



Faith Adventures for Children Together



Free to use – please acknowledge when using beyond local church children's and youth work
so others can find and use the resource themselves.

*Committed to URC Children Together:
enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus
together in the home, church and beyond.*

For guidance on the purpose of the resource
and how to use it as a launch pad for your
engagement with children and families, please
use this link: www.bit.ly/FACT-how-to-sheet

Title: Luke 23: 39 - 43

Theme: 100% Confidence in God's promise.

Contents:

Introduction	1
Together	2
Experience	4
Explore	4
Express	7
Handouts	11

Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning?

As we continue exploring the promises of God, this week's session takes us to one of the most powerful moments in Scripture - Jesus on the cross, speaking words of hope to a criminal beside Him. It's a passage that reminds us that God's promises are not just ancient words written long ago - they are alive, personal, and available to each of us, even in our darkest moments.

Last week, we laid the foundation by looking at the promises God makes throughout the Bible. This week, we zoom in on one promise in particular: the assurance of salvation. In Luke 23: 39 - 43, we witness Jesus offering a promise to a man who had nothing to offer in return - no good deeds, no time left to change his life - just a simple, heartfelt plea: "Jesus, remember me." And Jesus responds with a promise: "Today you will be with me in paradise".

As you prepare to lead this session, take a moment to reflect on the radical grace and certainty of God's promises. This story is not just about a man on a cross - it's about every child and young person in your group who may wonder if God's promises are really for them. Through this passage, we'll help them see that God's promises are not earned - they're received. And they are always trustworthy.

Consider how trust works in our everyday relationships. We tend to believe someone's words



when we know them well - when we've seen their character, consistency, and care. The same is true with God. The more we understand who God is, the easier it is to trust. Unlike human promises, which can be broken due to changing circumstances, emotions, or limitations, God's promises are anchored in God's eternal nature. God doesn't forget, or fail to follow through promises made - no matter what.

As you prepare, consider these themes that may resonate deeply with your group:

- **Empty Promises:** Many children and young people have experienced broken promises - from friends, family, or even authority figures. These can lead to disappointment, mistrust, and a sense of being let down. Be sensitive to this as you talk about God's promises. God's words are different - they're never empty.
- **Punishment and Grace:** Some may associate wrongdoing with punishment and rejection. This passage flips that expectation. Instead of condemnation, Jesus offers grace. Help your group see that God's justice is real, but God's mercy is greater. The criminal received paradise, not because he deserved it, but because Jesus offered it.
- **Conditional Love vs. Unconditional Promise:** Many young people wrestle with the idea that love must be earned. This story shows that God's promises are not transactional - they're relational. They flow from God's grace is, not what we do.

This week, help your group explore the idea that trust in God grows through relationship.

Encourage them to ask questions, express doubts, and discover that God welcomes all of it. The criminal on the cross didn't have a lifetime of faith - he had a moment of trust. And that was enough. Help those in your group to understand the unshakable truth that God's promises are for them, now and forever.

Together – prayer and games

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend

(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,

(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,

(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better,

(point up with one hand)

**As children together in your family**

(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three 'steps' as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN

(Two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.

Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.

Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,

Adventuring together with you wherever we may go.

Amen

Active game – Promises, promises

You will need:

- slips of paper with different promises written on them (mix of simple, fun, and kind ones, e.g. I promise to do five star jumps, I promise to give someone a compliment, I promise to tell a joke, I promise to share a smile). Have double the amount of promises for the people playing
- space for an obstacle course (chairs to go around, cones to weave through, a mat to hop across, etc.)

What to do:

Split into two teams (or play as one big team if numbers are small).

The first person in each line sets off around the obstacle course.

At the end of the course, they choose one of the "promise slips."

They must complete the promise written on the slip straight away.

Once they have kept their promise, they run back and join the end of their team's line.

The next person then sets off to complete the course and pick a new promise.

Continue until everyone has had at least one turn.

In this game we tried to keep small promises, and sometimes that was easy and sometimes it was hard. Unlike us, Jesus never breaks his promises, and we can trust him with our whole lives.

Quieter game - Steady

You will need:

- marshmallows (regular size)
- uncooked spaghetti
- a small stuffed toy or doll (lightweight)

What you do:



Tell those gathered that we are going to build a chair for our toy friend. But not just any chair—it has to be strong enough to hold them without collapsing!

Allow time to think through some ideas as a group.

Either as individuals or small groups, using only the marshmallows and spaghetti, build the chairs.

Once the chairs are built, gently place the toy on each one. Celebrate every attempt—whether it holds, wobbles or collapses!

Sometimes we build things and hope they'll work - but we're not always sure. People can make promises and not keep them, just like some chairs might look strong but fall apart. But God's promises are different. They're strong, reliable, and never fail - no matter what. We can trust God like a chair that never breaks, even when life feels wobbly.

