

Stories and Pictures of Our Faith

# PROMISES PROMISES

A Faith Milestone

For children ages 6-10



Written by Rev. Joy Engelsman and

Rev. Joel Schreurs

Edited by Kim Csepe

# PROMISES, PROMISES

## Purpose

*Promises, Promises* was created to help younger children articulate the faith they already have.

## Goals

The goals of *Promises, Promises* include:

1. That the children will understand God's unique promises made known to His people in our own life stories, in the Word, in Baptism, in the Lord's Supper and through the church.
2. That knowing these promises will encourage them to respond to God with promises of their own—to receive Him and follow Him.
3. That articulating these promises would mark a milestone in the faith stories of the children who participate.

## Content

In this curriculum, we will focus on three promises and the action of God that confirms each promise:

- **The Father promises I belong. (The Father adopts me.)**
- **The Son promises I'm forgiven. (The Son forgives/saves me.)**
- **The Spirit promises I'm a new person. (The Spirit grows me.)**

*Note: Knowing that the Trinity is a difficult concept and that all analogies and attempts to either blend or distinguish the persons eventually fall apart, we choose to speak of each person of the Trinity individually. We will make an effort to explain that the three persons are one God and that they share the promises which we have explained as coming from the individual persons.*

## Timing

We encourage *Promises, Promises* to be done as a two-part event. In the summer, we have held it on a Wednesday night and a Thursday morning. In the school year, on a Friday evening and Saturday morning. We have found that 2 hours and 15 minutes works for the first night, and 2.5 hours is needed for the next morning.

## Participants

**Pastors.** We have two so we use both of us.

**Elders.** We strongly encourage the Elders to attend. They observe and listen to the children as they engage with the topics of faith. The Elders sit on the floor among the children and have served food and been the arms for the "Bridge Illustration."

**Adults** are needed for the "Bridge Illustration" exercise, so we encourage parents to come about 20 -25 minutes early to hear the review and help provide with this activity.

## Food

Pizza, veggies, juice and ice cream bars for the first night. Fruit of all kinds were used as decoration in the Holy Spirit (green) section and eaten for snack on Day 2.

## Room

Don't skip this step!! The look and feel of the room has become an important part of communicating the promises. The interactive seating arrangement, the colors and the movement around the room will not only make it more fun and engaging, but it will clarify the promises and help the kids absorb the teaching.

Choose a room large enough to spread out on the floor and set up some decorations. We use our Fellowship Hall with all the tables and chairs removed. Divide the room into 4 sections. One section is set aside for gathering, eating, doing the "Bridge Illustration" etc. The other 3 sections are described below. If you have a small room, you could do these three primary sections in that room, but you will need another space for eating and for the Bridge Illustration.

It helps to create an impression of a border between the segments of the room. For example, we propped a table on end and threw red fabric over it to border the red part of the room and we hung green fabric from the ceiling tiles to create a border to the green section. For a visual, see the following page.

## Color

Don't worry about fancy decorating! Just get as much of the specified color into each section of the room as possible.

**Father section is purple as a royal color,**

**Son section is red as a reminder of the forgiveness through his blood**

**Spirit section is green to indicate growth.**

Instead of using chairs, we threw colorful blankets, pillows and cushions on the floor. Use your creativity and invite other good decorators to help. You might be surprised by what you'll find if you scour the various closets and rooms. We found fabric stashed in the drama room, fake plants and flowers in closets, purple cushions in the youth room and members of the congregation lent us red and purple bean bag chairs.

## Setting

Set each section so that the children's backs are to the center of the room and they face outward toward the walls of the room. At the "front" of each section, where the children are facing, place a simple table decorated to the theme of that section.

**Father section: Purple cloth, family picture, communion glass and plate**

**Son: Red cloth, standing cross, cup and plate with a small loaf of bread**

**Spirit: Green cloth, bowl of fruit (snack on second day), plants, a dove banner that we had; cup and a plate**

We set the baptismal in the very center where all the sections came together. But, you could alternatively set a small bowl of water at each station before the 3<sup>rd</sup> circuit. You could also take the cup and plate with you to each section during the 4<sup>th</sup> circuit on communion if you have just one set.

### Visual Aids



Left: Shows all 4 sections. Baptismal font is in the center.

Below: Purple section facing center.



Below: Purple section facing outward.



Below: Red section. See table that borders green section. Children crawl through this for

the tunnel activity representing resurrection.



Left: Green section from center facing outward.



o  
t

### ation Overview

With children this age, we knew we needed to move around quite a bit, so we decided to have everyone move from section to section. We would teach a specific promise in one colored section, and then move on to the next section to teach the next promise.

