

COURSE # 1

UNDERSTANDING GRACELINK (Lecture Notes)

GrackLink. The logo expresses the foundations on which the curriculum is built. God's unconditional love - grace, is what binds us, links us to Him.

Ellen White says:

“You may ...link yourself to the throne of God by the golden chain of grace and truth.” 2 Selected Messages p 318.

So Why Do We Need a New Curriculum?

- Grown out of concerns raised by the *Valuegenesis* studies.
- One of the specific recommendations made by Roger Dudley & Bill Gillespie in their book *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* was that “we need to help create a thinking climate in our families, churches and schools.”
- Most of the lessons were written over 15 years ago.
- More than 50% of our young people are leaving the church.
- Many changes have occurred in the world around us since then so children have different problems and challenges.
- Educational research has discovered more effective teaching methods.
- While the truths of God are unchanging the church has different emphases to meet the changing needs of the people.
- Many Sabbath School teachers around the world were asking for new material to hold the children's interest. Teaching in schools has changed with the introduction of videos and computers making it hard to hold the children's interest with the previous methods of Sabbath School teaching.
- Previous material was written by a limited number of people mostly from the USA and developed countries. People from all over the world have worked on and evaluated this curriculum from its inception.
- Children have not understood God's grace.



“Who would like to put the angel in the picture?” No one raised their hands. In the past, teachers told stories using felt pictures and kids were delighted with these colorful felts. But today's generation, kids are technology genius. They are already well versed with computer and internet. Certainly felt pictures do not attract them.

GraceLink Sabbath School, 0 - 12 years

I hope you've heard of GraceLink. It's the new Sabbath School program for children from birth to 13 years.

You know, we adults get a new SS lesson every quarter but the children's lessons had been recycled for many years. So 7 years ago the General Conference started to write a new series of lessons. Stories from the Bible are written so that the message in them is understood by the children, applied to their lives and shared with others. You can see how colourful the books are for the youngest children. I certainly wish I'd had those when I was little or even when my children were little.

GraceLink Primary Sabbath School Materials

This is the cover of the Primary lesson pamphlet. The children's Bible Study Guides are 4 colours throughout. And shouldn't our SS materials teaching about Jesus be as good as or better than secular books. Of course they should. We always want to do our best for God.

GraceLink SS programs use educational methods that have been developed from the latest research about how we learn best so they are different from our previous programs. So we've needed to help SS leaders understand this by running seminars and workshops about it. There'll be more workshops conducted throughout the divisions, unions and conferences to train teachers how to teach with this new curriculum. So if you want to know more or you know someone who wants to know more invite them to come.

FOUR DYNAMICS OF GRACELINK

The new GraceLink curriculum is based on four major dynamics:

- * Grace
- * Worship
- * Community
- * Service



1) GRACE--JESUS LOVES ME

So let's look at these dynamics in depth. We need to understand this, if we're going to be able to use the curriculum to its maximum effectiveness. Here's a powerful illustration of grace.

No, Daddy, Look at Me!

Ever wondered why God finds us attractive?

She was an ugly thing. Dog breath, a crooked leg, a bad eye, hair falling out; she may have had lice; she definitely had fleas. I saw nothing attractive about the little dog when she showed up on our front porch one morning. I felt pity for the little thing-the put-her-out-of-her-misery kind of pity.

I like dogs actually. I enjoy their companionship, the way they make me laugh, and their affection. But I like clean dogs. Dogs without disease. Dogs with hair. What did she want?

The little mutt stared at me through the screen door for a moment. I stared back. "Why should I feel sorry for you?" I asked her. As if to answer me she began some strange antics.

First she stood as tall as her scrawny legs could stretch, then she slowly turned around like a model on a fashion runway to give me a good look at her. *Impressive*, I thought. Then she started to bark a pathetic yap. By the way she carried on she must have a majestic voice. She was proud of it. Strangely enough, it seemed as though she was trying to communicate. "I just took a bath," she croaked. "Brushed my teeth too, see?" She grinned to show me several yellowed teeth with a number conspicuously absent.

