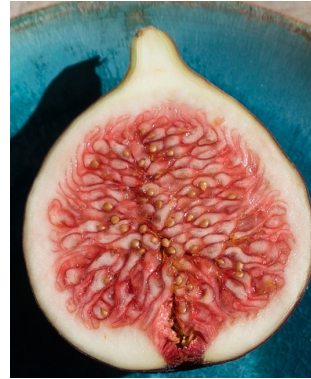


Season of Creation 2024
Children's Moments/Lesson Ideas/Resources
First Fruits and Fig Trees: To Hope and Act with Creation



Ideas: figs in worship, fig newtons in worship, tree in worship

Background/overview: Fig trees are native to the Mediterranean region, where Jesus' ministry took place. Fig trees were abundant there. They provided food and shade and a place to gather out of the heat of the sun. Fig trees aren't native to the Americas or Europe. We will use figs as an example here, however, we encourage you to use whatever fruit is native to where you live for these examples.

There are three basic threads in the Children's Ideas for each week:

- Plant a seed and watch it grow each week, bringing in the themes of each week in the discussion.
- Suggest ways for children to notice ways that the environment changes from week to week, connecting to the themes for the week. Specifically, they will develop the skill of comparing what they see one week with what they remember from the previous week.
- Have the children write words relating to the theme each week on paper shapes and attach them to the tree in the worship space. If you are using the worship planning notes, and creating a tree in the space and having the whole congregation attaching leaves, etc to the tree, we suggest you have the children do it with the rest of the congregation, rather than during the children's time. If the worship planning team is not using the worship planning resource, an option would be to create the tree suggested there to use for the children's time.

In addition to the three threads, each week provides preparation instructions, a repeat-after-me prayer, and extensions that could be used if you have a Sunday School class that can build on

the themes introduced in worship or if you provide take-home ideas for families to share during the week. Some churches may choose to use each thread of these materials differently to fit their context or may select which is most appropriate for the age of children in their congregation.

Week 1: Abundance-

How to prepare:

- Consider making a tree in the worship space using the worship planning resource if that is not already being done by the worship planning team.
- If you are using the tree, prepare some fruit shaped papers with string or tape so they can be attached to the tree. Bring some crayons or markers for writing words as well
- Write the repeat-after-me prayer you will be saying on one of the fruit-shaped papers so you can attach it after you pray. Here is the prayer listed below:
Holy God,
Thank you for showing us abundance in the world you created.
Teach us to see your abundance all around us.
Amen.
- Consider providing some figs and cut them up for the children to try; or, get some fruit that might be native to your area to have them try. Alternatively, bring pictures of figs, fig trees, or other fruit.
- Bring a seed of a plant native to your area, pot, and soil, to plant a seed. Hint: Berries are native to many areas of North America.

Time with Children

Part 1: Planting

- Introduce the theme of figs. In the bible, there are lots of references to figs. Do you know what a fig is? Have you ever seen one? Have you ever tasted one?
- Explain that a fig tree can produce an abundance of fruit. Ask: Do you know what abundance means? (help them come to the understanding that abundance means more than enough)
- Open up a fig that you've already cut in half or show a picture of a fig cut in half and point out the seeds. Use the word abundance to describe what you see: There's an abundance of seeds in a ripe fig.
- Provide some figs for the children to taste if possible and if they are willing. If you haven't already cut them, slice off part of a fig for each child. If you can't bring a fig, bring another fruit to sample – something that is abundant where you live. Talk about how God provides abundance, but in different ways in different places.
- Introduce the idea of native plants, and what is native in your area. Ask: Have you seen an abundance of fruit on any plants recently? What was it?

- Ask children to assist with planting a seed for a plant native to your area. If possible, have some children add water. Talk about how you will check on the plant in the upcoming weeks.

Part 2: Notice and compare

- Ask children if they have ever planted other seeds. Introduce the concept of comparison by suggesting that they might have been smaller or larger than the seed they just planted.
- Ask children if they know of plants around the church or their homes that are bigger than the one they just planted. Suggest that they use all their senses to remember the plants they find.
- Suggest that as children go out from church this week, they can take notice of plants growing in or around their home in the next week. Ask if anyone thinks they can take a picture of a plant this week and bring it next week. Remind them that we will follow up next week to find out what they noticed.

