit or lectern)

Someone learns about Abraham and Sarah's journey. Where would we learn about Abraham and Sarah?

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



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