Ugh. *As for the bath little dog, you missed a couple of spots-like your face, legs, and body.* I don't think she heard, though. She was proceeding with her impressive resume. "Just killed a varmint for you too," she announced proudly, dragging around the corner for my approval the barely recognizable corpse of one of the beautiful mallard ducks that had once lived peacefully on our pond.

Before, I was disgusted' now I was angry. She had killed a beautiful animal that we loved to watch. And on top of that she thought I'd be grateful. I started out the door, bad intentions on my mind, when my 5-year-old daughter tugged on my pant leg.

"Don't hurt the doggy." Her plea stopped me and quieted my anger. We watched in silence as the dog performed her Olympic athlete qualifications for us. She bounded the 1-foot dash with breakneck limps to the other side of the porch. Her gymnastics routine consisted of a roll-over that left a mat of hair on the porch behind her. Her grand finale was a neat little pile in the corner of the porch that I would have to clean up with a shovel.

I looked down at my daughter, who was obviously enchanted. "I want to keep her, Daddy." "But sweetheart, you can see that shape she's in. Why do you want a dog like that?" I asked with rationality I didn't feel.

"I just do," she said.

"But she's a mess, she has terrible behavior, and to top it off, she thinks she can impress us enough to take her in," I said reasonably.

"I love her," she said unreasonably. I told her she was being unreasonable.

"What is "unreasonable?" she asked, obviously not really caring.

"Look at her, just look at her, sweetheart," I said, my exasperation beginning to show.

“No Daddy,” my daughter shot back, “look at me. I’ll clean her, I’ll train her to be good. She can’t be good yet. She doesn’t know what good is. But I’m good, Daddy. Please, look at me.”

I looked at my daughter, and I saw the face of irrational, unreasonable grace.

By Jeff Scoggins, Adventist Review, September, 1999

2) WORSHIP--I LOVE JESUS

We want our children to know the joy of worshipping God - in family devotions, in Sabbath School, in Church services. We also want our children to know that every moment of their lives can be a response to God’s grace - relationships in the family, at school, everywhere.

In our children’s stories and lessons we must not separate the spiritual part of lives from the rest of what we do. All our kids’ activities must be open to the leading of God. That’s why we use contemporary versions of the Bible. God speaks the languages of the 21st century as much as He speaks in King James’ English.

What are the most important things we can teach our children about God?

1. Teach them about Jesus.
2. Teach them how to pray.
3. Teach them about the world to come.

(Child Guidance p.488)

There is nothing deeper, nothing more worthy of our investigation than God’s love as revealed in Jesus Christ. This is the divine spark that lights the flame of worship within us.

*Worship is caused by love
Functions through love
And responds to that First Love!*

This is not rote worship but a genuine heart-response to God’s great love and that’s what we want for our children.

3) COMMUNITY--WE LOVE EACH OTHER

We want to create for our children a genuine community of faith in which their Christian experience can fully develop. We’ll be able to this when:

- Parents and all Church members model God’s grace which is accepting, non-judgmental and forgiving.
- Children are involved in spiritual life at home and at church.
- Our church actively challenges prejudice and division between gender, racial, ethnic, socio-economic and age groups.
- Children are encouraged to explore their own faith through creative and thought provoking programs and services.
- Children support their faith community with their prayers, offerings and participation. This begins in the home but needs to be nurtured in the church.

4) SERVICE--JESUS LOVES YOU TOO

We want our children to experience the profound joy that comes from being of service to others. It's not enough for us to describe the vision or even to model it ourselves. We need to facilitate the children's motivation and opportunities for service. Here are a few suggestions. You'll be able to think of many more to fit your situation.

