

3

Growing in Faith

MARK 4:26-29; JEREMIAH 17:7-8



GOAL

By exploring the ways water enables growth in nature, children begin to see baptism as an invitation to spiritual growth.

- 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

Nurturing God, help me remain open to your working in me as I lead our children in this time of growth and exploration. Amen.

THIS SESSION

This session emphasizes the connection between baptism and growing. While baptism is an act of discipleship itself, it also inspires and informs other Christian practices important to faith development, such as prayer, reading Scripture, and engaging in acts of service. Just as water helps plants grow, baptism is an invitation to personal and communal growth in faith.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Mark's Gospel is a parable Jesus told his followers early in his ministry. The parable of the Farmer focuses on the way in which the farmer and God work together to bring about growth. This is much like how God provides growth, but we have to engage in order to experience growth. The second passage, from Jeremiah, likens the faith of a happy person to a tree growing near water; it flourishes because it is well watered. Participating in the practice of baptism is a way of *watering* our faith.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children are busy doing a lot of growing. However, they may be new to the concept that our faith can grow, instead of thinking that faith is something you either have or you don't. The idea is introduced that faith is more about what you do and who you are than something you possess.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Baptism Questions" (p. 8): Display the newsprint with questions and answers from session 1.
- "Water Play" (p. 22): Set up a water station with one or more large tubs of water, bowls, pitchers, measuring cups, and various containers. Cover the floor around the water tubs with a tarp or plastic tablecloth. Have towels on hand.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Look at Us Now!" (p. 22): Gather a few pictures and stories from your childhood to share with the children.
- "Nature Walk or Collage" (p. 23): Plan a route for your nature walk. If a walk is not conducive to your location or the weather, gather supplies to make a group nature collage.
- "Grinch-y Growth" (p. 24): Obtain *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss (Random House Books for Young Readers, 1957) or use the YouTube video "Dr. Seuss' "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" Read by Keith Morrison—NBC News" ([bit.ly/FMGrinchBook](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMGrinchBook), 9:56).
- "Watching for Growth" (p. 24): Gather planting supplies. Set up an area to plant seeds. Place a tarp or plastic tablecloth on the floor for easy cleanup.



GETTING STARTED



Post the newsprint with questions and answers about baptism from session 1, “Baptism Questions” (p. 8). Invite the children to add questions and answers throughout the session. Keep for session 4.

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- Tubs, bowls, pitchers, and cups of various sizes
 - A large container of water
 - Towels

WATER PLAY



As children arrive, invite them to engage with the water play station. Lay out towels on the table and floor, along with a large container of water and smaller containers to pour, measure, and splash in the water.



Some children will likely get wet! Have extra towels on hand for drying exuberant children and their clothes.

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- Bowl of water

WATERS OF BAPTISM



Place a bowl of water in the center of the group. Invite the children to dip their fingers in the water and make a cross mark on the back of their other hand. Say to the group, “Through the waters of baptism, God claims you as God’s own beloved child.”



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

-
- Pictures and stories from your childhood

LOOK AT US NOW!



Engage the children in a conversation about what they were like as small children compared to how they are or what they do now. Show some of your baby or childhood pictures that display how you’ve grown and changed. Invite the children to share stories from when they were little. As they do, emphasize how much and in what ways (not just physically) they have grown since then. Explain that, in this session, you are going to learn about how baptism helps us grow.



Be sure not to put anyone on the spot to share. Some children may not have many happy or funny stories about their early years, particularly if they have had a major shift in family structure.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

-
- Copies of Resource Page 1

HOW FAITH GROWS



Introduce the Scripture passage from Mark 4 as a parable and explain that *parables* are stories Jesus told to teach his followers something. Invite the children to think about what Jesus was teaching about when he told this parable. Read aloud the passage.

Then Jesus said, “This is what God’s kingdom is like. It’s as though someone scatters seed on the ground, then sleeps and wakes night and day. The seed sprouts and grows, but the farmer doesn’t know how. The earth produces crops all by itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full head of grain.

Whenever the crop is ready, the farmer goes out to cut the grain because it’s harvesttime.”

—Mark 4:26–29 (CEB)

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Explain that you are going to narrate while they act out an imaginative retelling of the story. Assign a part to each child so everyone can participate: farmer(s), seed(s), rain(s), and sun(s). Read the story, pausing between each statement for the children to act out the responses described on Resource Page 1. When you have finished, applaud and ask the children what message they think Jesus was teaching his followers. Wonder together how it applies to us today.



