

The Promise Keeper

- Large and Small Group Sessions for Kindergarten-Grade 3 and Grades 4-8
- 2 Dramas
- Songs
- Complete Christmas Program
- CD
- Crafts, Games, and Other Photocopiable Resources



LEADER'S GUIDE K-8 CHRISTMAS BOOK 4

The Promise Keeper



Grand Rapids, Michigan

Any questions or comments about this unit?
We'd love to hear from you:

Faith Alive Christian Resources
1-800-333-8300
E-mail: editors@faithaliveresources.org

RCA Children's Ministry Office
1-800-968-3943
E-mail: childrensministry@rca.org

Presbyterians for Renewal
1-502-425-4630
E-mail: office@pfrenewal.org

Walk With Me curriculum has been developed by Faith Alive Christian Resources in cooperation with the Children's Ministry Office of the Reformed Church in America and with Presbyterians for Renewal.

We are grateful to Jessie Schut for her work in developing this unit of *Walk With Me*. We also thank Margo Burian for providing illustrations.

Unless otherwise indicated, the Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, © 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Walk With Me

Christmas

Book 4: The Promise Keeper

© 2007 by Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America on recycled paper.

www.WalkWithMeOnline.org

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-1-59255-244-3

Contents

Getting Started	4
Week 1: Waiting for the Promise.	9
Large Group Session	9
Small Group Session, Kindergarten-Grade 3	13
Small Group Session, Grades 4-8	24
Week 2: The Promise Comes True	36
Large Group Session	36
Small Group Session, Kindergarten-Grade 3	40
Small Group Session, Grades 4-8	50
Dramas	60
Songs	68
Christmas Program Ideas	78
Reproducible Pages.	81
Leader's Evaluation.	111

Ways to Get Others Involved

You'll need the talents of many people in your congregation to make these two sessions come alive for your children. What a wonderful opportunity to involve adults and teens who usually don't take part in the teaching ministry of the church! Consider using volunteers in some of the following ways:

- *Drama Team:* You'll want to find actors to play the roles in the dramas. Your middle school kids could take these roles. Or invite adults and older teens to prepare and present one or both of the dramas.
- *Sets Person(s):* Whether you want a very simple set with a few props for the dramas or a more elaborate backdrop and set, you will probably want to find one or more people who have artistic gifts to plan and prepare these for you. If you plan to use any kind of lighting, you'll want to find a volunteer to manage that too.
- *Costume Gatherer:* Simple costumes will add a lot to the drama presentation. Look for a volunteer who'd be willing to work with others or alone to plan and prepare what the actors will wear.
- *Musicians:* Whether you plan to present a Christmas program to the church and community or just to enjoy songs together as part of your opening worship on these two Sundays, you'll want to find someone with musical gifts to teach the songs to children, someone to play the accompaniment, and someone to lead the singing.
- *Materials Gatherers:* Look for people who are willing to do photocopying, gather craft materials—anything you might need to provide teachers in the small groups as they work on specific projects during these two weeks.
- *Program Planners:* If you have the children present a program for the church and community, you'll want to appoint a planning committee several months ahead of time—people who will make some of the content decisions, schedule rehearsals, and make sure all of the details are attended to.



The Promise Tree

The Promise Tree, which is a prominent visual feature of this unit, is based on the Jesse Tree, which many churches use during the Advent season. The Jesse Tree represents the genealogy of Jesus; symbols decorating the tree represent Jesus' ancestors, such as Adam, Abraham, Ruth, and David. If you already have a Jesse Tree at your church, as well as the ornaments that this unit suggests, your preparation work will be much simpler.

If you do not have a Jesse Tree and the symbol ornaments, the following ideas and patterns are provided to help you create a Promise Tree. Simple symbol ornaments can be made by reproducing the patterns provided (see pp. 85-86) on paper and gluing to a sturdy backing; more visually interesting ornaments can be made from clay, fabric, wood, or other craft materials.

