

GRACIOUS PROMISE

THE AIM: To discover more about God's grace

The aim unpacked

Today's Bible passage revolves around Noah's sacrificial offering and God's promise to humanity. It takes into account that we are fallen beings with a propensity to sin. However, God is a God of grace, forgiveness and second chances. He tells Noah to get on with things, to populate the earth, and to live life to the max. The promise that God makes is completed in the work of Jesus.

WAY IN



theGRID MAGAZINE

WHAT: promise vote

WHY: to introduce the concept of keeping promises

WITH: magazine page 30, flip chart or whiteboard, marker pen

- 1 Invite the group to look at the list of promises on page 30. The young people have to give each promise a rank out of 10 as to how important it is to keep that promise, putting them in order from 1, the most important, to 10, the least important.
- 2 Feed back the results and record them on a flip chart or whiteboard to find out which promises the young people think are the most important.
- 3 Discuss with the group whether they would find it easy or hard to keep those promises. Why?



SCENE SETTER

WHAT: group discussion

WHY: to understand what a promise is
WITH: two lengths of wallpaper with 'Keeping promises' and 'Breaking promises' written on them respectively, marker pens, meditative background music

- 1 Divide the young people into pairs and ask them to talk about what a promise is, and whether they think promises are important or not.
- 2 Invite the pairs to feed back to the whole group what they have discussed.
- 3 Ask the young people to gather around the 'Keeping promises' sheet of paper and think about the reasons why we make promises, the kinds of promises we make, why it's important to keep them, and any wider issues. They should write these on the paper. Then they should move over to the 'Breaking promises' sheet and write down their suggestions as to why we sometimes break promises, the consequences to ourselves and others of doing so, and any wider issues.
- 4 Read out some of the comments on the two sheets. Discuss together, sensitively, the importance of promises, the young people's understanding of why we make them and the consequences of breaking them. Emphasise that a promise is a bond of trust and love that should never be broken.



THEMED GAME

WHAT: balloon race

WHY: to show that it isn't easy to go through life carrying our sin around with us

WITH: inflated balloons, markers such as traffic cones

- 1 Divide the young people into teams of four or five. Set one marker in front of each team and another at least 10 metres away.
- 2 Give each team a balloon and explain that this represents sin – all the bad stuff we do. Each team member must put the balloon between their knees, run to the marker and back, and then pass the balloon to the next runner without touching it with their hands.
- 3 Ask the young people to suggest what hindered them in the race. Say that just as the balloon stopped the young people from running fast, our sin stops us from living our lives the way God wants us to.

BIBLE EXPERIENCE



LEVEL 1: CONNECT

WHAT: improvisation

WHY: to discover more about God's grace

WITH: flip chart or whiteboard, marker pen

1 Divide the young people into pairs and challenge them to prepare a short improvised drama around the following scenario: A head teacher is interviewing a new pupil for entry into their school. The pupil has been excluded from their last school for ... (each pair should make up a reason). The pupil should show how bad they are, with loads of attitude. The head teacher should be shocked at the pupil's behaviour and show that they don't want the pupil in their school. (They could perform these improvisations to the whole group if you have time.)

2 Read Genesis 8:20–9:17 to the group and invite the young people to listen out for the promises that God makes. You could use the following questions to help:

- What promises did you hear?
- What does God think of people?
- What does God say about the future?

3 Ask for feedback and collate the answers on the flip chart or whiteboard. Explain to the group that God, because he is a God of grace, has promised us a great life and future even though people will continue to do wrong. Now we can live life to the full and have the best life possible because of what Jesus has done for us. We can have a great relationship with God and a great future, despite the things we have done wrong.

4 In their pairs, invite the young people to improvise the school situation again. This time, whatever the pupil has done, however bad they have been, the head teacher is willing to give them a new start. What kind of future does the head teacher now talk about for the pupil?



LEVEL 2: INTERFACE

WHAT: discussion

WHY: to discover more about God's grace

WITH: magazine page 31, resource page 32 (optional), flip chart or whiteboard, marker pen (optional)

1 Divide the young people into pairs or threes and ask them to look at the sets of partnerships and relationships on page 31. Ask them to think and then talk about the different stresses and strains that each of these relationships might be under.

2 Next, ask them to talk about how they think the partnerships and relationships handle these strains. How are they coping? Have the relationships continued or have they stopped? How can broken relationships be mended?

3 Invite them to read Genesis 8:20–9:17, verse by verse, in their pairs.

4 Ask them to answer the following questions (copy these onto a flip chart or whiteboard or use resource page 32):

- What was the problem with the relationship between God and humanity? (You may need to refer the group to the beginning of the flood story.)
- Did flooding the world solve the problem? (Genesis 8:21)
- What did God promise that he wouldn't do again?