Experience – Bible story and songs

Hear, watch and sing the Bible story

For this story we recommend using the New Living Translation

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2023%3A%2039-43&version=NLT>

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: Cartoon version by Andy Hughes

https://youtu.be/QECkRj0OqxA?si=LvWbFXE-zJ4od_hh

Five to elevens: A speed chalk drawing of the reading by Kidswise

<https://youtu.be/X-J16F1K97k?si=q0g3JYi8QH4FU4YF>

Songs to support the story

Under fives: Rend collective kids – lighthouse

<https://youtu.be/JeJvKkBV6rY?si=1Xh6DkxTqQpQmYmF>

Five to elevens: Jesus I have promised (Muppets theme tune) by Hornsey Moravian

https://youtu.be/iHqpaG_HOqg?si=ThWCAY7vpXg3B6nn

Explore – ways into the theme

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A new way to explore the theme - Captain Promise and Captain Assurance

Have some superhero fun while exploring the difference between a promise and an assurance.

This passage gives us the opportunity to think about the difference between a promise we make and a promise God makes. God's promises are assurances. Let's explore what we mean and what the difference is.

Read the passage to the group twice, the first time read 'Jesus said to the man, I promise you that today you will be with me in paradise'.



Then read it again and this time replace “promise” with “I assure you, you will be with me in paradise.”

Ask the children, what the difference was.

What's the difference between the two?

Write “promise” on a large piece of paper and “assurance” on another. Give the definition of both.

Promise = to tell someone you will do something.

Assurance = a promise you can have confidence in, because it will happen.

Have a brief conversation about the two.

For example: we try to keep promises, but things happen to stop us keeping them (can the children think of an example)

When God makes a promise, nothing can stop it from happening and that gives us confidence in God's promises.

You could have some fun with two leaders dressing up in superhero clothes and becoming Captain Promise and Captain Assurance.

They could swoop into the group and rescue a cat on top of a bookcase for example.

But Captain Promise (“never fear Captain Promise is here”) says he will help, but actually it's quite windy, and he is allergic to cats, and the bookcase looks a bit wobbly. He will try but might not be able to keep his promise.

While Captain Assurance (“I make a promise and I keep my promise”) swoops in and nothing is going to stop him from rescuing the cat.

Have lots of panto-style fun with this.

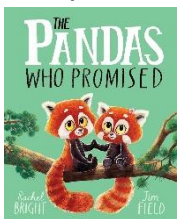
The group might like to design a costume for both, or have a go at putting little sketches together, pretending to be each superhero.

Recap – How is God's promise better than anyone else's?

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too. If you are to use the modern parable consider buying a copy or borrowing it from the library so children see the actual book and can explore the illustrations more (and support the author).

The pandas who promised by Rachel Bright and Jim Field (May 2024 Orchard Publishers)



<https://youtu.be/cBEk3kwkpUo?si=0BIzUN8vo1vTRHNS>

The pandas promise not to stray too far when playing, they struggle to keep this promise. The story explores how promises work in life.

- What promise did you last make?



Talking together: How might we talk about the Bible story together?

- Were both criminals going to be with Jesus or just the one the promise was given to?
- What helps you to see God's promises?

Wondering reflect on the theme

- I wonder how the two men felt when they heard Jesus' promise
- Are there things which stop us from fulfilling our promises to others?
- I wonder what the criminals had been accused of
- I wonder how God's promises different from our promises
- I wonder if there are any of God's promises which you find hard to accept

What's in the box? (for under fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing, "what's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- Signs for promises - <https://youtu.be/2-Q1rveWHKU?si=d7zTbSpua-x0a3Ct> – show the signs for promise, I wonder what sign we would use for promise?
- Rainbow – talk about the rainbow being a sign for God's promise to the world. Have you seen a rainbow?
- Padlock and key – Talk about places they may have seen padlocks displayed – this is because two people put a little lock on a fence or a bridge. Then they throw the tiny key into the water. Splash! The lock is their promise to be friends, or to love each other, for ever and ever.
- Shape sorter – talk about the shapes going into the right holes and that God's promise will always fit. It is always true and can be trusted.
- A tactile cross of wood or fabric (a cross shape reminds us of Jesus. Jesus/God loves us and it's always in the box because Jesus/God always loves us!)
- A set of play people to act out the story or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (eg stones, felt, twigs etc)

Express – prayer and creative activities

Praying together: enabling your group to respond spiritually

Prayerful activity – Prayer chatterbox

You will need:

one square piece of paper (preferably A4 trimmed to a square)
pens or markers
scissors (if trimming paper)

What you do: <https://youtu.be/dtm0WlsVMt0>

Fold the square diagonally both ways, then unfold.



Fold each corner into the centre.

Flip it over and again fold each corner into the centre.

Fold the square in half horizontally and vertically.

Flip it over and slide your fingers under the flaps and push together to form the chatterbox shape.

