



Light and Darkness

Goal: To live in the light!

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In 1 John 1:5-10

The three Epistles of John were written by an unknown follower of Jesus. The first letter of this “John the Elder” was like a sermon or a “circular letter” that went to several churches in a region. All three letters, however, focused on these main themes: 1) God’s light in Christ, which overcomes the darkness. 2) Passing on the truths that were given from Jesus. 3) A focus on future hope, on the imminent return of Christ. 4) Jesus is God incarnate—the Word made flesh. 5) The work of Christ in salvation and forgiveness. 6) The centrality of love as the whole context for Christian living. All of these themes are included in the Scripture for this lesson.

This letter is like a Faberge egg that, when opened, reveals these beautiful truths at the center of the gospel. The language is both metaphorical and theological. When leading children, it will be helpful to use both the poetic language and simple language of *light* and *dark*. Words and concepts of light and dark can be found throughout the Bible. Theological language and Christian tradition have also used these concepts. However, recognizing that language has power and can be used to dominate and oppress, it is important to be clear that the terms *light* and *dark* refer here to a light source (the sun or a lamp) or the absence of light (night or a cave). The idea that light equals good and dark equals bad, when applied to people, is harmful and racist.

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Children of all ages know the difference between day and night, sunshine and shadow. They understand how a flashlight or candle casts light along a path at night or in a dark room. Children will need help to connect how sin, doing something wrong and displeasing to God and God’s way of living, is like turning away from God’s light of love and stumbling in the dark. Confession, naming what one has done wrong, is like turning on the flashlight and seeing God’s way once again.

Children may be familiar with the words *sin* and *confession* from worship services.

They can probably name individual actions that are wrong, such as lying, cheating, stealing, or hitting someone. As children get older, they will start to encounter sins that are individual and communal in nature, such as hatred, racism, greed, or oppression.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

This session will give you many opportunities for discussion about sin and forgiveness. While the most important part of the lesson is the children’s understanding of God’s forgiveness in Jesus Christ, you can help them understand by drawing parallels to our forgiveness of one another.

Gracious God, help me to walk in the light, seeing when I may stumble and confessing my mistakes. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 11, 14, 26

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

variety of light sources,
such as lamps,
flashlights, and candles

bowl of water

flashlight or battery-
operated tea light for
each child

Responding

Claiming

glow-in-the-dark paint,
black paper

Celebrating

flashlights and/or
battery-operated tea
lights; long, thin glow
sticks with connectors
(can be found at many
dollar stores)

Extra

gallon-size ziplock
bags or clear page
protectors, black
construction paper cut
to fit the bag or sheet
protectors, copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual 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.

“Claiming God’s Grace,” “Celebrating God’s Grace,” and “Extra Activity” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **M**

Greet the children by name and with the words “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” Smile and acknowledge your pleasure in seeing them.

As children arrive, invite them to help prepare the worship space. Provide a Bible, a candle, a green cloth, a bowl of water, and a variety of light sources. As children place the light sources on the worship table, turn them on so that the table is ablaze with light.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Invite a volunteer to practice the Scripture reading for today.

As children are decorating, engage in discussion about times they are completely in the dark. Comment that, even in a dark theater, the movie screen provides light to the theater or the moon provides light on a dark night. Have conversation around why some people may be scared of or not like dark places and about the difficulty of accomplishing anything in a totally dark space.

Singing

L

Play, listen to, and sing “Rise and Shine”—**MM 1**; **SCM 14**.

Comment that, when we reflect God’s light and shine, we are giving God glory.

Praying

T

Turn on the candle, reminding the children that the light represents Jesus the Christ and the light he brings into the world. Invite children to look silently at all the light coming from the table. Ask them to imagine that the light symbolizes God’s love. Wonder how thinking of light as God’s love can help them look at the light differently. Lead them in taking a few deep breaths together and then pray:

God of light and love, open our hearts to the story we will hear today. Help us to see and know your truth, and forgive us when we sin or try to hide our wrong actions from you and those who love us. Lead us in your grace and truth. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.



Preparing to Hear the Story

SD MS

Dim the lights in your space. Using a powerful flashlight, have all children crowd into the light. If you have a large group, use two flashlights. Move the light(s) around slowly, then a little faster. Tell children to stay in the light wherever it is. Play for a few moments. Afterward, ask children what they had to look at to stay in the light: the light or the darkness? Offer that today's story describes walking in God's light. Encourage them to listen for what that means.

Provide each child with a sheet of paper and encourage them to doodle as they listen. They may choose to draw images or write down words or phrases that stand out to them.

SD *Some children may be uncomfortable in darkness. Help these children by altering activities to avoid the situation or providing them with a pocket-sized flashlight when lights are dimmed.*

Hearing the Story

SD L

Invite one of the children to find 1 John in the Bible. Have a volunteer read 1 John 1:5–10. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible on the table.

Give each child a flashlight or battery-operated tea light. Invite them to hold their light high when they hear the word *light* and to cover their light when they hear the words *dark* or *darkness* as you read the story again using **SCM 11** or listen to the story audio.