**In the purple section, teach the promise that God the Father says we belong.**

**In the red section, teach the promise that Jesus says we are forgiven.**

**In the green section, teach the promise that the Spirit says we can grow.**

Begin in the purple section with the leader(s) sitting on the floor near the table and the children's backs to the center of the room, facing the leader. After the Pastors tell their **belong** stories, everyone gets up and moves to the red section where the Pastors will tell their personal **forgiven** stories. Then everyone gets up again and moves to the green section for the **grow** stories.

- The three promises will be reinforced by five trips around the room.
- The first and second trips will be about **stories** of faith.
- The third, fourth and fifth trips will be about **pictures** of faith.

On the first visit to each section, the Pastors will tell personal stories (testimonies) of how they have experienced the three promises in their own lives.

On the second visit, we will explore Bible stories that confirm these promises.

On the third trip, we will look at the promises through the eyes of baptism.

On the fourth trip, we will look at the promises through the eyes of the Lord's Supper.

On the fifth trip, we will look at the promises through the eyes of the church.

If the Promises Promises retreat is held in two parts, the following schedule is suggested.

#### Part 1:

- Children enter, sign in and eat dinner.
- Pastor introduces and gives an overview of the promises and the night.
- Complete circuits 1 and 2, moving through each section and telling the stories.
- Children break for a snack (ice cream bars)
- Finish the night with the Bridge Illustration

\*If the retreat is held in one day, the water bowls for baptism and the cup and plate to represent communion can be added to the stations at this time if they have not already been set out.

#### Part 2:

- Review promises: What do they remember about the promises of the triune God?
- Introduce the sacraments: baptism and Lord's Supper.
- Complete circuits 3, 4 and 5.
- Break for snack.
- Hand out testimony pages for students to complete. Adults can help them, especially if they are younger. The pastors and adults present can review the sheets when they are completed and pray for the children individually.
- Optional: come together to review the testimony sheets as a group.
- Optional: Students can complete the day by doing a craft that will mark this as a faith milestone.
- Close with a prayer, and if time allows a song such as the Doxology.

## Part I.

Circuit I: Our **Stories** of Promises.

**Two part testimonies: What God promises and how we respond.**

*Rationale: telling our stories introduces the pattern of the work of our triune God and our responses to God's work.*

*It also models for the kids that we all have a story that connects us to God.*

A. **Joel's story:** scared at night, mom's lap, Psalm 27, security.

**Joy's story:** During hard time when she thought God had abandoned her, God showed himself in creation, sermons, people, songs.

B. **Joel's story:** told a lie, was forgiven by parents and felt forgiven by Jesus.

**Joy's Story:** 4<sup>th</sup> grade decision to follow Jesus.

C: **Joel's story:** Kids who stole the car for a joy-ride. He was convicted and felt bad for gossiping. God helped him to grow in this.

**Joy's story:** Bad habit of hitting her sisters. The HS helped her stop the bad habit and start a new one of loving her sisters. (transformation)

Introduction: What do you see in this part of the room? What do you think it means? I wonder what kind of stories we might hear tonight... notice the colors... we hope they will help you to remember the promises.

► Once you enter each colored section, do a short introduction to the section itself, using questions like the ones above. Try to repeat the color, the Person of the Trinity and the promise words as much as possible.

Pastors Joy and Joel tell stories of their own faith/life journeys (see side bar) following the pattern below. Stories focus on the key words: belong, forgiven, and grow.

### A. God the Father/Our Response (BELONG)

- i. God loves us and promises that he wants us in his family
- ii. We can trust Him and feel safe and secure belonging to Him.

### B. Jesus/Our Response (FORGIVEN)

- iii. Jesus loves us and died so that our sins were paid for and we are forgiven
- iv. We believe in Jesus and receive his forgiveness.

### C. Spirit/Our Response (GROW)

- v. The Spirit lives in us and works in us to make us really alive and help us to grow and become who God wants us to be
- vi. We listen to the Spirit and obey God because of the Spirit.

## Circuit II: **God's Story** of His Promises.

Starting over in the purple section, we move around the circuit again. This time, we tell God's own story from God's own Word, the Bible. As the pastors tell the stories of the Bible in their own words, they will come to a point where specific verses can be read aloud by some of the children in the group. These verses can be found to print at the end of this document.

### a. **God the Father (BELONG) – Pastor Joel**

- i. God loves, chose us and promises to have us in his family. (We belong.)
  1. Creation: Gen 1: 1, (paraphrase the creation story), 1:31- it was very good, (tell about God walking with Adam and Eve.)
  2. **Ephesians 1: 3-8 (Ask a child to read)**
- ii. Our response to God – Pastor Joy
  1. Fall: tell the Adam and Eve story. Sin separated people from God. We inherit that sinfulness.
    - a. Go into a dark hallway if possible. Talk about how sin separates us from God. It is like darkness.
  2. Consequences of the fall- **have a child read Romans 3:23**. We are sinners and can't be in the family unless we are forgiven.
  3. Ask and listen to kids talking about their understanding of sin and how it affects them in their own lives.