Now write on your chatterbox.

On the outside flaps you could have 4 pictures

chair—it has to be strong enough to hold them without collapsing!

Allow them time to think through some ideas as a group.

Either as individuals or small groups, using only the marshmallows and spaghetti, they build their chair.

Once the chairs are built, gently place the toy on each one. Celebrate every attempt—whether it holds, wobbles or collapses!

Sometimes we build things and hope they'll work—but we're not always sure. People can make promises and not keep them, just like some chairs might look strong but fall apart. But God's promises are different. They're strong, reliable, and never fail—no matter what. We can trust God like a chair that never breaks, even when life feels wobbly.

 Rainbow

 Heart

 Cross

 Star

or 4 letters P R A Y

On the inside flaps add these (or other) Bible verses.

Genesis 9:13–15 - God promises never to flood the whole earth again.

Romans 8:38–39 - Nothing can separate us from God's love.

John 3:16 - God promises eternal life to those who believe in Jesus.

Jeremiah 29:11- God has good plans for our future.

Isaiah 41:10 - God promises to be with us and strengthen us.

Deuteronomy 31:6 - God will never leave or forsake us.

Philippians 4:6–7 - God promises peace when we pray instead of worry.

2 Corinthians 5:17 – When we follow God we're made anew.

Under each flap add prayer promises, below are some suggestions:

Thank you, God, for always loving me—even when I mess up.

I trust you, God, because your promises never fail.

Help me remember that I can be assured of your promises.

Thank you for forgiving me and giving me a fresh start.

I believe you have good plans for my life.

Even when I feel scared, your promise can give me peace.

Thank you for sending Jesus to show me your love.

I know I can talk to you anytime, and you'll listen.

Discuss: Was it fun guessing what promise you'd get? Just like we trusted the chatterbox to give us something good, we can trust God's promises even more. They're not random - they're always true, always loving, and always for us.

Spoken prayer

Lord God,
thank you that we can be forgiven by you.



Thank you that when we want to be your friend and live your ways we are promised a spot in paradise.
Amen

Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond.

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

Friendship bracelets

You will need:

- embroidery thread
- some tape or a circle of card

What you do:

The simplest way to make a friendship bracelet is to use a simple loom. This is a circle of card with a hole in the middle and eight slits cut evenly around the outside of the circle.

Cut seven different coloured threads 30 cm long and knot the ends together.

Take the knotted end of your threads and push them through the hole. Take each colour and place each one into each slit on your template.

There will always be one empty space while you are braiding.

With the empty slot facing you count to your left and grab the third thread on the left and pull it out and place it into the empty space.

Rotate the circle so that the empty slot is facing you again and do the same. Keep moving the third thread on the left into the empty space and rotating it so the empty space is always facing you. Once it is the right length, remove each thread from the loom, and pull the whole bracelet through the bottom. Knot the ends together, then put it on the children's wrist as a reminder about how we keep God's promise with us.

Here is a video of different friendship bracelets you could make <https://youtu.be/u5knLsLjlaE?si=rA1O91jvJaHia2l8>

Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- Talk to someone older or younger than you and ask them to tell you something you might not already know about Jesus.
Find out what sort of promises your local MP has made. Have they been able to keep them? Could you write and ask about any broken promises?



We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of **God's promise** with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing
sharon.lloyd@urc.org.uk

Please join the Faith Adventures Facebook Group **bit.ly/FACT_FB**

Why not have a look at next week's resource on **God never leaving us?**



The
United
Reformed
Church **Children**



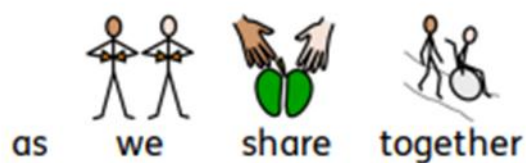
The
United
Reformed
Church **Youth**



Jesus our friend,



be with us today



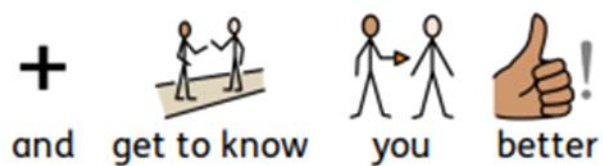
as we share together



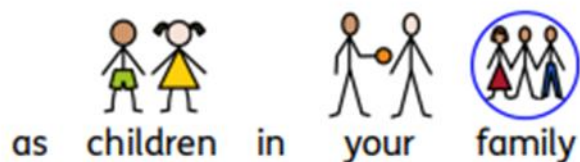
pray together



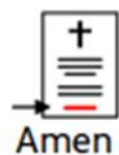
play together



and get to know you better



as children in your family



Amen



Right middle finger
touches centre of
other palm, repeat
with left hand



Alternate hands back
and forth







The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory

For ever and ever . Amen