Read through the following ideas and create the tree and ornaments that best suit the time, materials, and space you have available. You will need a larger promise tree and symbols for your large group drama so that symbols are large enough for the group to see; the small groups that gather after the large group drama will also need their own smaller tree and ornaments. The two-week project suggested in the Show step is to have the children make their own Promise Tree. If you decide to choose that as your Show step, the tree you use for the small group Know step can serve as a model for the children.

Tree

1. Real Tree

The simplest Promise Tree is an artificial or real Christmas tree.



2. Bare Branch

Another simple form of Promise Tree is a bare branch that is placed in a tree stand, or in a bucket of rocks or sand, or nailed to a crosspiece stand, or placed in a hole drilled into a log that's been cut in half lengthwise. Be sure that the bare branch has enough limbs on which to hang the symbols and ornaments.



3. Banner

A Promise Tree banner can also be made out of fabric or paper. You will need to photocopy the pattern on page 84 onto a transparency, then project the transparency at the desired size onto a wall on which you have fastened mural or butcher paper. Trace the outline of the tree and trunk on the paper. This paper, when colored, can form the Promise Tree banner.



For a more durable banner, cut out the traced outline and use it as a pattern for fabric pieces. These pieces can be fixed to a cloth background with fabric glue or a bonding product such as "Wonder Under" (available at fabric stores). Alternately, trace the tree patterns on fabric and let the children color the tree with fabric markers or fabric paints. Enlist volunteers in your congregation who are skilled in fabric arts to help you make this banner.

4. Dowels or Tree Branches

A stylized Promise Tree can be made with doweling or tree branches of various sizes. The upright "trunk" should be about twice the size in diameter as the crosspiece "branches." Drill holes through the upright that will accommodate the diameter of the dowel branches.

These trees can be simple or complex, depending on the number of crosspieces and types of stands. For instance, in the illustration, we used a three-foot (1 m) length of 1" dowel for the trunk, and three lengths of ½" dowel (8", 12", and 16" or 20 cm, 30 cm, and 40 cm) for the crosspieces. The holes were drilled at 6" (15 cm) intervals. The remaining length of the trunk was buried in a sand-filled flower pot. Stands can also be made of crosspieces, or they can be inserted into a hole that's been drilled into a log stand. Again, because these trees take more time to create, enlist the help of people in your church who are skilled in the use of power tools.

Promise Symbol Ornaments

Symbol patterns are found on pages 85-86. You may enlarge or reduce them in size, depending on the size of ornaments you wish to make. Consider the following ideas for creating ornaments:

1. Photocopy the patterns, color, cut out, and glue to a stiff backing such as cardstock, craft foam, or plastic yogurt or margarine lids. You may embellish the ornaments with lace, glitter, fabric scraps, feathers, sequins, and more. Punch a hole in the top and add a ribbon loop to hang on a tree or branch. If you are hanging the ornaments on a paper banner, attach pieces of two-sided tape to the backs of the ornaments. Or, if you are adding these to a fabric banner, add squares of self-stick Velcro to the banner and the back of the ornament.



2. Trace the patterns onto craft foam and cut out. These can be colored with markers and hung on the trees as is, or they can be glued to blocks of wood to create stamps. Paint the design with acrylic paint, then stamp on felt or fabric. Glue the fabric to jar rings.
3. Make 3-D ornaments using clay, wood, or other craft materials. For instance, cut out two felt hearts. Place a small amount of batting in between, then sew or staple closed. Glue on lace or ribbon to make the ornament more visually attractive. Roll out cookie dough or self-hardening clay and cut star shapes with a cookie cutter. Make a small tent with fabric scraps glued to a toothpick or popsicle frame.
4. Many craft outlets have ready-made painted wooden shapes of stars, apples, hearts and crowns. They usually also have these in unpainted wood, which you or children can decorate.

Or look for ready-made ornaments of some of the symbols at home decor, craft, or dollar stores: a miniature globe, a plastic fruit, a star-shaped tree ornament, a cookie cutter in the shape of an angel. These larger three-dimensional symbols would work well for the large group drama.

How to Use This Book

Christmas—it's a time to remember that God is a promise keeper of the highest order. We celebrate Christmas because God has kept his promise to send Jesus, his Son, to the world as Savior, Redeemer, and Friend. We pray that leaders, children, and all who participate in the sessions and in the Christmas program will come to know Jesus. To help meet this goal, we'll focus on the theme of God's promises: promises made in the past, promises fulfilled, and promises for which we are still waiting fulfillment.