Multiple children can have the same part, and the same child may have multiple parts, depending on the size of your group.

TREES PLANTED BY STREAMS

A

Provide card-stock copies of Resource Page 2, watercolor pencils, water cups, and paintbrushes. Tell the children that there’s another part of the Bible that talks about faith growing like plants. Read the verses from Jeremiah found on Resource Page 2. Invite the children to draw a picture illustrating this passage using the watercolor pencils. Explain, if necessary, how the watercolor pencils work by drawing or coloring with them first and then adding water on the paintbrush to turn the pencil marks into watercolor paint.

As they work, engage them in conversation about their art and why those chose to illustrate the verses the way they did. Set the pictures aside to dry.



When working with watercolor pencils, a little water goes a long way. The more color on the paper from the pencils, the more vibrant the finished picture will look; too much water will result in a watered-down (though still beautiful!) mess. If you’d prefer to use watercolor paper, have the children cut out the passage from Jeremiah from Resource Page 2 and glue it to their watercolor paper.

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- Card-stock copies of Resource Page 2
 - Watercolor pencils
 - Water cups
 - Paintbrushes
 - Watercolor paper (optional)



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

NATURE WALK OR COLLAGE

NS AM A

Lead the children on a nature walk on your church property or a nearby park. Note the growth you see in the area from season to season. Instruct the children to pay special attention to any water you see. Encourage them to wonder how water affects the landscape or individual plants and animals. See how many signs of life your group can discover!

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- Mural paper (optional)
 - Magazines (optional)
 - Glue sticks (optional)

If your location or the weather isn't conducive to a nature walk, have the children make a group nature collage using mural paper, pictures from magazines, and glue sticks.

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- How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss (Random House Books for Young Readers, 1957) or internet-connected device

GRINCH-Y GROWTH



Read *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss to the children or show the YouTube video “Dr. Seuss’ “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” Read by Keith Morrison—NBC News” (bit.ly/FMGrinchBook, 9:56). Emphasize the size of the Grinch’s heart at the beginning and end of the story. Then engage the children in conversation about how the Grinch’s growth is like our growing in faith; our love gets bigger!

- ✦ Why did the Grinch hate Christmas so much?
- ✦ What changed about the Grinch?
- ✦ What inspired him to change?
- ✦ How can we tell the Grinch’s heart grew bigger?
- ✦ How is this story like growing in our faith?



While it is much beloved, *The Grinch* is a fairly long children’s book. You may want to move through the book fairly quickly.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Clear cups or jars
 - Potting soil
 - Grass, sunflower, or other fast-growing seeds
 - Spoons
 - Small pitcher of water or watering can
 - Tarp or plastic tablecloth

WATCHING FOR GROWTH



Lead the children in planting a tiny garden to take home. Give each child a cup or jar and help them fill it 1/2–2/3 of the way with potting soil. Show them how to tuck the seeds in to give them a place to sprout. Help each child give their mini-garden a tiny bit of water to get it started.

Invite the children to water their seeds a little bit each day and to say a prayer when they do. Create and recite a short prayer together so you can all say the same prayer. An example of a prayer might be:

Dear God, thank you for all we need to grow.

Be with me and my seeds today and help us grow.

Amen.

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- Copies of Resource Page 3

GROWING IN FAITH



Share with the children that growing in faith isn't just for Sundays! Give each child a copy of Resource Page 3 and explain that each activity listed is a way to grow your faith and heart. Encourage them to try one activity a day and color in the flower when they have completed it. Read through each activity and answer any questions the children may have. Talk together about ways to adapt the activities if needed.



FOLLOWING JESUS

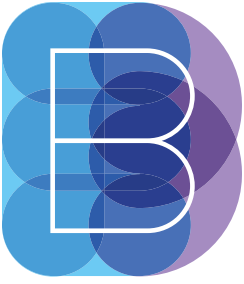
WATER BLESSING

Return to the bowl of water. Form a circle. One by one, invite each child to dip their fingers in the water and then turn to the person next to them in the circle and draw a cross on their hand, saying, “(Name), you are God’s child. God loves you!”

Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Dear God, /
you are like a farmer, /
and we are like your seeds. /
Send us sun /
and send us water /
so our faith /
and our hearts /
can grow to giant sizes. /
Amen. /

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- Bowl of water from “Waters of Baptism” (p. 22)



BIBLE STORY

A RETELLING OF MARK 4:24-29

One day, a farmer (*stands up and waves*) went out to the field (*walks around*) and planted some seeds. (**Seeds** *jump up and wave*. **Farmer** *walks around, pretending to drop seeds here and there. Wherever the farmer “drops” a seed, one of the seeds curls up in a ball on the floor.*)

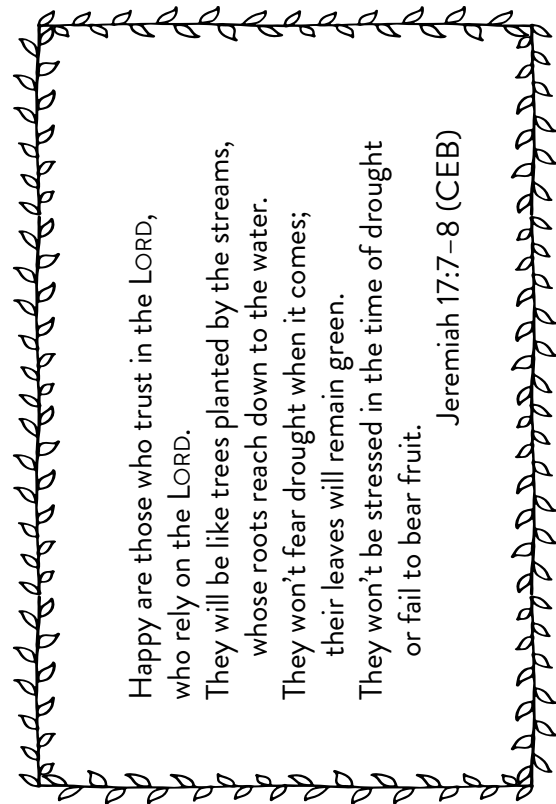
The rains came. (**Rain** *makes “shushing” sounds and dances around the seeds.*) And the farmer woke (**Farmer** *jumps up*) and slept (**Farmer** *lays back down*). The sun shone. (**Sun** *stands up, spreads arms and legs and shines/dances around the seeds.*) And the farmer woke (**Farmer** *jumps up*) and slept (**Farmer** *lays back down*). The seeds sprouted. (**Seeds** *stick their arms up like little leaves.*)

The rains came. (**Rain** *makes “shushing” sounds and dances around the seeds.*) And the farmer woke (**Farmer** *jumps up*) and slept (**Farmer** *lays back down*). The sun shone. (**Sun** *stands up, spreads arms and legs and shines/dances around the seeds.*) And the farmer woke (**Farmer** *jumps up*) and slept (**Farmer** *lays back down*). The seeds grew tall. (**Seeds** *stand to a crouching position.*)

The rains came. (**Rain** *makes “shushing” sounds and dances around the seeds.*) And the farmer woke (**Farmer** *jumps up*) and slept (**Farmer** *lays back down*). The sun shone. (**Sun** *stands up, spreads arms and legs and shines/dances around the seeds.*) And the farmer woke (**Farmer** *jumps up*) and slept (**Farmer** *lays back down*). The seeds grew big and strong. (**Seeds** *stand up and stick their arms up and out like full-grown plants.*)

And the farmer was proud. (**Farmer** *stands up, smiles, and gives the plants a big thumbs-up.*) So the farmer thanked the rain (**Farmer** *looks at rain and claps; Rain bows.*) And the sun (**Farmer** *looks at sun and claps; Sun bows.*) And the seeds who were now plants! (**Farmer** *looks at plants and claps; Seeds/Plant bows.*)

Then the farmer said thank you to God (**Farmer** *folds hands and bows head as if in prayer*), because it was God who took the seeds, and the rain, and the sun (*each wave in turn*) and made them grow. (**Farmer** *looks up and smiles.*)



