

Today's Suggested Schedule—December 2023, Week 1

Today's Bible Story: Goodness and Light (Jesus Is Promised) • *Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:6-7; 7:14-15*

Today's Bottom Line: You can have hope because God is faithful.

Monthly Memory Verse: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;* Isaiah 9:6a (ESV)

Monthly Virtue: Christmas—Celebrating Jesus, God's greatest gift

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Before kids arrive, take a few moments to pray for them. Start by thanking God for being faithful. Think of a couple of promises you're especially grateful for and praise God for those specific promises. Pray for your few, that they would be ready to celebrate God's greatest gift, Jesus. Pray for patience as you navigate the content of this month. Ask God for wisdom to help your kids grasp the hope they can put in God as you explore the Old Testament verses today.

Check out our Pinterest page here <https://bit.ly/447HSZi> for a visual on some of the activities.

LARGE GROUP (35 minutes)

STORY: Communicating God's Truth in Engaging Ways

WORSHIP: Inviting People to Respond to God

- Hang Time
- Welcome/Opener
- Worship
- Bible Story
- Bottom Line
- Prayer
- Closer

SMALL GROUP (25 minutes)

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect

- Story Exploration
- Bible Story Review: Faithful Chain
- Application Activity: True or False Hop
- Memory Verse Activity: Verse Hopscotch
- Prayer Activity: Pray and Dismiss

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

- Parent Cue Card (Print or Email)
- Devotionals for Kids
- Parent Cue App

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Use this if kids have questions about following Jesus.

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word gospel. Clarify that the word gospel means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.

God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.

We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)

God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.

Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.

We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

If a child has expressed interest in following Jesus, please let the parents know so they can be a part of the conversation that their child is having about faith.

What Now?

If you put your trust in Jesus Christ and believe in Him as the One who forgives your sins and makes it possible for you to know God, we are so proud of you! There is no greater single decision that you could make. We believe that baptism is an important next step for you. Baptism is your way of telling your friends and family, “Hey, I'm a follower of Jesus!” If you're interested in learning more or participating in baptism, talk to a staff member about the next steps you should take.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Story Exploration

The prophet Isaiah said the Messiah would be born of a virgin. (Jesus' mother Mary was a virgin.) Jesus came to earth as a baby in Bethlehem. God is Jesus' Father, but He chose Mary and Joseph to be Jesus' earthly parents. For many years, God had promised to send a Messiah to save people from sin. Jesus was God's plan to bring salvation to the world, and God had been working out His plan all along.

1. The Promise of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2):

Micah, a prophet, spoke about the significance of Bethlehem—a seemingly small place. But God, in His divine plan, chose this humble town for the birth of the Savior. Reflect on the idea that God often works in unexpected and humble ways. Discuss how God's plans are perfect, even if they don't always match our expectations.

2. The Wonderful Names (Isaiah 9:6-7):

Isaiah gives us a glimpse into the nature of the coming Messiah by describing His names: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Discuss each of these names and what they reveal about the character of Jesus. Emphasize how Jesus fulfills each role in our lives, providing guidance, strength, everlasting love, and peace.

3. The Sign of Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14-15):

The prophecy of Immanuel ("God with us") is a powerful sign of God's presence among His people. Reflect on the concept that God entered into humanity, becoming one of us. Discuss how Jesus' birth was a miraculous sign of God's love and His desire to have a relationship with us.

The Old Testament prophets also said that Jesus would be the Son of God. Jesus did not use His status as God to make His life on earth easier. Jesus gave up His position in heaven, came to earth, and took on the form of a man.

Jesus did not stop being God the Son when He came to earth. Is Jesus God or a human? As the Son of God, Jesus is both fully God and fully human. Jesus had earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, but His true Father is God. Through Jesus, God kept His promises to Abraham and David. Jesus saves people from their sins and adopts them into God's family.

- What does it mean to be adopted into God's family?
Lead kids to recognize that adoption describes our new relationship with God. We gain all of the responsibilities and privileges of being a child of God. God gives His Spirit to lead His children. We live for Him, and we will live with Him forever.
 - (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Gal. 4:6-7.)
- How does the idea of "Immanuel"—God with us—impact your daily life?
Help kids to reflect on how much their relationship with God affects their life. Does their relationship with God change how they treat others? How they respond to different situations? How does it make you feel that God desires to be with us?
 - (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Eph. 1:4-5.)
- How is Jesus different than other people?
Emphasize that as the Son of God, Jesus is both fully *God and fully human. Unlike other people, Jesus never sinned.*
 - (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Heb. 4:15.)