This book offers a variety of ideas and options for large group sessions, small group sessions, and a Christmas program. Use the ideas and options that work best with your church school. Ideally, the large group session would take about 15-25 minutes, and then the children would break up into their small groups for about 30-40 minutes. You may also need to schedule an extra practice time or two if your church is planning on doing the Christmas program.

Finding time to do everything in this book may be difficult, so choose what you think your group will be able to handle. You will need one copy of this book for each of your leaders. As the purchaser of this book you are granted permission to photocopy the dramas and the patterns and activities on reproducible pages 78-108.

Getting Started

Because these materials suggest a different format and approach than the regular *Walk With Me* units, you'll want to spend some extra time planning and preparing to teach these sessions. Although we realize that each church situation is unique, you may find some of the following suggestions helpful:

- In the early fall, appoint a small committee to read through this book and decide which of the many suggestions would work best for your church.
- After the committee makes its recommendations, recruit actors, song leaders, accompanists, and teachers as necessary.
- Recruit volunteers who are willing to gather materials for these special sessions. Give them plenty of time for this task (a month or two) since they will likely want to ask the congregation to save and/or gather some of the items.
- Schedule rehearsals for the drama team.
- If you're planning a Christmas program, schedule final rehearsal that includes drama, singing, recitation, and so on.

Large Group Sessions and Christmas Program

The large group session materials in this book contain a drama for each week and suggestions for songs that the whole group can learn. (The songs are also recorded on the CD that accompanies this book.) Each drama takes about ten minutes and requires five actors; the second drama also requires at least three nonspeaking actors. The costumes may be as simple or elaborate as you would like (see page 11 for suggestions).

You'll probably want to choose middle schoolers or a team of older teens or adults to play these roles. Be sure to schedule ample rehearsal time.

Alternately, if assembling a drama team committed to rehearsals is not an option, the Promise Chant (pp. 81-83) can be used to present the story with a team of choral readers or to have children pantomime the stories.

The dramas and songs (or choral chants) can be used not only for the large group sessions but also for a Christmas program. You'll find a sample program along with ideas for organizing and producing it on pages 78-80.

Small Group Sessions

Small group sessions will give you the opportunity to help apply the story to the children's lives. If you are unable to present the story as a drama in the large group setting, you can still use the drama or another form of the story (such as the Promise Chant) in the small group setting. It's a story you want children to hear!

Each small group opens with a Hello step designed to catch the children's interest and get them thinking about the lesson's theme.

Next comes the Know step (telling the story). If the children have already heard the story in the large group session, you'll want to use this time for a brief review. If you did not participate in a large group session, either use the drama, choral chant, or another interesting way to present the story to the group (see sessions for suggestions).

The Grow step will help children understand what the story means for their lives, and the Show step will guide them to respond to what they learned in this session.

The small group session includes options for activities and crafts that leaders (or the committee you appointed earlier) should carefully consider well ahead of teaching these materials. Once you've decided which crafts and activities to use, you may want to appoint two or more volunteers (possibly parents of children in the group) to gather the materials, cut out patterns, and assemble all the items you'll need. Having a helper in the classroom is also a plus when doing crafts and other activities with young children.

We trust that you and your congregation will experience the special comfort of God's promises this Christmas. God is a promise keeper—on that we can stand firm!

Scheduling Rehearsals

1. Let cast members know rehearsal times when you ask them to participate. Stress that agreeing to participate means making a commitment to come to all practices.
2. Schedule two to four well-planned all-cast rehearsals.
3. Request that all lines be memorized by the first rehearsal.
4. Build community at rehearsals. Pray, practice, and enjoy a snack together.
5. If you are presenting the dramas as part of a Christmas program, use your final rehearsal to go through the entire program including music, recitations, and so on.