\* Before moving to the red section, take a walk with the kids around your church and give an overview of the Old Testament, how the people kept straying from God but God kept bringing them back. Tell the stories in brief as you walk around the building: Noah, the flood and God's promise to never destroy the whole earth; tower of Babel; covenant with Abraham; Israelites in Egypt & the desert; kings; prophets; etc. After each story, have the students repeat this memory verse from Psalm 100:5 – "God's love endures forever!" - Pastor Joel

### b. **Jesus (FORGIVEN) – Pastor Joy**

- i. God sent his Son into the world to save us. Jesus lived a perfect life, showed us the Father's heart and died on the cross to take the punishment of our sins so that we could have a right relationship with God again and so that we could be in the family of God forever! – to keep the promise. **Have a child read John 3:16**
- ii. Ask: *What do you think or feel about what Jesus did? Is it important to you? What should we do with this story?*
- iii. Our response: We believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. We turn from our sin to God, receive his forgiveness and let the story become our story. (We are forgiven.) And we share the story with others. **Child reads Acts 16:29-30; 31 and Romans 10:9-11**
- iv. Resurrection (Luke 24:1-6a) – After Jesus died the women went to the tomb and Jesus wasn't there. He had risen. And he lives. And like him, he promises to bring us from death into new life too. **Child reads Ephesians 2:1, 4-5** -Pastor Joel

\*Tunnel activity: A table with white cloths should border the red and green section. Children can crawl under the table to the green section where there is "new life" greenery to represent resurrection.

**c. Spirit (GROW) – Pastor Joy**

- i. Tell the story of Pentecost- use actions where possible
- ii. The Spirit reminds us of Jesus and helps us be like him. He is always with us and lives inside of us. He helps us understand and grow. **Child reads John 14: 26.**
- iii. The Spirit grows us and helps us to bear the fruit of the Spirit. *Does anyone know what the fruits of the Spirit are?* **Child reads Galatians 5:22-23**
- iv. The Spirit also makes us new. In Christ we are new creations. **Child reads 2 Corinthians 5:17**
- v. The Spirit is the power of Jesus at work in us. He can help us pray, help us know what to say and help us live. He can give us comfort and peace. The Holy Spirit will help us grow and will always be with us!

Break for snack (ice cream) and or question and response time.

Finish with the Bridge Illustration; Instructions on the next page.

## “The Bridge Illustration”

- a. Need: Signs for “God”, “Sin” “Jesus”
- b. Tell the Elders and/or parents ahead of time that they will be needed to make a bridge. Show them how to link their arms so that the kids can crawl across them from one side to the other. (To do this, cross your arms, one over the other. Stagger the lines so that you can grab the wrist of the person’s arm across from you to the left and one arm from the person across from you to the right.) Give someone the “Jesus” sign to hang on the middle of their “bridge” when it’s time.
- c. Pick a kid to be “God” and hang the sign around his/her neck. Say: *When God made people, he wanted to be with them all the time. He **promised** that they would be together.* (have the rest of the kids stand around God.)
- d. *BUT . . . Adam and Eve didn’t do what God said (they sinned), and they **broke their promises** to God. That made a big separation between people and God—a humongous, ginormous, canyon* (move the kids across the room from “God.”)
- e. At this point, you can have someone lay down tape to mark out the chasm.
- f. *That canyon was deeper then you can even imagine and so far across . . . Do you know what the canyon is called?* (Sin . . .put the sign in the canyon on the floor)
- g. *Lots of people try to get across that canyon by themselves. They think if they are good enough they can jump across sin and get to God. Let’s try it.* (Let the kids practice jumping and falling down into the canyon (no second chances . . . “you fell too far into the canyon to be rescued”)
- h. *So, being good isn’t going to fix the problem with God. Some people think if you are born into an important family . . . same thing.* (You can use other ideas as well – basically, nothing works for the kids to cross the divide.)
- i. *What’s going to happen? God **promised** that he wanted us in his family, but we just can’t get there because of SIN. What are we going to do? We couldn’t come up with an idea to save ourselves, but God did.*
- j. *He sent his son Jesus to die on the cross. What do you know about Jesus? (He died to save us and **promised** that we are forgiven.) Let’s make a cross together and build a bridge across the sin.* (Hang the Sign “Jesus” on one of the bridge builders.)
- k. *There we have it . . . God kept his **promise**. Now it’s all better . . . isn’t it?* (Let them figure out that the people are still on the other side of the room and haven’t “believed in Jesus” or taken the bridge across.)
- l. *You’re right. In order to get to God, we need to remember God’s **promise** and make a **promise** of our own . . .that we will believe in Jesus as our Savior and let him take us back to be with God forever.* (Let the kids crawl across the bridge—or if there are too many or too heavy, choose a representative child.) Celebrate together.