1. Faithful Chain

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Create: an activity that explores spiritual ideas through the process of drawing, building, and designing

What You Need: Strips of green and red construction paper, glue sticks or tape, and pens

What You Do:

- Give each kid two red strips and two green strips of construction paper and a pen.
- Set out the glue sticks or tape.
- Instruct the kids to write a way they can be faithful on two of the strips, for example:
 - I will practice praying.
 - I will turn in my homework on time.
 - I will get my chores done when my parents ask me to, etc.
- When done, invite the kids to write ways God has been faithful on the remaining two strips, for example:
 - God kept the promise to send Jesus.
 - God kept the promise to send a rescuer to save us from our sins.
 - God makes something good happen out of something bad.
 - God promises to be with us all the time, etc.
- Ask the kids to share what they wrote on each strip.
- Demonstrate how to make a paper chain by looping two strips together and securing it with glue or tape.
- Encourage the kids to create one long chain with their strips.

What You Say:

“Wow! You came up with some amazing ways you can practice being faithful every day. Being faithful is not always easy. When someone isn’t faithful and breaks a promise, how does it make you feel? (*Invite responses—sad, disappointed, hopeless, etc.*)

“Did you know that there are over 3,000 promises that God has made to us in the Bible? And did you know that God always keeps those promises? Your list of ways God has been faithful is a great reminder to us that God always keeps promises.

“God fulfilled the promise to send Jesus, and God promised to one day make everything right in this broken world. When things in our lives aren’t going well, we tend to think the worst. But even in those times, God is there with us. God is with us when we feel lonely, sad, and upset because things didn’t go the way we thought they would. God is with us when we’re confused and feel like there is no hope.

“No matter what you’re going through, God wants you to have hope that something good could come out of something bad. The truth that **[Bottom Line] you can have hope because God is faithful** is one of the many things we can celebrate during Christmas. **[Make It Personal] (Tell kids how remembering God’s faithfulness in the midst of a hard time gave you hope to keep going and keep believing.)**

“So, **[Bottom Line] you can have hope because God is faithful.**”

*2. True or False Hop

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Move: an activity that increases the oxygen in the brain and taps into the energy in the body

What You Need: “Review Statements” Activity Page and paper chain from “Faithful Chain” activity; *Optional: painter’s tape if you do not have the chain*

What You Do:

- Place the Christmas chain on the floor to divide the environment into two sections.
 - If you did not create a chain, tape a line on the floor.
- Designate the right side of the chain to be “True” and the left side to be “False.”
- Instruct the kids to stand on the right side of the chain to start.
- Inform the group that they are to move to a side of the chain when you share a true or false statement.
 - If they think the statement is true, instruct them to jump to the “true” side.
 - If they think the statement is false, instruct them to jump to the “false” side.
 - Have kids remain on the side they jumped to until the next statement is read.
- Read the “Review Statements” Activity Page, pausing to let the kids jump to a side.
- If the kids think a statement is false, invite them to share why they think that.
- When done, use the chain to decorate the environment.

What You Say:

“Throughout history, God’s people found themselves in trouble. Every time, God rescued them. What is the BIG thing that God promised us way back in the Old Testament through Isaiah and Micah? Who did God say would come to rescue us, to save us? (*Pause for responses*). That’s right! Jesus!

“Years later, we see in the New Testament that God fulfilled that promise to us by sending Jesus, God’s only Son! That’s what Christmas is all about. God kept that promise back then and continues to keep promises now. That is why we can always have hope. God has also promised to one day make everything right in this broken world. Even when things are tough, you can know that God loves you and will be faithful to make things right again. **[Bottom Line] You can have hope because God is faithful.**”

3. Verse Hopscotch

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need: “Memory Verse Phrases” and “Verse Layout” Activity Pages, two prepared hopscotch grids, and Bibles

What You Do:

- Lay the “Memory Verse Phrases” cards inside the hopscotch grids according to the “Verse Layout” Activity Page.
- Make sure each kid has a Bible.
- Together, look up Isaiah 9:6 using the Bible navigation tips below.

Finding verses with 2nd and 3rd graders: Guide kids to open their Bibles to the front and find the table of contents. Hold up a Bible opened to the table of contents to show the kids what the page looks like. When the kids find the table of contents, lead them to find “Isaiah” in the list under “Old Testament.” When the kids find Isaiah, lead them to look at the page number beside the word. Explain that the number tells them on what page they can find Isaiah. Help the kids find the page. When they find Isaiah, explain that the big numbers on the page are the chapter numbers. Help them find chapter 9. Explain that the small numbers are verse numbers. Help them find verse 6 in chapter 9.

- Read the verse together a few times.
- Divide your group into two teams.
- Direct each team to line up in front of one of the hopscotch grids.
- Instruct the kids to take turns hopscotching down the grid.
- As they hop into a section, direct them to recite the verse phrase inside that section.
- Give the teams a few minutes to become proficient with the verse.
- Share that the two teams will race against each other to see who can finish first, but there is a catch!
- Direct the first kid from each team to compete against the other by hopping into section one and removing the phrase.
- Instruct them to carry the phrase with them while they hopscotch to the end of the grid and they recite the verse.
- When that kid is done, direct them to join their teammates at the end of the line.
- Once the first kid has jumped through the grid, prompt the second kid to hop through the grid saying the verse, including the missing phrase, while removing the phrase from section two.
- Continue until all phrases have been removed.