Introducing a New Song

The way you introduce a new song is crucial. Of course, you'll want to know it well yourself. But you'll also want to take time to think through how you'll introduce it to your group. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind:

- Many kids learn mostly by rote and repetition. Listen to the CD or play the tune and encourage the kids to join in on a line or phrase at a time. You may want to start by teaching them a phrase that repeats often.
- Make up motions that go along with simple words (such as "step" or "Jesus") to help them remember the words.
- Be enthusiastic! Model your love of singing instead of being concerned about your performance.

Tailoring Your Sessions to the Ways Children Learn

How do children learn? The answer to that question can be almost as varied as the kids in your group. Some learn best through words. Others through music. Still others through nature or through movement.

Sessions in the *Walk With Me* curriculum try to respect the many ways kids learn. *Walk With Me* sessions include a wide range of activities that speak to kids with the following types of intelligence (based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences). Within each session, the icons below highlight the learning styles represented by each activity. As you teach, you'll begin to get a sense for how the kids in your group learn best. Young people who are



Word Smart

learn best through verbal activities (listening, reading, or speaking), including discussions, worksheets, writing, reading, storytelling, and word games.



Number Smart

learn best by exploring patterns and relationships through activities such as problem solving, logical puzzles or games, making charts and graphs, or putting things in sequence.



Picture Smart

learn best by visualizing concepts. These kids enjoy viewing maps, slides, pictures, videos, and diagrams; making jigsaw puzzles; and expressing their ideas with shape, color, and design.



Body Smart

learn best by using their bodies, acting things out, using puppets, moving—anything hands-on.



Music Smart

learn best through sound, music, and rhythm—playing musical instruments, writing their own songs and raps, listening to recordings, singing, and so on.



People Smart

learn best through doing things with others, cooperating and working in small or large groups, role playing, conversations, brainstorming, and other interactive exercises.



Self Smart

learn best by working independently through such things as writing in a journal, meditating, reading, and reflecting.



Earth Smart

learn best through activities connected to living things and natural phenomena, through nature walks, examining plants and animals, nature experiments, and activities that focus on ecology.

—The ideas on this page are based on material from the following resources: *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* by Thomas Armstrong, © 2000, and a chart prepared by Donald L. Griggs, Livermore, California.



Waiting for the Promise

Scripture

Genesis 3:15; 8:21b, 22; 17:6-7; 2 Samuel 7:16

Memory Challenge

Isaiah 25:1 (all for Grades 4-8, portions for K-3)

Focus

Long ago God promised that he would send a Savior to our world.

WORDSearch

Think About It

Promises are tough on kids and grownups too. Promises make us wait and wait for what we want now.

Promises are also hard on us because we can't be sure they're always kept. We're disappointed by broken promises. Sometimes those who make them deceive or cheat us. Sometimes they mean well but just can't pull them off.

Yet promises made by reliable people are good and important. They keep our hopes alive during hard times. Hope keeps us going and helps us stay the course, even when things look grim. Hope heads us back to healing and eventually to heaven.

That's how it's always been for God's people:

- When Adam and Eve made a royal mess of everything, God promised a Savior who would restore all things. God cursed their deceiver: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Imagine how miserable and pointless their lives would have seemed if they hadn't known that God would one day rescue them from Satan's clutches.
- When Noah and his family endured the flood, God promised, "And never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Gen. 8:21b-22). Imagine how terrified they would have been whenever it rained if it hadn't been for God's amazing promise.
- Abraham and Sarah followed God to an unknown, hostile land because of God's promise: "I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:6-7). Imagine if God hadn't made this promise: Sarah and Abraham would have stayed in Haran. There would be no Promised Land, no people of God, and we would still be worshipping idols.
- When David became king over God's people, he was painfully aware that he was nobody special (2 Sam. 7:18). But God made this amazing promise: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). That promise kept David from throwing in the towel when he fought fearsome battles, faced the consequences of his own crimes, and endured the ill-fated rebellion of his own son. Imagine what life

Pray About It

Make a list of God's promises to you. Give thanks for every one.

Tell About It

Remind your class that God's promises require our trust, patience, and obedience.



would be like for us if David hadn't received God's promise: the Savior would not have been born and the Hitlers of this world would always remain in charge.