Reflecting on God's Grace

C

Invite children to share their doodle words or images. Comment on what they captured as they listened. Encourage children to ask questions of one another as they share too.

Ask someone to recall in their own words the portion of the story where they understood what is meant by walking in the light or being in the darkness. Share your own story of a time you did something wrong and wanted to keep it hidden. If children have a similar experience, encourage them to share too. Use the following questions for further discussion:

- ▼ What is one thing this story made you wonder about?
- ▼ Why is it hard for us to admit when we have done wrong?
- ▼ What do you think it means to “walk in God's light”?

Singing

SD

Sing “God's Love for Us Is Truly Amazing (El amor de Dios es maravilloso)”—**MM 29**; **SCM 26**. Add rhythm instruments and encourage the children to sing loudly and with passion.

Turn off the candle.



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.



T For children who struggle with transitions, consider a quick physical activity—such as doing chair push-ups, squeezing hands together, and stretching.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.



Claiming God's Grace

C L A

Tell children that a hashtag is a label beginning with the symbol “#” used on social media sites to make it easier to find information with a theme or specific content.

Create a hashtag for the day. Invite a time of reflection on the story. Ask the children what might be a catchphrase or slogan for this story to make into a hashtag. Suggest that a hashtag is short and memorable. Prompt them to recall what the message of the letter was. Some suggestions may be: “Walk in God’s Light” or “God Is the Light” or “Follow God’s Light.” Note that hashtags are written all as one word with no space or punctuation. For example, #GodIsTheLight or #WalkInGodsLight. Capital letters will help distinguish the words.

Once the group has settled on a hashtag, provide supplies and let them create a “billboard” using the glow-in-the-dark paint and black paper. Ask them to include the hashtag as well as images they feel are important.



Celebrating God's Grace

M

Have the children help create and play a ring toss game using glow sticks and flashlights or battery-operated tea lights. Turn on and set the tea lights or the flashlights on the floor in a playing area space with the lights facing up. These will be the “pegs” to toss the rings on. Make rings out of two or three long, thin glow sticks and connectors. Dim the lights in your space.

Have the children take turns tossing the rings, trying to land them around the lights. Wildly celebrate each landed toss!

After playing, discuss whether it was easy or difficult to get the rings around the lights. Wonder if there were any strategies that helped ensure they would get a ringer. Ask the children what helps us find and stay in God’s light.



Praying God's Grace



Pray prayers of confession. Recall that, in today's story, pretending we don't sin (make mistakes) is like stumbling around in the darkness. Re-read these words:

. . . following Jesus is like living in the light, reflecting the light and love of Jesus. However, the people were also reminded that everyone makes mistakes sometimes, turning away from following Jesus and God's way of living. This is called *sin*. If someone says they don't ever sin or make mistakes or hurt others or God, then they are fooling themselves and not telling the truth. Sin is like stumbling around in the dark and not using a light to see where to go.

John the Elder assured everyone who heard that sermon letter, and us today, that God loves us and, if we tell God those things we have done wrong—if we confess our sins—God is faithful and loving. God forgives us. We can see God's path, God's way of living, once again.

Provide coffee filters and washable markers. Invite the children to write or draw their own prayer of confession, telling God something they did wrong. Assure them that no one else will see their words or drawing. It is only for God to know. Once they have completed their prayer, invite them, one by one, to place their filter in the bowl of water and watch the ink dissolve to symbolize that God has received and forgiven their confession. Invite the group to respond to each person's coffee-filter prayer with the words "God loves you and God forgives you. Walk in the light of God."

Offering God's Grace



Write a litany about offering forgiveness. Today's story teaches that God is faithful and will always forgive us when we confess our sins. This is part of walking in God's light. Comment that another part of walking in God's light is that we also offer forgiveness to others. Lead children to write a litany with the repeated line: "We will walk in God's light."

For example:

Leader: When others hurt us, we will offer forgiveness.

All: We will walk in God's light.

Encourage them to come up with movements for the repeated line as well.



Spend time crafting the litany and then offer it together, letting the person whose birthday is closest to today serve as the leader.

Share the litany with the pastor and/or worship committee to use in worship at some time.



Extra Activity

LD A



Give each child a copy of **GN 1**, a gallon-size plastic bag or clear sheet protector, and permanent markers. On the front of the bag or sheet protector, invite the children to draw or write things that bring them hope. Hand out black construction paper and have the children place it in the bag or sheet protector. Tell them that the dark paper represents turning away from God and God's way of living. It makes the things that bring us hope hard to find.

Have the children read the words on **GN 1** as they cut out the flashlight along the dotted lines. Then insert the flashlight between the construction paper and the bag. Show the children how to move the flashlight to see the hopeful things again.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite the children to help clean up the worship space.

Encourage the children to look for opportunities to walk in the light of God, following God's ways, confessing when they have done wrong, and forgiving others.

Have the children gather in a circle and offer this prayer:

Dear God, thank you for calling us to walk in your light. Help us not to make excuses. Help us to be brave when we do wrong and confess to you and those we love. We are grateful for your grace. Amen.

Bless each child as they leave, saying, “(Name), go out to share the love and grace of Jesus with everyone you meet.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

Live in God's Light!



