

1

Welcome All, as God Welcomes Us

GENESIS 1; LUKE 18:15-17



GOAL

Children explore the way that God welcomes creation, including us, by enacting ways to welcome others in the group, at home, in the larger church, and in the community.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Lord, help me to show my welcome of these children through my words and actions that, through me, they might welcome God and their neighbors. Amen.

THIS SESSION

This session begins a unit on the faith practice of hospitality. Here we look at how God welcomes all of creation, and we're assured that God welcomes us, too, through Jesus' welcoming of children. These stories cause us to follow Jesus' example by welcoming all we meet as God's children.

THE BIBLE STORY

Hospitality begins at creation as God welcomes everything from light to animals. This reading of Genesis 1 shows that hospitality includes all of God's creation, not just people. In coupling this with the story of Jesus welcoming the children, we see that, even though God's hospitality is vast, God still cares for each of us and welcomes us to the world.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Young children are practicing the art of welcoming here. They are learning how to greet others and to welcome all of God's creation as they encounter it.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Centers" (p. 8): Set up the following centers:
 - Play kitchen area with cooking and table-setting items
 - Nature encounter table with different non-sharp natural objects that the children could explore through touch and smell
 - Puzzle center with simple wooden puzzles of different parts of God's creation such as fruits or animals
- "God Welcomes All" (p. 8): Learn the song and motions for "God Welcomes All" on Resource Page 1.
- "Farewell, Good Friends" (p. 11): Learn the song and motions for "Shalom Chaverim."

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Greeting at Church" (p. 10): Contact several church members who are involved with greeting people and hospitality. Invite them to visit your group.
- "Welcoming in Other Languages" (p. 11): Explore the Omniglot website "Welcome in Many Languages" (bit.ly/FMManyLanguages), and choose three languages found in your faith community or neighborhood. Write the phrases and pronunciation, if necessary, on cards.



GETTING STARTED

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- Play kitchen area
 - Nature encounter table
 - Puzzle center

CENTERS

AM D NS

As the children enter, greet them by name and welcome them into the space. Invite them to play in the centers you have set up. If the children are new to you, you may want to use name tags, so that you can readily address them individually. Knowing children's names is a fundamental action in this practice of hospitality. Having several centers set up for individual or small group activity is helpful as children arrive.

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- Resource Page 1
 - Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device (optional)

GOD WELCOMES ALL

M

Teach the children the words and motions for the song “God Welcomes All” on Resource Page 1. This is the opening song for each of the sessions of this unit. If you are not familiar with the tune, this song can be found in the *Glory to God* hymnal, #399, or you can hear it at bit.ly/FMWelcomesAll or show the YouTube video “God welcomes all” (bit.ly/FMWelcomesAllVideo, 1:15). You can also speak the words and have the children repeat after you, following your motions.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

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- Jack-in-the-box toy (optional)

JACK-IN-THE-BOX NAME GAME

G AM

To begin this practice of hospitality, play a name game. Invite the children to sit in a circle. Tell them that each will have a turn to make themselves as small as possible and then to jump up like a jack-in-the-box. Show how the toy works or have a leader or volunteer demonstrate the action. Then invite the children to welcome this person by name. Say the following rhyme with the child's name, repeating the process for each person in the room:

(Name) in the box, sits so still.

Will they come out? Yes, they will (*child jumps up*)!”

The children respond, “Welcome, *(Name)*!”



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Two stories, one from Genesis 1 about God welcoming all of us in creation, and the other from Luke 18:15–17 about Jesus welcoming the children, are combined in this session and in the adapted Bible story on Resource Page 2. This shows two aspects of God, both God’s power and greatness and God’s close personal concern for each person.

WELCOMING THE STORY

AM

Read the adapted Bible story on Resource Page 2, inviting the children to throw their arms wide open each time they hear the word *welcome* or *welcomed*. These words are bolded in the story so you can use added emphasis on those sentences.

Resource Page 2

WELCOME POSTERS FOR CREATION

A

Invite the children to think about their favorite plant or animal and to share their choices. Tell them that they will be making welcome posters for those plants and animals and that their posters will include a picture of them too. Provide paper and crayons and/or markers and have them draw the plant or animal they mentioned along with a picture of themselves. You may want to write the word “Welcome” on top of their posters.

White paper or construction paper
 Crayons and/or markers

When all are finished, display the posters in the room to remind the children that hospitality is for all of God’s creation, not just for people.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Hospitality is something we practice every day, whenever we greet another person or take care of God’s good creation. Young children can move from their own welcoming to the welcoming of others.

Choose one or more options.

SEEING AND CARING FOR GOD’S CREATION

T QC C

Show the YouTube video “Beautiful Nature Images—Relaxing Music” (bit.ly/FMBeautifulNature, 5:33). Ask the children what they saw. Comment that God calls us to not only welcome creation but also care for it. Encourage them to offer suggestions about how we might keep the places they have seen beautiful and the animals safe. You might offer actions such as picking up trash and recycling, if they don’t come out in the discussion.