God's promises nourish our spirits in the gloom of sin and loss. They keep us moving in God's good ways, traveling towards the light of a restored relationship with God that Jesus blesses us with. God's promises give us great expectations: eternal life basking in the light and warmth of God's holiness and love.

God's precious promises always spur us on. Why? Because God keeps them without fail. The gift of Jesus proves it. That's why we celebrate Christmas even in the dark of winter.

Planning the Session

You are in charge of presenting the drama "Promises Made, Promises Kept" to all the children in your church school—from kindergarten to grade 8. That's quite a challenge! But kids of all ages can relate to the theme of promises. Children are keenly sensitive to such matters. When promises are kept, children develop a sense of trust and security; when promises are broken, trust is eroded. So it's important that the children know and experience that God is a promise keeper and that they can trust God forever. That's what this Christmas unit teaches.

This large group session will take 15-25 minutes, depending on how much time you have available: 5-10 minutes for singing and another 10-15 minutes for the drama. The large group time is followed by small group time, as explained in the Introduction (pp. 6-7). More information on rehearsing, staging, and presenting the drama, including options, is found below under the heading "Presenting God's Story."

If you're going to be presenting a Christmas program, you may want to use part of the large group session to help the children prepare. You'll find suggestions for program planning on pages 78-80.

The suggestions in this large group session assume that you'll be presenting God's story to your entire church school (large group) and preparing them to respond to it in small groups.

Singing

You may want to ask someone with musical gifts to lead the singing and teach new songs to the children during these two sessions. Be sure to share the tips in the box "Introducing a New Song" (p. 7) with that person.

The songs listed below (printed on pp. 68-77 and included on the CD that accompanies this course) are among those you may want to sing. They were selected for their ties to the themes of the drama and the Christmas story. However, you may also want to choose other, more familiar Christmas carols for your two sessions, especially if your time is too limited to learn new songs.

The drama includes the presentation of an Advent candle-lighting song "Light One Candle: Christ Is Coming." By teaching this song to your group before the drama, you will enable the children to join the actors in singing verses 2-4 at the end of the drama.

If you are planning to use these songs as part of a Christmas program, you will want to start teaching them to the group already in early fall so that they will know them well by the time you present the program in December. The songs that are part of the Christmas program that may be unfamiliar and will need to be taught are the following:

- "Light One Candle" (p. 68; CD, track 1)
- "O Come, O Come Immanuel" (p. 69; CD, track 2)
- "God Is Great, God Is Good" (p. 70; CD, track 3)
- "Jesus Is His Name" (p. 72; CD, track 4)
- "Mary's Boy Child" (p. 73; CD, track 5)

- “Go, Tell It on the Mountain” (p. 75; CD, track 6)

You may also wish to include a couple of favorite carols that the children know and love.

- “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (p. 76; CD, track 7)
- “Once in Royal David’s City” (p. 77; CD, track 8)

Also, please be aware that the songs we suggest can be divided up between groups of children; for example, the children in kindergarten-grade 3 might learn some of the easier songs (such as “God Is Great, God Is Good”) while those in grades 4-8 could learn the more demanding songs. Or the younger ones could just learn the chorus of some of the songs.

Presenting God’s Story: Drama

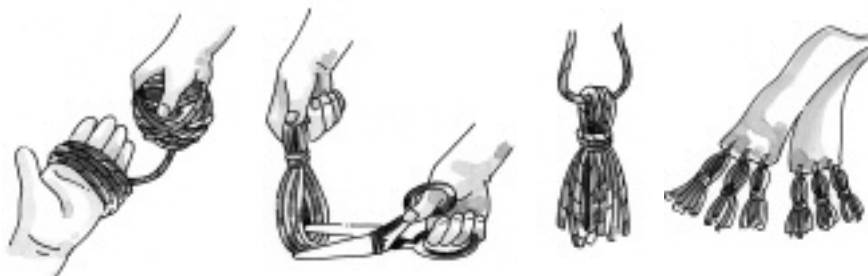
The drama for today is found on pages 60-63. Rehearsing and presenting a drama can be a fun and rewarding experience—both for the actors and for the people who view the drama.