Part 3: Interact with the tree

- Have paper figs or other fruits with strings or yarn or tape attached to them. Ask the kids to name ways they see abundance in the world. If they are able, have them write words that show the abundance that God has given them. If the children have yet to learn to write, help them write the words they express. Provide the opportunity for them to attach the fruits to the tree in the worship space.
- To end the time, say a prayer that is written on a paper fruit, and attach it to the tree.

Repeat after me Prayer:

Holy God,
Thank you for showing us abundance in the world you created.
Teach us to see your abundance all around us.
Amen.

Ideas for extending it to Sunday school or at home:

- Bring seeds, pots, and soil for all the children to plant a seed of their own. Talk about how a seed grows into a plant. What does the plant need to grow? How big can it get if it grows properly?
- Discuss the places where figs are native. Discuss with the children how the climate is different there than where you live. Invite children to learn what kinds of fruits are native to your area.
- Plan a family or congregational meal that involves foods grown within 100 miles of the church. Let the children help to shop for the ingredients at farmers markets.
- The book, "All the World" by Liz Garton Scanlon may be appropriate for some readers, depicting children in a family exploring a farm and how the plants and animals on the

farm interact and depend on each other. Discussion questions for children are available at <https://storypath.upsem.edu/all-the-world-2/?highlight=bees>. Find a copy in print at a library near you by searching for your zip code at <https://search.worldcat.org/title/892889739>.

Week 2: Repentance-

How to prepare:

- Keep the seed you planted in a well lit space and give it appropriate water and care throughout the week. Bring it back to worship with you.
- Print and bring a few pictures of people who are not taking care of their plants well and what they might do differently.
Some options are provided here:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/137Yfh-FJIHAOieJCzpNqnbIFZSq9Uh0V/view?usp=drive_link
- Make paper leaves and attach a string or tape so they can be attached to the tree. Bring crayons or markers to write on them as well.
- If you live in an area where trees change color and leaves fall this time of year, consider choosing three or four colorful leaves to bring in and show the children.
- Write the repeat-after-me prayer for this week on a leaf paper.
Holy God,
Help us to learn how to treat your world better.
Forgive us when we don't get it right.
Amen.

Time with Children

Part 1: Planting

- Ask if children noticed plants in the past week. What did they look like? What did they smell like? Did they have anything edible growing on them? What do they need to grow?
- Bring in the plant you planted last week. Talk about whether it's growing. Use questions like: Has it started to grow? If not, did we fail to water it, or does it need more water? Do you need to do something different to help it grow? What does it need to grow? Maybe it doesn't have enough light? If it will have blooms, it will likely need to be outdoors in order to be pollinated.
- If you have brought colorful leaves, show them to the children and ask if they know why the trees leaves change color. (accept any answer, including getting ready for cold weather, less sunlight so using other enzymes besides chlorophyll to convert energy for plant use, so the branches don't get too heavy with ice that

they fall off in winter, etc.) Point out that this is one of the ways that trees change every year and turn toward what is happening for them next.

Part 2: Notice and Compare

- Introduce today's theme of repentance. Repentance means turning around; turning away from whatever is harmful. It's like the big change that trees go through in the fall, turning toward what is next and turning away from where they were before.
- Show the children pictures of people who are not caring for plants well.
- Ask: What are the ways we might need to change, or adjust our behavior to help plants? What plants do we encounter outside our church? What do they need to survive? Is there anything we can do to help? (don't litter, use less fossil fuels, don't trample them...)
- Help students connect by explaining that sometimes when we change our behavior to make something better, we call it repentance. Ask children if they can think of any examples of times when they needed to change their behavior or someone had to show them ways to do something better (e.g. throwing a baseball, washing dishes after dinner, writing with a pencil, etc.)
- This next week, ask children to notice ways that it would be helpful to change behavior. Depending on the age of your children, you may want to suggest they consider how easy or hard it would be to change that behavior and even brainstorm together what would make it more realistic.