What You Say:

“Great job, everyone! Many years before Jesus was born, Isaiah—the author of the verse we are learning—wrote about Him. He said that a child and a Son would be given to us. Who do you think Isaiah was referring to? (*Invite responses.*) That’s right! Jesus!

“God sent His Son to make things right. The verse continues to say, ‘He will rule over us. And he will be called Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God. He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever and Prince Who Brings Peace.’ (*Isaiah 9:6 NIV*) Jesus came not just to rescue us from our sins, but also give us advice and peace in every situation. Because He is all these things, we can always have hope when we trust in Jesus. He helps us and is with us forever. **[Bottom Line] You can have hope because God is faithful.**”

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Create: an activity that explores spiritual ideas through the process of drawing, building, and designing

What You Say:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- How does this story help me love others?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

What You Need: "Advent Ornament" Activity Page and markers or colored pencils

What You Do:

- Ask the kids to sit in a circle.
- Give each kid an ornament from the "Advent Ornament" Activity Page.
- Set out the markers or colored pencils.
- Instruct the kids to write their name on the back of the triangle.
- Invite the kids to recite the Bottom Line with you a few times, putting extra emphasis on "hope."
- Inform the group that they will color a different word on the ornament each week and will have the opportunity to assemble the ornament and take it home later in the month.
- Point out the Christmas tree.
- Ask the kids to find "HOPE" on the Christmas tree and color the letters and the tree.
- Discuss what hope means as kids color the first section of their ornament.
 - Hope means believing that something good can come out of something bad, like when you lose your favorite toy but you don't throw a fit because you can ask someone to help you find it later. It's when you have a bad day at school, but you are still excited to hang out with your friend after school because they know exactly how to cheer you up. It's when you get sick and have to stay home, but instead of making everyone else bad because you feel bad, you think about all the things you can do with your family while you're home, like a movie night. It's when you make a mistake on your art project, but you get some help turning it into something you think the teacher will still love.
- Collect the ornaments and store them for future weeks.
- Close your group time in prayer.

What You Say:

"[Bottom Line] You can have hope because God is faithful is the best news ever! Since God never breaks a promise, you can trust God to be faithful at all times, no matter what. This means you are never without hope! God is always with you, helping you face the most impossible situations. God is working behind the scenes to make something good come out of something bad. That is something to be thankful for! Let's pray.

"Dear God, thank You for always keeping Your promises and being faithful. We know You love us. We know You will never leave us. You are faithful, and that's why we can have hope. Thank You for sending Jesus to rescue us and be our best friend forever. We love You, and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

As adults arrive to pick up, encourage the kids to show them how they decorated their environment with the Christmas chain they made, if you did that activity. Ask them to locate one of their links and share what they wrote on it.

GETTING READY

Here's everything you need to know to get ready for this week.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Create a safe place to connect and learn how the Bible story applies to real life experiences, through interactive activities and discussion questions.

Story Exploration – No supplies

(Choose as many of these activities as you like.)

**If you don't have time to do all these activities, be sure to do activity #2*

1. Faithful Chain

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Create: an activity that explores spiritual ideas through the process of drawing, building, and designing

What You Need:

- Green construction paper
- Red construction paper
- Scissors
 - Before group time, cut construction paper into equal strips, two strips of each color for each kid
- Glue sticks or tape
- Pens

***2. True or False Hop**

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Move: an activity that increases the oxygen in the brain and taps into the energy in the body

What You Need:

- Print “Review Statements” Activity Page on paper, one for each Small Group
- Paper chain from “Faithful Chain” activity
- *Optional: painter's tape if you do not have the chain*

3. Verse Hopscotch

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need:

- Print “Memory Verse Phrases” Activity Page on cardstock and cut apart, two sets for each Small Group
- Print “Verse Layout” Activity Page on paper, one for each Small Group
- Bibles
- Painter's tape
 - Before group time, tape two hopscotch grids on the floor following the guide on the “Verse Layout” Activity Page. The “Memory Verse Phrases” cards will be laid inside the grid during the activity.

4. Pray and Dismiss

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Create: an activity that explores spiritual ideas through the process of drawing, building, and designing

What You Need:

- Print “Advent Ornament” Activity Page on cardstock and cut out, one for each kid plus extras
 - Make sure you leave the tabs attached when cutting out the triangles.
- Markers or colored pencils

Note: Kids will be working on this project for the next few weeks. Have a plan to collect and save their ornaments for future weeks. Assembly directions will be provided in Week 4. Make extra copies for others who attend the group in the following weeks.

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

- Print on cardstock or email this week's devotionals and Parent Cue cards.
- Tell parents about our additional family resources: **Parent Cue app**