

Isa. 64:1–9

Ps. 80:1–7, 17–19

1 Cor. 1:3–9

Mark 13:24–37

Grace-Filled Words

Goal for the Session

Children will learn, use, and receive grace-filled words with their friends as they learn about Paul's letter.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," E. Elizabeth Johnson

The letter's thanksgiving (1:4–9) telegraphs to readers at the outset the basic concerns of the writer. In this case, Paul's concerns are several related issues pertaining to the welfare of the house churches in Corinth: their charismatic giftedness (vv. 4, 7), their wealth—particularly but not only in terms of speech and knowledge (v. 5), the revelation of Christ in glory on the Day of the Lord (vv. 7, 8), and the faithfulness of the God who has called them (v. 9). Each of these subjects recurs throughout 1 Corinthians.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Carlos F. Cardoza-Orandi

This text points to one of the unique characteristics of the Christian religion: the intimate relationship between God and the Christian community that God bestows in and through Jesus Christ. Christianity gives witness to an intimate relationship among God, creation, and, in particular, the Christian community. This relationship is contextual: in other words, it takes its life and its shape from the particular terms of people's cultures. Hence, Jesus is our brother, our Lord, our ancestor, our beloved one, our enlightened spirit. Paul reasserts that the Christian community will be sustained in this spiritual continuum for one crucial reason: "God is faithful" (v. 9).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Martin B. Copenhaver

Paul proceeds to bless the Corinthian congregation. He has some urgent matters to take up with them, but those can wait for a time. Instead, Paul begins by offering a gift of blessing. It is an offering that, in itself, reminds his readers of the bonds they share. This passage invites us to offer thanks to God, not for material gifts, but for spiritual gifts found in the church. It might also serve as a reminder that the gathered body, the body of Christ, is itself intended to be a feast of abundance laid out for the sake of the world.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Charles L. Campbell

The grace of Jesus Christ, which is the source of the community's faith and life, undercuts all divisions in the community based on human accomplishments or status. Grace here has radical social implications; it is not simply a word spoken to individuals or a power at work in individuals. Grace creates a new kind of community. Paul invites the Corinthian church—and the contemporary church—to become an odd, new people in the context of a culture divided between superior and inferior, honored and shamed, insider and outsider. The grace of Jesus Christ is the source of that new kind of community.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple fabric
- 4 battery-powered votive candles
- basket of small stones
- Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024, CD player
- Color Pack 1, 2, 27, 30
- Bible
- roll of blue or purple ribbon
- scissors

For Responding

- option 1: 2 foam balls
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 1, colored pencils
- option 3: newsprint, markers, copies of Resource Sheet 2, fine-tipped markers, envelopes, postage stamps

Tell children about the ways your church observes the season of Advent during worship. What colors or decorations are used in the worship space? What special songs or prayers are used? This will help children participate more fully in worship.

Focus on Your Teaching

Grace-filled words are kind words. Every child basks in the glow of kind words. Today we read an excerpt from a letter from Paul to the Christians in Corinth. Paul uses kind words in his letter to remind the Corinthians of God’s gift of grace—God’s everlasting love and forgiveness. Paul writes these words to people who were not being kind to one another. Today the children you serve may not be kind to one another, either. Plan kind words you can say during the session, trusting that these words of love help fill children with God’s gift of grace.

Dear God, may your loving-kindness, embedded in my heart, well up into my words today. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the children arrive, if you will do option 3 in Responding, get a list of names and addresses of church members who are homebound or hospitalized. Your church office might be able to print address labels for these individuals if you ask early enough. It also may be able to provide postage stamps.

Welcome learners as they arrive. Invite them to help you arrange blue or purple fabric—according to the color your church uses in worship during Advent—and place Color Pack 2 on it. Arrange four battery-powered votive candles on top of the picture of the wreath.

Gather around the Advent wreath. Pass the basket of stones around, asking each child to take one stone to hold. As you light one candle, say that today is the first Sunday in the church season of Advent. The word *advent* means “coming.” During Advent, lighting one candle each Sunday reminds us that Jesus is coming. When all four candles are burning, Christmas is nearly here. Advent is a season of waiting. We wait to celebrate Jesus’ birth, because Jesus is the gift God sends to show us the ways of God’s love.

Take a stone and set it on the cloth, saying one thing you will be doing in your home to get ready for Jesus’ birthday. Ask children to take turns setting a stone on the cloth and telling one way they are getting ready for Jesus’ birthday.

Play the first verse of “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 27; track 8 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024), and then sing it together.

God, We Sing

1. God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *hope*
anew;
Light this candle, light
the way,
Bring *hope* into our
hearts today.
Jesus, near us as we
pray,
Let *hope* be in our hearts
today.

EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 1, and ask a volunteer to read the title. Invite learners to recall some things about Paul, such as: Paul used to arrest people who followed Jesus, but Jesus came to Paul and changed his heart. Paul spent the rest of his life traveling to tell people the amazing news about God's Son, Jesus. Paul wrote letters to churches he had visited. Many of his letters are in the Bible.

Today's reading is from a letter to Christians in the city of Corinth. If you have a map of the ancient world in your Bible, hold it up and point out Corinth. After Paul left Corinth, he stayed in touch with the Christian church there by writing them letters. (There were no phones or e-mail in Paul's day!)