Part 3: Interact with the tree

- Invite children to say aloud any ways they'd like to ask for God's help changing behavior, if they are comfortable voicing their ideas. If they are able, give them the opportunity to write words about these requests on a leaf to ask God for forgiveness or repentance in relation to climate change or a personal experience. If the children have yet to learn to write, help them write the words they express. Then attach the leaf to the tree in the worship space.

Repeat after me Prayer

Holy God,
Help us to learn how to treat your world better.
Forgive us when we don't get it right.
Amen.

Ideas for extending to Sunday school or at home:

- To engage more with the concept of repentance as a change in direction, play a game with children that requires changes of direction. Depending on the age of your children and the room where you meet, you could consider card games like Uno (when the reverse direction cards are played), board games like Candyland (when a card with an image rather than a color is played) or Sorry (where it is possible to roll a backward

number or return to home base), instruction following games like Simon Says or Red Light Green Light (where the leader's instructions or actions result in going multiple directions), or ball games like Dodgeball, or Basketball (where the ball dictates the direction the players move).

- Find a recipe for homemade fig newtons, fruit salad with figs, or another fruit recipe, collect the ingredients, and have the children make them. This would also be a good activity for zoom worship. Here are some links to some recipes:
<https://www.dessertfortwo.com/homemade-fig-newtons-recipe/>
<https://www.seriousseats.com/homemade-fig-newtons-recipe>
<https://feastingonfruit.com/gluten-free-fig-bars-recipe/>
<https://veggiekinsblog.com/2020/10/31/healthy-vegan-fig-bars/>
- Find a recipe for some other treat using fruit that is native to your area, and have the children make them. Perhaps cherry pie or peach cobbler.
- The book, "Coming Home" by Floyd Cooper about the life of Langston Hughes and his desire to find something that felt like home describes several examples of a life that changed, turned, and influenced others to live lives that advocated for justice in a variety of ways. Heroes who worked on the Underground Railroad, who wrote poetry, and who worked for civil rights, are part of the story. Near the beginning of the book, there are also some beautiful descriptions of Langston encountering natural environments in Kansas that might be inspiration for children to imagine how they encounter the natural environment. You can hear the book being read aloud at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1ggwdMrelQ>. Find a paper copy in a library near you here: <https://search.worldcat.org/title/28798447>.

Week 3: Restoration-

How to prepare:

- Make water droplets out of paper and add a string or tape so they can be attached to the tree. Gather crayons or markers to write on them.
- Bring the plant you planted in week one.
- Write the repeat after me prayer for this week on a water-droplet-shaped paper.
Holy God,
Thank you for the ways you restore us and restore the world.
Teach us ways to help in that process
so the plants may be restored and be abundant.
Amen

Time with Children:

Part 1: Planting

- The plants we have been talking about that are abundant, aren't always abundant. They need time for restoration in order to bear fruit again after they have produced fruit. Talk about what restoration means.

- If you planted a seed on week one, talk about whether that is growing (or not). What is helping it change from a seed to a plant?

Part 2: Notice & Compare

- Ask: What did you notice this past week on the theme of repentance? Did you discover behaviors that would benefit from changing? If you change them, will it help with restoration of something? What is that something?
- Explain that we need to rest and eat and drink water to restore ourselves and give ourselves energy. Plants need that too. Ask: Can you think of examples of when you needed restoration?
- This next week encourage children to notice if there are some plants that seem to be choking off other plants. Ask: What are those plants?
- Introduce the idea of invasive plants, that grow really well, sometimes so well that they crowd out other plants. Consider sharing an example that is a problem in your area. More information on invasives can be found here: <https://www.si.edu/stories/escape-invasives>.
- If there are well-known invasive species in your area (like blackberries in the PNW), talk about how they sometimes keep the native plants from growing abundantly, and that it is helpful to remove them in order for the native plants to be restored. Sometimes that's hard because, for example, blackberries are delicious, yet they are harmful to the environment in the PNW.