5 Ask the young people to think, on their own, about the stresses and strains that their relationship with God may be under. Is there anything they could do to make the relationship better? What promises about the future has God made to those who love and trust Jesus? Don't pressurise the young people into answering aloud, but do make it clear that you and other leaders are available to listen to anything they want to share. Say that God, because of his grace, was prepared to give humanity a fresh start even though they had messed up so badly.



LEVEL 3: SWITCH ON

WHAT: Bible study

WHY: to discover more about God's grace

WITH: Bibles or copies of the passage, copies of resource page 33

1 Divide the young people into small groups of three or four and hand out copies of resource page 33. Invite them to read Genesis 6–8 and then Genesis 8:20–9:17 around the group, reading a verse each. Then they should go through the questions on resource page 34, discussing the answers in their small groups.

2 Ask the groups to feed back their answers. Discuss as a whole group any issues they have raised. From Genesis 6–8:

- Why do you think God caused the flood? (Genesis 6:11)
- Why do you think God allowed Noah and his family to survive the flood? (Genesis 7:1)

From Genesis 8:20–9:17:

- What did Noah do when he left the ark?
- What did God actually promise?

3 Ask the young people to think about the story of Noah, what happened, and the promise God made. Then discuss these questions as a whole group:

- What does God promise us through Jesus, even though we continue to do wrong? (A future, life, forgiveness, hope.)
- What do you think God asks of us in return? Say that God, because of his grace, was prepared to give humanity a fresh start even though they had messed up so badly.



MUSICAL

WHAT: meditative prayer

WHY: to respond to God's offer of a full relationship with him, despite our sin

WITH: instrumental music suitable for meditation, playback equipment

- 1 Ask the young people to get into pairs or threes. Make sure no one is left out. Invite them to share together about how and when they pray. What do they do to help them focus on God?
- 2 Say that we are going to think about the promises God gave to Noah and work out how we should respond to them. Invite the young people to get into a position where they can focus on God. This could be sitting quietly, walking around or lying down. Say that there are pens and paper available to write down any thoughts, words or pictures the young people may receive.
- 3 Play the music and read God's promises from Genesis 8:20–9:17 to the young people. Suggest that they keep whatever they have written or drawn and use it to stimulate prayer.



PRACTICAL

WHAT: making a covenant

WHY: to enjoy a life that, despite our sin, can be a full relationship with God

- 1 Explain to the young people that in order to keep a promise, we often need to remind ourselves what that promise entails.
- 2 Invite them to write down the things in their lives that they want to commit to God as a covenant to him. If the young people would say that they are Christians, they should write down what they have already promised or committed to God. Suggest that they commit everything, and then name a few specific areas or issues that they find really hard to give over to God. If they are not Christians, or aren't sure, they should write down what they want to say to God about what he has promised through Jesus.
- 3 Challenge the Christian group members to read their covenant to God daily over the coming week, and suggest that they can pray about other things at the same time. Challenge those who aren't yet Christians to talk to God about what they have written.
- 4 Next time you meet, ask the group how it felt to tell God regularly what they have committed to him. Remind them that, even though we forget what we have committed to him and often break our commitment, the promises from God of everlasting life, unconditional love and forgiveness are never broken.



CREATIVE

WHAT: rainbow of commitment

WHY: to enjoy a life that, despite our sin, can be a full relationship with God

WITH: large sheet of paper, paint, credit-card-sized pieces of card

- 1 Invite the young people to paint a rainbow on the large sheet of paper.
- 2 Ask them to think about what commitments they might make to God. If they would say they are Christians, perhaps there are areas of their lives, situations or issues that they find hard to give God control of, or perhaps there is something about their relationship with God that they find difficult, such as reading the Bible and praying regularly. Give them a small piece of card on which to write any commitment they'd like to make. Suggest that they decorate their cards. If they would say they're not Christians, they can make similar cards but without the same level of personal commitment behind them—that's OK.
- 3 When the rainbow is dry, invite the young people to stick their cards onto the rainbow. (Be sensitive to those young people who may have written something personal and might not want to display it.)
- 4 Explain that regular prayer helps keep our relationship with God going. The commitments and thoughts that the young people have written down are not just for today but are ongoing.

MORE ON THIS THEME:

If you want to do a short series with your group, other sessions that work well with this one are:

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Apple disaster</i> | <i>Genesis 3</i> |
| 2 | <i>Fugitive from justice?</i> | <i>Genesis 4:1–16; 6:1–8</i> |
| 3 | <i>Saving grace</i> | <i>Genesis 6:9–8:19</i> |



I PROMISE

How important is it to keep each one of these promises? Rank each promise in order from 1, the most important, to 10, the least important.

