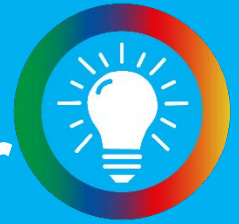




Faith Adventures for Children Together



How and why to use this resource

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

FACT – A Bible-based children's group resource

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Values

It will be:

- **Bible-based** - every issue is based on a passage from the Bible, encouraging children together to experience the story, explore it in new ways which relate to their daily life experience, and express their own response
- **Creative and playful** – the essence of childhood is creativity and playfulness and these are the best way for our scriptures to come to life for children and adults alike.
- **Inclusive and accessible** – God's love is for all and this resource aims to be accessible to all children, regardless of age, gender, 'churched-ness', wealth, education, physical or cognitive needs, locality etc
- **Fostering God-connection** – This resource is designed to encourage and enable children and adults to talk and listen to God and become friends of Jesus for themselves.
- **URC unique** – there are lots of resources out there, but this resource is written primarily with URC children in mind. There is a focus on social justice and walking the way, a focus on the Bible, inclusivity and an encouragement to develop a personal understanding which may differ from that of others but is still accepted and respected.

Purpose

This resource gives URC churches a free flexible weekly outline to use in services, groups, wider settings etc with all ages, particularly including children from 0-12 – and encouraging them to resource faith at home through enabling



children, parents and grandparents to experience, explore and express faith through those activities and providing a simple 'take home' connected resource.

- It will develop URC Children through resourcing churches and families/households.
- It will support the Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme focus on children's spirituality.
- It will enable children and young people to play their part in the mission of God.

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

It is good to know a little bit about the passage and where it fits into the Bible before you begin. Read the passage, maybe in a couple of different versions, and read this short introduction to help you think about the context of the passage and what the passage means to you. This section may also help you think about how to tackle any tricky subjects that may arise.

Then think about the children you are working with and their needs. What from our resources would work best for them? Do you need to adapt any?

You will probably not want to use everything in this resource – it will depend on your setting, the length of your session etc.

Together

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

Starting a session with a prayer grounds the session in God.

While children like variety, most also really like structure, and a prayer that is used every time can be a good way to help children feel secure and involved. Remember there may be newcomers who are unfamiliar with the prayer, or children with memory difficulties, so maybe give them a written version or use actions they can join in with. Choose from the two prayers provided or use your own. There are templates at the end of this "how to" resource.

Games are useful for helping children work off some steam, to relax and bond together as a group. This resource contains an option for in the room and an option for if you're meeting online. These games are linked to the theme so are a good way of introducing the theme from the start. In a longer session, you might wish to supplement the game in this resource with one of your group's favourites.

What are Experience, explore and express?

Our faith adventure takes us around the Bible, exploring different passages each week and generally gathered loosely around a theme for the month, although most issues will be stand-alone. They do not link to the lectionary. Faith is not about learning; it's about growing in relationship with God through Jesus and with others of all ages on the path together, guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Our role is to create an environment where children can experience God's word, explore what it means for them as an individual and as part of God's family the church, and express their own response.



Experience

Each week we will look at different versions of the Bible and recommend which version might be best for your session. We will give you a link to that version in Bible Gateway. If you choose a different Bible, please make sure that it uses everyday language that the children will understand and that it also uses inclusive language where appropriate. This means using words like "people" instead of "men" and not always presenting God as male.

Where can I find the story online?

There will always be two online versions of the Bible story, one aimed at younger children and one more suitable for slightly older children. Do make sure you've watched them in advance if you decide to use an online video clip to tell the story.

Songs to support the story

There will always be two songs with links to help you find them, one aimed at younger children and one more suitable for slightly older children or all age worship. Of course, you may use familiar songs instead, if you want to have a time for singing. These are just suggestions.

Explore

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

A new story to share

Each week there will be a new story, written by our team of storytellers, which explores the theme or the Bible reading in a new way. Like the modern parables, you could use these stories to help the children unpack the theme. The aim will be to produce a variety of styles of story over the weeks. These stories are not copyrighted and can be used in any setting.

Occasionally, instead of a story or poem etc, there may be suggestions for a whole-group conversation around the story with slightly more expansive conversation prompts than the talking together and wondering questions.

What are modern parables ?

Parables are stories that Jesus told which paint a picture of the message he wanted to share by putting it in a context that people could understand. They did not always explicitly mention God. Many of today's stories for children do that too, even if they're not explicitly Christian. We will suggest one such story but you may know of more. Please use the Facebook group to share your suggestions – when we find a good children's book, it's always good to share with others!

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

The talking together questions give an opportunity to have a focused chat around the theme. They encourage interaction within the group, adults and children together. This would be good to do whilst still all together.



Wondering together: suggested questions to use during activities

The beauty of wondering questions is that they don't imply there is a right or wrong answer, they are a chance for adults and children alike to ponder together. They can be used to encourage more chatting on the theme and are perfect for while a craft or similar activity is happening, though they can be used at any time.

What's in the box? What is the purpose of this section?