Read aloud 1 Corinthians 1:3–9. Then ask:

- ✪ Why is Paul thankful for the Christians in Corinth?
- ✪ First Corinthians 1:9 says that "God is faithful." What does this mean? What do these words promise?

Paul said, "Grace to you and peace from God . . ." Explain that grace is God's love that lasts forever. This love gives us forgiveness and life with God forever. Jesus came to earth to bring us God's grace. Paul reminds people of God's grace through his letters. Paul blesses them with God's love.

- ✪ In what ways can we remind other people of God's loving grace?
- ✪ What might we do or say to bless other people with God's love?

"Grace to you and peace from God . . ." (v. 3). Repeat these words, asking children to join in. Next, form two groups. Ask the first group to greet the second group with "Grace to you." The second group responds: "And peace from God." Repeat the greeting and response several times.

- ✪ Why is it important to tell people that God's grace and peace are for them?
- ✪ What are some ways we can tell them?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Pass the Grace Game** Review today's memory verse through a game. Read aloud 1 Corinthians 1:3, recalling Paul's practice of passing on God's everlasting love to others through his letters. Stand in a circle. Say, "Grace to you, (*Name*)," and toss a foam ball to that person, who responds, "And peace from God." That person repeats the action, tossing the ball to another person. After a few turns, begin a second ball. Continue play until all have had several turns.

Grace is a common word in Christian worship. It is a complex concept. Build a foundation for lifelong learning by introducing grace as God's love that lasts forever. Children will add to this definition as they mature.

EASY
PREP

- 2. Living Together** Tell children that later in his letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul urged them to stop quarreling and to do a better job of living as God’s grace-filled people. Invite an honest discussion about reasons that people quarrel or fight. Acknowledge that getting along takes a lot of work. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Life Together) and colored pencils. Read each box together, taking time for children to complete each box. As time allows, invite volunteers to tell what they’ve written or drawn.
- 3. Grace Letters** Children can proclaim God’s grace in a letter, like Paul did. Tell children about members of your church who are homebound or hospitalized. Imagine together what you might say to these individuals in a letter. Write some of the phrases they offer on newsprint. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Grace Letters). Give each child the name of one of these members to write at the top of the letter. They then can decorate the letters with fine-tipped markers and sign their names at the bottom. Take a moment to offer a prayer of thanks to God for each of these people, then demonstrate how to fold the letters and put them in envelopes. Have the children help you address and stamp letters for mailing.

We Are Dancing in the Love of God

We are dancing in the love
of God,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing in the love
of God,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing, we are
dancing, ooh,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing, we are
dancing, ooh,
We are dancing in the love
of God.

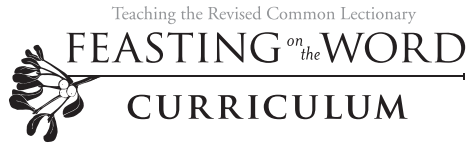
Siyahamba, ekukanyen'
kwenkos',
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos'.
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos',
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba, oh,
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba, oh,
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos'.

CLOSING

Gather in a circle. Ask who remembers the name of this season of the church year. Hold a roll of ribbon—blue or purple, depending on your church tradition. Unroll about 20 inches while saying something you learned today. Holding onto your portion of the ribbon, pass the roll to the next person in the circle. The next person unrolls some ribbon while telling something he or she learned today, holds onto the ribbon, and passes the roll to the next person. Continue until the ribbon roll is back to you. Cut the ribbon and tie the ends together while everyone is still holding onto the ribbon. Remind the group that God’s grace—God’s love that never stops—brings us together as a community of Christians. Cut the circle apart, giving a piece of ribbon to each learner.

Close your time together by singing “We Are Dancing in the Love of God” (Color Pack 30; track 23 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*) while waving the pieces of ribbon. After the song, explain that group members will give a blessing to each person. As you stand behind each person in the circle, the group says: “We give thanks to God for you, (*Name*)!” End the blessing time with a hearty “Amen!”

December 3, 2023
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Grades (K)1–2
Resource Sheet 1

Life Together

Use grace-filled greetings. Paul said, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:3). Draw yourself saying “hello” to a friend at school.

Find good things to say about other people.

Paul told the Christians in Corinth that they had wonderful spiritual gifts from God. Draw yourself giving a compliment to a friend or family member.

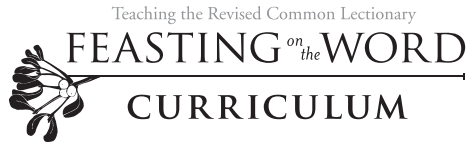
Remind other people they are children of God.

Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that God called them to live together as Jesus’ followers. Draw yourself making the sign of the cross on the forehead of a person you love.

Thank God for your friends and family.

Paul told the Christians in Corinth: “I give thanks to my God always for you” (1 Corinthians 1:4). Draw the people you are thankful for.

December 3, 2023
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Grades (K)1–2
Resource Sheet 2

Grace Letters

Dear _____ ,

Grace to
you and
peace from
God.

Our Sunday school class gives thanks for you.

Your friend in Christ, _____