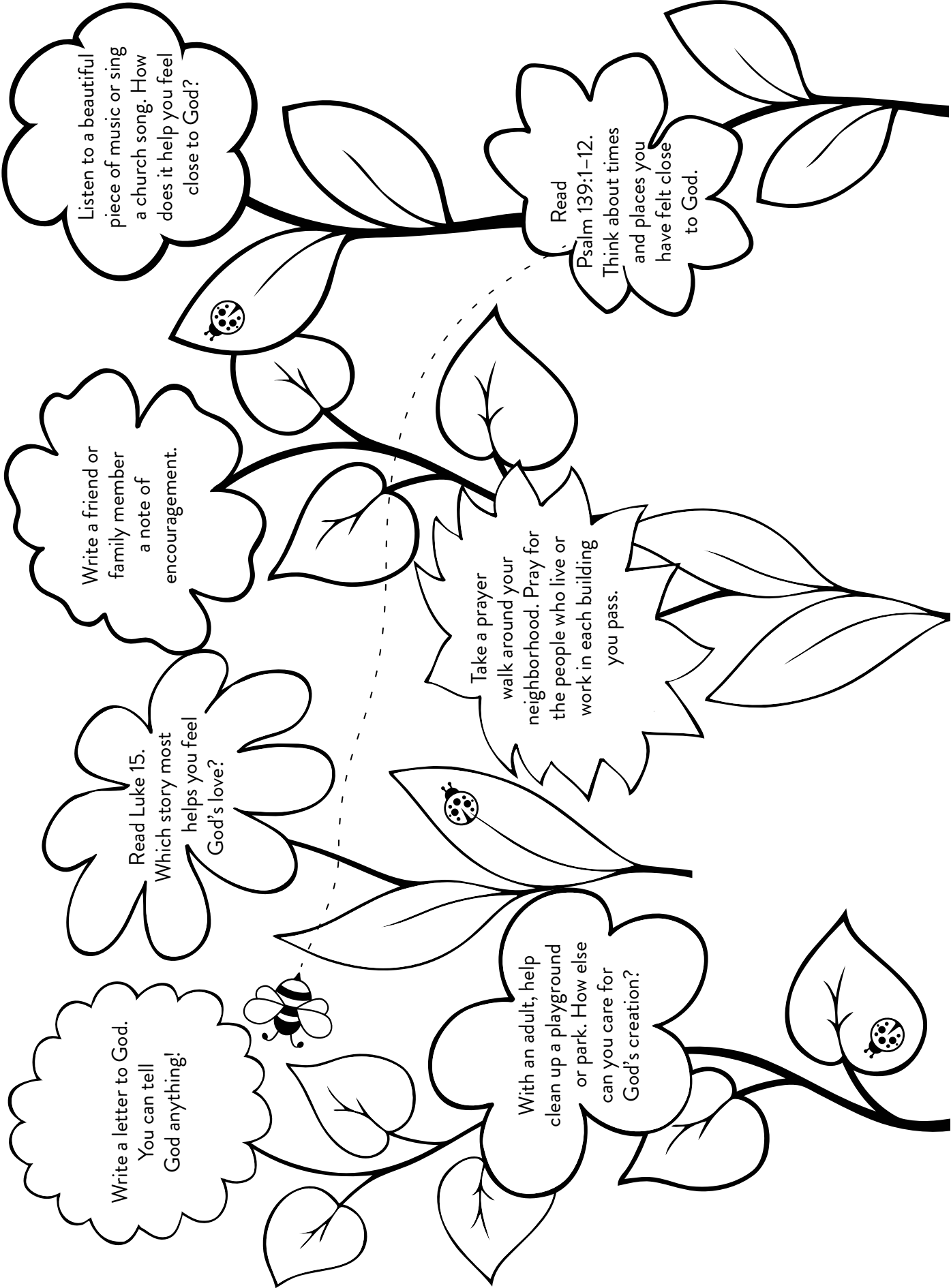
Happy are those who trust in the LORD,
who rely on the LORD.

They will be like trees planted by the streams,
whose roots reach down to the water.

They won't fear drought when it comes;
their leaves will remain green.

They won't be stressed in the time of drought
or fail to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (CEB)



Listen to a beautiful piece of music or sing a church song. How does it help you feel close to God?

Write a friend or family member a note of encouragement.

Read Luke 15. Which story most helps you feel God's love?

Write a letter to God. You can tell God anything!

Read Psalm 139:1-12. Think about times and places you have felt close to God.

Take a prayer walk around your neighborhood. Pray for the people who live or work in each building you pass.

With an adult, help clean up a playground or park. How else can you care for God's creation?