Our younger children, and some children with additional needs, benefit from a more concrete experience of the story and the items listed here are common, everyday items which children can play with. They all link with the story or the theme in some way. You could tell the story in your own words or use a Toddler Bible if it's a story that is in there. We recommend The Beginners' Bible For Toddlers or the Lion First Bible as good versions to use. The resource has some suggestions of the kind of thing you might talk about with the children as they play.

Small play toys such as playmobil people or other toys can be used to re-enact the story, or why not dress up other toys as characters?

Loose parts play uses bits of felt, stones, items from nature such as twigs and leaves, or household bits and pieces to make pictures to retell the story or represent the theme or simply to explore. Read more here : <https://www.pacey.org.uk/news-and-views/pacey-blog/2019/march-2019/getting-to-grips-with-loose-parts-play/>

This section will list some items you could provide for your under-fives together with some prompts for conversations you could have as you explore the items in the box. Promote some excitement, a bit of awe and wonder, by the way you share the items with the children. The routine of having the items in a box or bag that you open with a familiar song will help the children know what to expect and will connect the play items with the story rather than them simply being things to play with.



Express

How can you encourage the group to respond to the story and share it?

Praying together: how can you involve the children actively in prayer?

Our aim is to create opportunities for children to see prayer as talking and listening personally to God, as much a part of life as talking and listening to others, and something that can happen in many different ways. Children (and adults too) can often disengage from prayers spoken or written on their behalf by others, but tapping into their creativity and their everyday experience enables the prayers to be truly theirs.

Do not worry if the prayers do not feel like the prayers you are used to experiencing in church.

The resource offers a creative prayer and a spoken prayer to choose from (or you could do both at various points in the session)

Responding together: how can you facilitate children making God's message their own?

You could choose from the craft included in the resource, small play (lego, playmobil, etc), colouring, or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond.

The basket could include things like different colours and types of paper, glue stick, scissors, different kinds of writing or colouring materials such as felt tips and chalk, scraps of felt and fabric, feathers, lollipop sticks, beads etc. Children might respond by making/drawing/writing or in some other way, you do not need to direct this.

With an online group you may want to encourage them to use the things they have at home to create a model, a picture, a poem or story, or a prayer that they'd like to share with the others and give them a time limit to spend on them.

You could use the wondering questions with the children while they're responding. It is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and chat with the children while you're doing so. This may be difficult online so maybe play a piece of music that can be in the background while everyone is focused on their response.

The resource provides instructions for two different, slightly more structured activities that you might choose instead of giving children free choice, though it is good even with these not to expect children to produce a carbon-copy of the finished result but to develop the idea using their own creativity. One activity will be a craft activity, the other will be a STEM activity (i.e. something more science-based or a recipe). Which you choose will depend on what resources you have available, how much time you have, and the preferences of the children in your group.

Although we have included a colouring sheet, colouring should never be used just as a time filler or easy option and you should be aware that not all children enjoy colouring. It is, however, an activity that could be done if there is limited time as it can be taken home and completed later, and it can be a good way of engaging children's hands while having a conversation about the theme or while they listen to a story.



Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

Our faith isn't just for one day a week, it's something that influences our whole lives as we aim to be disciples of Jesus, living the life of Jesus in all we say or think or do. You could use the suggestions in the resource of things that children might try to do during the week ahead. Better still, you could talk with the children about ways in which they might live out (express) the message they've gained through experiencing and exploring the Bible passage in their everyday lives and get them to come up with some suggestions which you could write on the back of their 'postcard home'

The postcard home – what is it for?

Children spend far more time out of church than in it, so part of our role is to equip and encourage families to explore and express their faith at home. Some children will have families which support them in this, others may be unsupported in their faith at home and want something that they can do on their own. The postcard home (the content of which has been decided upon by consulting with a range of children in different contexts) is designed to give them a simple take-home that will give them suggested prayer ideas, wondering questions and easy activities on the theme.

Even if you don't run the sessions, you could give the postcard to members of your congregation to pass on to grandchildren, young friends or godchildren etc

Sharing and networking: We would like to encourage you to support one another and us by building a sense of community. We have a Facebook page for Faith Adventures for Children Together where you can share pictures of things your group has made and done or different crafts, modern day parables, resources, prayers etc, you have found, or just chat about things in general or ask questions or share news.

Your feedback will also help us develop the resource to be best suited to the needs of those who use it. Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk

Don't forget our other resources which are available on the website: Families on Faith Adventures @ Home, our annual themed resource books, Go with Greta/#Connect 2, Friends on Faith Adventures, and our annual holiday club materials.

FACEBOOK : https://bit.ly/FACT_URC

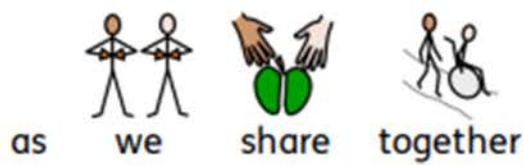




Jesus our friend,



be with us today



as we share together



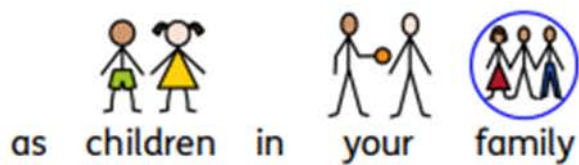
pray together



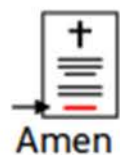
play together



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