Internet-connected device

WELCOMING GOD'S CREATION

NS

Take a nature walk with the children around the church grounds or block. Have them spot different things that God created. As each one is named, say something together like, "God welcomes you, tree, and I do too."



If you know the specific name of a plant or animal, feel free to use it and teach it to the children. If not, you can just use broad categories like "tree," "bush," "flower," and "insect" to describe God's creation.

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- One or two people who are involved in your church's hospitality ministry
 - Any greeting items particular to your church such as member and/or visitor name tags, a welcome book, or pew pad

GREETING AT CHURCH

D S X

You may have particular people at your church who are designated to show hospitality to members and guests who come to the worship service. Invite them to your session. Welcome your guests and introduce them to the children, modeling hospitality. Ask your guests to share their role in the church and to demonstrate how they greet people when they come through the door of the church. Have them show any items that your church uses in welcoming people. After they have demonstrated various verbal and physical greetings, as well as handing out a worship bulletin (if this is their role), then invite the children to role-play these various ways of greeting.



If your group meeting precedes worship, notify parents/caregivers that the children may be invited to be greeters at the worship service. If not, they could be invited to do so at another time.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Practice welcoming others as you prepare young children to take hospitality beyond the doors of the church and into the world.

Choose one or more options.

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- Napkins, small paper cups
 - Snack items such as crackers or fruit

MEAL HOSPITALITY

F

This is snack time with a twist, linking it to the practice of hospitality. Invite several children to assist you in serving the other children during snack time. One person could pass out napkins; another could provide small cups of juice or water; a third could serve the crackers or fruit. All should wait for the prayer, which could also be led by a child, before eating. This can also be a time of gathering prayer requests from the children of their own joys and concerns or a time to teach them a new table grace that they could use at home. Look at "Children's Dinner Prayers and Mealtimes Blessings" (bit.ly/FMDinnerPrayers) for some ideas for table blessings.



Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

WELCOMING IN OTHER LANGUAGES



Teach the children how to say “welcome” in several different languages that may be heard in your church or community, using the phrases you learned from the Omniglot website, “Welcome in Many Languages” (bit.ly/FMWelcomeManyLanguages). You may want to form a small group for each language with a leader practicing with the children. Then have the children greet one another with the *welcome* they learned. Or, as one group, learn two or three *welcomes* and practice with one another. Encourage the children to greet people in the church and community who might know these languages when they see them during the week.

- Cards with “welcome” phrases



If you have photos or a church directory of people within the church who speak the languages the children have learned, show the children their pictures so they can identify and greet them sometime. You could also invite them to stop by at the end of the session so the children can welcome them in their language.

“SEEDS OF WELCOME” STORYBOOK



Provide the children with crayons or colored pencils and the two-sided copies of Resource Pages 3 and 4. Assist them in folding their paper in half to form a book. Read through the book with the children and invite them to color the pages. Wonder together how the characters are feeling in the story. Ask them who is showing hospitality and how they are showing it. Imagine together what might happen in the next part of the story. Encourage the children to read their storybook with family members.

- Two-sided copies of Resource Pages 3 and 4
- Crayons or colored pencils



FOLLOWING JESUS

FAREWELL, GOOD FRIENDS



Teach the children the Hebrew word *shalom*, and explain that it can mean “hello,” “goodbye,” or “peace to you.” Then teach them the song you will use to close each session of this unit, “Shalom, Chaverim!” If you are not familiar with the song, it can be found in the *Glory to God* hymnal, #540, or you can show the YouTube video “Shalom Chaverim: A Jewish Kids’ Sing Along” (bit.ly/FMShalomSong, 0:48). Note that the video has the words “We’ll see you again,” where the hymnal uses “Till we meet again.” You may also choose to speak the words and have the children repeat after you.

- Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device (optional)

Shalom, chaverim! Shalom, chaverim! Shalom, shalom!

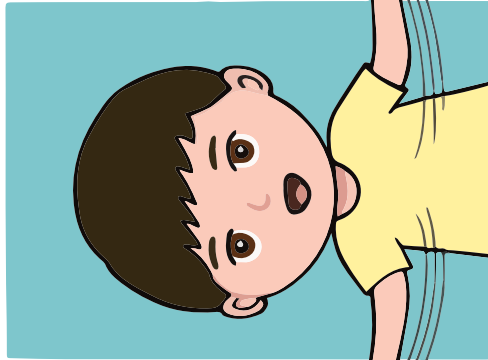
(sha-LOHM ha-ver-EEM! sha-LOHM ha-ver-EEM! sha-LOHM!
sha-LOHM!)

Le-hit-ra-ot, le-hit-ra-ot, shalom, shalom.