I PROMISE...

- 1 TO CLEAN MY TEETH EVERY MORNING AND NIGHT.
- 2 TO WASH THE DISHES FOR A WEEK.
- 3 NOT TO TELL ANYONE ABOUT MY FRIEND'S SECRET CRUSH.
- 4 TO GET HOME BY 9PM.
- 5 TO RESPECT MY PARENTS OR GUARDIANS.
- 6 NOT TO CHEAT ON MY BOYFRIEND/GIRLFRIEND.
- 7 TO TELL THE TRUTH.
- 8 NOT TO GO AND SEE THE NEW BLOCKBUSTER MOVIE WITHOUT MY BEST MATE.
- 9 TO WALK THE DOG EVERY MORNING.
- 10 TO PRAY AND READ THE BIBLE MORE.



Bible bit

Genesis 8:20 – 9:17

After Noah gave thanks to God for keeping him and his family safe in the ark, God told Noah to get on with things, to populate the earth and, to use a popular idiom, to live life to the max. God is a God of grace, forgiveness and second chances. He also wants us to live the life he's given us to the full!

Promises

Check out these other promises that God has made to us.

Philippians 4:19

God has promised to give us everything we need.

2 Corinthians 12:9

God promises that he will give us strength.

Isaiah 54:10

God promises to always love us.

1 John 5:14

God promises to hear our prayers.

1 Corinthians 15:3,4

God has promised us new life with him through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38

God has promised that if we believe in Jesus we will be saved.

John 10:27,28

God has promised us eternal life.

Hebrews 13:5

God promises to never leave us.

IN PARTNERSHIP?

4



What pressures, stresses and strains do you think these partnerships each have to face?

How do they, or don't they, cope with them?

What stresses and strains affect your relationship with God?

How do you and God cope with them and restore your relationship?

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE (WILLIAM AND KATE)

ANNA AND ELSA

SHERLOCK AND WATSON

HARRY POTTER, RON WEASLEY AND HERMIONE GRANGER

VENUS AND SERENA WILLIAMS

BEYONCÉ AND JAY Z

WOODY AND BUZZ

GOD AND YOU?

Genesis 6:1–8 reminds us about the problem with the relationship between God and humanity. The flood story tells us something about one way God tried to deal with it.

- ➔ DID FLOODING THE WORLD SOLVE THE PROBLEM? (GENESIS 8:21)
- ➔ WHAT DID GOD PROMISE THAT HE WOULDN'T DO AGAIN?
- ➔ HOW ELSE HAS GOD TRIED TO RESTORE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIM AND HUMANITY?

RESOURCE PAGE

USE WITH SESSION 4 BIBLE EXPERIENCE 'LEVEL 2 INTERFACE'

Bible study on Genesis 8:20 – 9:17

With a partner, read Genesis 8:20 – 9:17 and think about these questions.

- What was the problem with the relationship between God and people?
(Look at the beginning of the flood story.)

- Did flooding the world solve the problem?
(Check out Genesis 8:21.)

- What did God promise that he wouldn't do again?

- Think about your relationship with God. What strain might that be under?

- Is there anything you could do to make it better?

USE WITH SESSION 4 BIBLE EXPERIENCE 'LEVEL 3 SWITCH ON'

Recap

Read Genesis 6–8.

- Why do you think God caused the flood? (Genesis 6:11)
- Why do you think God allowed Noah and his family to survive the flood? (Genesis 7:1)

Read Genesis 8:20 – 9:17.

- What did Noah do when he left the ark?
- What did God actually promise?

Personal application

Read the info box about covenants. Think about the story of Noah, what happened, and the promise of God, and discuss these questions with your group:

- What does God promise us through Jesus?
- What do you think God asks of us in return?

INFORMATION: Covenant

Another term for a promise that God makes is a 'covenant'. A 'covenant' is a special promise between the 'holy' God and 'sinful' people. There are several covenants between God and the people in the Bible—for example, Abraham (Genesis 15,17) and David (2 Samuel 7). Another example of covenant is seen in the old covenant with Moses (Exodus 19, 20 and 24) and the new covenant through the work of Jesus (Jeremiah 31:31–34; 2 Corinthians 3:6–17). Biblical covenants were confirmed in rituals which involved the slaying of an animal; the spilling of the blood was of significance. This is also seen in the sacrificial spilling of Jesus' blood as the sign of the new covenant.