- collecting canned goods
- making birthday cards and/or gifts for those in the church who are elderly, lonely etc
- visiting shut-ins
- singing at nursing homes
- helping the elderly with gardening, shopping etc
- baby-sitting
- having a garage sale of their toys etc to raise money for a needy project
- ADRA appeal
- supporting a child in a 3rd world country

THE SABBATH SCHOOL PROGRAM

- Introducing the lesson on Sabbath
One reason for this is to motivate the children to study the lesson during the week. It will also avoid the problem we have had in the past where some students had studied the lesson and knew it well, while others had not looked at it and were unable to tell anything about it.
- Focusing the entire Sabbath School time on one theme
Making sure every aspect of the program (songs, prayer, lesson, activities) is focused on a theme will ensure that the "power point" you are trying to make has been reached.
The themes will be about God's grace, the response of worship we make to that grace, or how that grace empowers our loving relationships with one another and our service to a world God's love created and sustains.

TOTAL HOUR TEACHING

The entire Sabbath School time is a complete learning cycle, teaching and reinforcing the point/message of the lesson. The time is not broken into program and class segments. The "hour" is divided into four segments, each one of which appeals most strongly to a specific learning style and the prayer and praise section. Taken in sequence these segments follow the pattern of how the brain learns best.

They answer the learning questions -
Why? What? How? What if? (These reflect the learning styles).

TOTAL HOUR TEACHING

Total Hour Teaching is composed of four main segments:

- 1) Readiness Activities—Feeling

- 2) Experiencing the Bible—Understanding
- 3) Applying the Message
- 4) Practicing

1) READINESS ACTIVITIES

These readiness activities are usually quite active and reach the students on more than one level of perception. They lead students to understand **Why?** They should learn the lesson, and engage their feelings as well as their thoughts.

Debriefing questions follow activities in every segment, but are particularly important here. Through these prompts for discussion, the leader/teacher is able to ask questions that invite the students to reflect on what they experienced (reflective), what it means to them (interpretative), and what they can do about it (applicable). The debriefing time is what makes the activities educative and not just activity for activity's sake.

2) BIBLE STUDY: EXPERIENCING THE BIBLE

It answers the learning question What?.. What is it I need to learn?
This traditional aspect of the learning cycle—the subject matter—takes on an additional colour as students learn the Bible story interactively (having some active part in the learning experience, not just as passive listeners).

3) APPLYING THE MESSAGE

It answers the question how does this apply to my life? How am I going to use this?
The students are able to discuss a situation in contemporary life when the lesson's principle applies.

4) SHARING THE MESSAGE

This segment deals with what the student can do with the newly learned concept to bless others in the coming week. What if...? is the typical learning question.
Here you will use some of the other application to real life activities along with sharing time. This is where the children will learn to share what they have learned. Sometimes they will practice sharing skills. Sometimes they will make something to help their sharing e.g. a poster for the church foyer, a gift for an elderly person

PRAYER & PRAISE

In the GraceLink curriculum there is also guidance given for the time-honoured business of Sabbath School - mission story, offering, song service. This can be incorporated wherever the leader feels it will work best. However, it is recommended that the Sabbath School hour begin with the readiness activities.

CHANGES in SS Divisions

- It is recommended that the children move from one division to the next at the end of a year. Thus they would move as a class group as they do in school. The advantages of this are:
 - A it will maintain the flow of the program you have
 - A the children already have made friends in the group
 - A it prevents those whose birthdays are a little later than others from feeling left out
 - A these issues are more obvious for the Primary - Junior - Teen Divisions
- In the present curriculum, kindergarten and primary follow the same lesson and memory verse cycle, however, in the GraceLink curriculum, beginner and kindergarten lessons are based on the same Bible stories and memory verses.
- Instead of 13 Beginner lessons each quarter, GraceLink will supply three lessons per quarter, one per month, providing for much needed repetition.

Make Sabbath School Come Alive with GraceLink

Make Sabbath School come alive with GraceLink for today's children. Get them involved in activities, application and sharing the messages they have learned with their friends and neighbors.