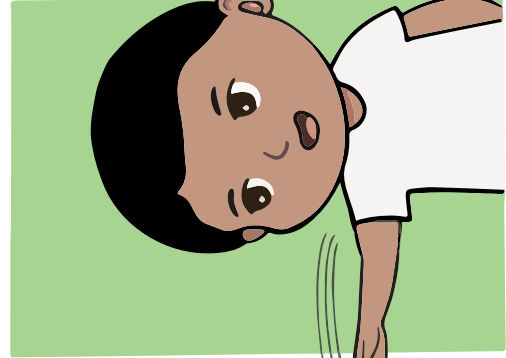
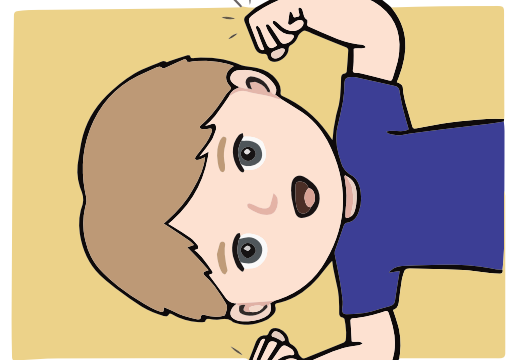
(La-HEE-tra-oat, La-HEE-tra-oat, sha-LOHM, sha-LOHM)

Farewell, good friends! Farewell, good friends! *Shalom, shalom!*
Till we meet again, till we meet again, *Shalom shalom.*

God Welcomes All



God welcomes all, strangers and friends.



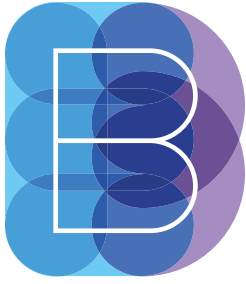
God's

love

is strong

and it never

ends.



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON GENESIS 1 AND LUKE 18:15–17

In the beginning, God smiled and began to create. God swept over the waters like a wind while deciding what to make first. “Let there be light,” God said. Light and darkness became two separate things—day and night. God **welcomed** the light and the darkness and said they were good, and that was the end of the first day.

The next day after the light came, God decided to separate the water that drops from the sky in rain and snow from the water that is down below in rivers, lakes, and the ocean. God **welcomed** both the water in the sky and water below and said they were good, and that was the end of the second day.

On the third day, God looked at the waters below and gathered them into particular places so dry land could appear. God planted all kinds of flowers, bushes, and trees on the land that produced yummy fruits and vegetables. God **welcomed** the land and all that grows on it, and God saw that these things were good.

On the fourth day, God gathered some of the light together to create the sun and the stars. God called the moon into being for the night. God **welcomed** the sun, moon, and stars and saw that they were good.

On the fifth day, God began to create the creatures of the sea, everything that swims, and the creatures of the air, everything that flies. Can you name some of these creatures? God **welcomed** all of these we have named and all the others whose names we don’t know, and God saw that they were good.

On the sixth day, God created the creatures of the land, all kinds of creatures. Some were tall, and some were short. Some had spots, and others had stripes. Some ate meat, and some ate plants. Can you name some of these land creatures? God **welcomed** all of these we have named and all the others whose names we don’t know. But God wasn’t done yet. God created humans to be in God’s image and to continue to welcome all of God’s creation.

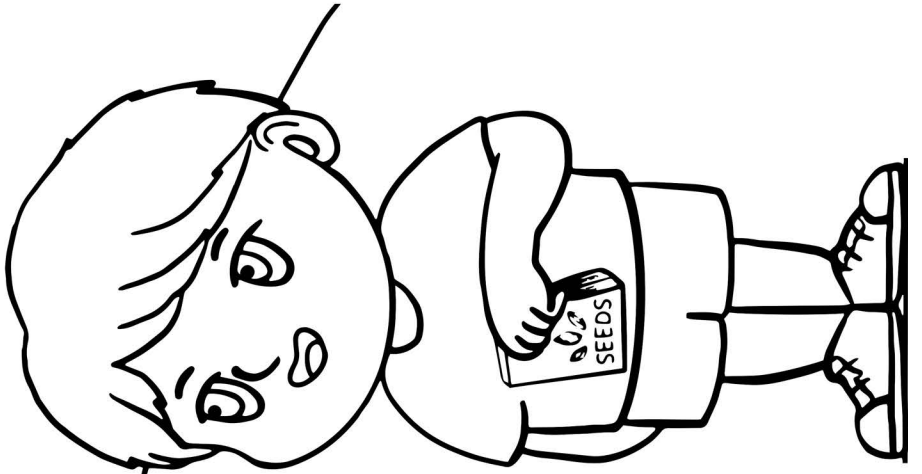
Does God welcome you? How do you know?

Many years after all these things were created, God’s Son, Jesus, came to earth, and one of the things he made sure to do was to **welcome** children. “These young ones are very good,” said God, as Jesus talked to them, hugged them, and blessed them and their families. We continue to **welcome** each other today through smiling, waving, and baptizing new people into God’s community.

Seeds of Welcome

Session 1

Today is a good day for planting seeds.



Now we can both welcome these plants to their new neighborhood.

I've never planted seeds before.