For this week’s drama, “Promises Made, Promises Kept,” you will need five actors.

Consider finding a team of actors and begin working with them early. This could be a wonderful gift for your middle school group to offer to the younger children. Teens and adults can also be drama team members. You’ll need a narrator, two adults who are parents, and two children. However, teens or even middle school children can play all the roles; costuming and mannerisms will suggest the ages of the actors. You’ll also want to begin thinking about costumes and props (which are very simple). Consider asking persons in the congregations (especially those who sew!) to help you out.

Costumes

We suggest very simple costumes. The four actors can wear long, sleeveless tunics made from homespun, linen, or even burlap over long-sleeved shirts. Each actor should have a prayer shawl (with tassels on the ends for the father and boy).




Props and Set

Again, simplicity is the key. The scene takes place inside an Israelite home. Furnishings in those days consisted of low stools, sleeping pallets on the floor, and cushions and animal hide rugs. Food was stored in large pottery jars or skin bags. For ease of presentation and viewing, you might wish to create a low table by covering a large box with a blanket. Alternatively, have the family reclining on cushions in a semicircle around a cloth on the floor, providing sight lines are still good for your audience. The Promise Tree and ornaments should be large enough so all the children can easily see the pictures. See pages 4-5 for description of the Promise Tree and how to make a variety of versions of this tree. Patterns for Promise Tree ornaments are found on pages 85-86.

A window should be available on one wall of the set. Either cut a simple hole in a cardboard wall or paint a simple window on one of the set walls.

If you have an artist in your congregation, he or she could help design a backdrop for the home scene and furnish it with pots, wall hangings, and other embellishments. If you



know an electrician who can rig it up, it would be an additional bonus to have tiny lights behind the window. Three lights representing stars could come on at intervals at the beginning of the drama. But these extras are optional: you can effectively present the skit with only the simplest of costumes and the basic props suggested with the script.



If you want to present a drama, but have no time for rehearsal, you could use the reader's theater approach. Your actors, preferably teens or adults, should have the scripts and costumes in advance so they can "get into character" and understand the story line. Some of the initial activity (the children's "wrestling" and parents' entry) should be done impromptu, without the scripts. But after this initial introduction to the family, most of the action takes place around the dinner table, where it is easy to hide the scripts. It won't be as smooth, but it's doable. For this approach, you'll need to allow more time for the presentation than you do for rehearsed performances by a drama team.

Alternative Presentation of God's Story: Promise Chant

If it is impossible for you to assemble a drama team and present this as a drama, consider using the Promise Chant, found on reproducible pages 81-83. This Promise Chant can be used in several ways.

1. *Choral Performance:* Assemble a team of choral readers (perhaps middle- or high school-aged kids). They can perform the chant, inviting children in the audience to repeat each line after them or repeat only the last line of each four-line stanza. Or you can divide your choral readers into two teams and have one team echo the lines the other team chants. The chorus could be repeated in unison by the team and audience if you display it on a transparency, PowerPoint slide, or newsprint.

A creative group of choral readers might wish to add actions to the chorus; or one or two team members could perform their own creative dance movements during the reading of the chant. Follow up with introducing and hanging symbols on the Promise Tree.

2. *Pantomime Scripts:* Divide your large group into four small groups. Provide each small group with copies of one of the scenarios in the Promise Chant. Appoint a narrator in each small group (preferably one of the older children) to read the script aloud (or have an adult group leader do this task), while the rest of the small group pantomimes the story told in the script. Give each small group a few moments to prepare this presentation for the whole group. Follow up by introducing and hanging symbols on the Promise Tree. With this option, you'll be wanting more time so children can practice before they present the story to the others. This may mean you will spend less time reviewing the story when you break into age-related groupings later.

If you do not meet as a large group for this unit, use the chant during the Know step in the small groups.

Small Groups

After the drama, the children will meet in small groups. If your regular leaders are present for these two weeks, it would probably be best to have children meet with their groups as usual or to combine several groups together. Note that we have included only two session plans—one for children in Kindergarten-grade 3 and another for children in grades 4-8. Each leader will need to adapt the plans to the needs of his or her age group.