## Part II **Pictures** of Promises - the next day

Start out by reviewing the promises:

- Father adopts us and promises that we belong
- Jesus died for us and promises that we are forgiven
- Holy Spirit lives in us and promises to help us grow

Then, introduce the morning by explaining that sometimes it helps us to remember things if we can see a picture. We are going to look at three different pictures of God's promises: Baptism, Lord's Supper and the Church. We will move through the circuit three more times.

Introduce baptism as a sacrament and explain. Ask the children what they already know about baptism. Then, begin the circuit.

**Circuit 3: Baptism.** Go through the promises of each member in baptism. Use illustrations to help the children understand.

Baptism is an invisible sign that reminds us these truths:

- a. **We belong—the water marks us as God's adopted children (Joy)**  
Illustration: The invisible mark at Glenwood Springs to say "you belong in the pool."
- b. **We are forgiven—the water washes away the dirt of our sin (Joel)**  
Illustration: Taking a bath
- c. **We have new life and continuously grow—the water nurtures us like water for a plant (Joy)**  
Illustration: How does a garden grow? What does it need in order to grow? What do people need to grow? Lots of things need water in order for them to grow. The water reminds us of how the Holy Spirit grows us.

**Circuit 4: Lord's Supper.** Introduce the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Ask the children if they remember what a sacrament is and what they already know about the Lord's Supper. Then begin the circuit.

Lord's Supper. This is a precious meal that reminds us:

- a. **We eat because we belong. (Joel)**  
Illustration: Aunt's House sitting at the kid table – being included vs. not included.
- b. **We eat it in order to remember and give thanks that we are forgiven.**  
Illustration: Foods and smells that remind us of something or someone special. That's what the Lord's Supper does: "Take, eat, remember and believe." When we eat it we pray, repent, ask forgiveness and praise God for the promise that we are forgiven. (Joy) (Matthew 26:26-28)
- c. **We eat to get stronger in our faith. (Joel)**  
Illustration: Calories that help us grow. Good food is grow food.

**Circuit 5: The Church.** Introduce the picture of the church to the kids. Ask them questions about the church. Help them to see that the church is more than a building, it is the people of God. So it is more than just their church. It is all of God's people all over the world throughout all of time.

The church reminds us of God's promises:

- a. Because we belong to God, we also belong to one another. We care for one another and look out for one another (like a big brother or sister or parent). We forgive one another. We recognize that each person brings something special to the whole (body illustration- we need all of our body parts for our body to work as it should). And we belong to other Christians around the world. They are our brothers and sisters. Take time to think about how we can love someone even if they live very far away. (Joy)
- b. *What kinds of things do we say in worship? I love you. Help! Thank you. I'm sorry. And what does God always say back? We are forgiven. We hear "forgiven" in the renewal and the sermons at church.*
- c. We grow. There are lots of ways that the church helps us to keep growing in Christ. *What are some of those ways? Listening, singing, praying, worshiping, reading our Bibles, etc.* And there are people at church who help us grow. *Who has helped you grow? The church could be called the growing place because that is a place where God's family comes together to grow up in what we know about God, how we act and who we are.*

### To Finish the Retreat:

1. Take a snack break, eating the fruit that has been set out at the Holy Spirit section.
2. Testimony pages:
  - Hand out the testimony pages. Explain that they can draw, color, write sentences or even just a few words. Adults will help them read if they don't know the words.
  - Set out markers, crayons and colored pencils and let students work around the room quietly.
  - Walk around to offer help. Many students will need help with the last page. It may be worth taking time to explain this page more thoroughly before the children spread out.
  - When students finish, they can review the promises with an adult or pastor who will then pray for the child individually.
  - When finished, they can begin to work on the craft project.
3. Craft – Making a Milestone
  - Use your imagination to think of something that will mark this as a faith milestone and help kids remember the promises. Try to use the colors and the promise words.
  - We hammered the promise words into 3 different washers and tied them onto string.
4. Close with a quick review of the promises, a song if time allows and prayer.
5. To mark this milestone, we had the children come forward in the next Sunday service to respond that they had remembered these promises and have the church respond as well. Then they received the milestone marker craft they'd made to take home.

**Ephesians 1:3-8**

<sup>4</sup> Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. <sup>5</sup> God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

**Romans 3:23**

<sup>23</sup> For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

**John 3:16**

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

**Acts 16:29-31**

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

<sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."

**Romans 10:9-11**

<sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. <sup>11</sup> As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." [a]

**Ephesians 2:1, 4-5**

<sup>1</sup> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, . . . <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

**John 14: 26**

Jesus said, <sup>26</sup> “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

**Galatians 5:22-23**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

**2 Corinthians 5:17**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!