Part 3: Interact with the tree

- Have the children say aloud and write words on a paper water droplet that remind them of how things were restored or changed in their school, home, church, or community in relation to personal need or climate. If the children have yet to learn to write, help them write the words they express. Then have them attach the water droplet to the tree in the worship space.
- Invite them to consider how God might have been involved in the change they identify. If the changes the children identify are not about restoration and are instead about challenges they face, help them to understand that God is not causing the challenges, but instead that God is supporting them through addressing the challenges with the help of the adults in their lives.
- Say the prayer that is written on a water droplet, and attach it to the tree in the worship space.

Repeat after me prayer:

Holy God,
Thank you for the ways you restore us and restore the world.
Teach us ways to help in that process
so the plants may be restored and be abundant.
Amen

Ideas for extending to Sunday school or at home:

- Do some research on native and invasive plants and animals in your area. Have a discussion about those species, helping children understand that invasive species are sometimes released or planted in an area to solve a problem or to enhance the beauty of an area, but due to their ability to reproduce without constraints, they cause local species to fail to thrive.
- Bring the book “The Water Hole” by Graeme Base. Use this link for some discussion questions: <https://storypath.upsem.edu/the-water-hole/>. To find a paper copy of the book in a library near you, search your zip code at: <https://search.worldcat.org/title/45558818>.
- For youth, consider organizing a volunteer opportunity to help with removing an invasive species and/or maintaining a local trail in your area. Alternatively, watch a documentary like **Cane Toads: an Unnatural History**, about the toads that were introduced into the Australian farmlands to control agricultural pests and have now become pests themselves. To find a DVD copy in a library near you, enter your zip code here: <https://search.worldcat.org/title/47827573>.

Week 4: Trust-

How to prepare:

- Cut bird shapes out of paper and add a string or tape so they can be attached to the tree. Bring crayons or markers so they can be written on.
- Add a birdbath to your tree in the worship space. Consult with your pastor about how much your birdbath may resemble a baptismal font and what their preference is about possible resemblance. Some may want you to keep the birdbath away from the font to avoid confusion. Alternatively, some pastors may want to explore the ways that baptism is a call toward trust in God and might welcome the use of the baptismal font in the children’s moment and invite children to interact with water in the font as they talk about trusting God, both for people and for birds.
- Bring the plant you planted on week one.
- If you plan to use the USDA zone tracker to show how conditions for planting has changed due to climate change, print those maps or bring a laptop with internet access.
- Write the repeat after me prayer on a bird-shaped paper.
Holy God,
We are thankful that we can trust you.
We trust that you take care of the world.
Teach us to be trustworthy.
Amen

Time with Children:

Part 1: Planting

- If you planted a seed on week one, look to see how it’s doing. We trust that the seed has what it needs to turn into a plant given the right conditions.

Part 2: Notice & Compare

- Ask: What did you notice this past week? Did you notice any plants that appeared to be damaging other plants?
- Introduce the theme for this week of Trust with questions like: What does it mean to be trustworthy? (help children express the idea that trustworthy people are safe and encourage others to be fully who they are.)
- Consider a conversation that invites children to reflect personally on trust with these questions: Who do you trust? (family members, community members, teachers, other leaders) Why do you trust them? How do they help you?
Note that if you have children who have experienced abuse or who have other trust issues, this question may be triggering for them. If you don't know your children well or suspect that there are unaddressed trust issues in your congregation, consider saving this question for a time when children are more at ease and able to express their needs around trust.
- Return to the world of plants by explaining that different kinds of plants need different conditions to grow. That's why there are different kinds of plants that grow abundantly in different parts of the world. Some of those things are changing because of climate change. If you have older children/youth, you could discuss the United States Department of Agriculture map that shows which plants grow where in the US. If you type in a zip code in the US, you will see at least two descriptor zones, which are being updated because the climate is changing. The map is located here: <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>. If you are outside the US, a zip code like 98112 will demonstrate the principle.
- Help children connect these ideas to their faith by stating that we trust that God will provide what plants need to grow. Can you think of what plants need to grow that God provides? (rain, sun, soil, pollinators) If children are unfamiliar with pollinators, this might be a time to help them understand that pollen has to move from one plant to another and usually that happens on the legs and bodies of bugs. If you read "All the World" on Week 1, you might refer back to that text here to point out how the flowers relied on the bees.
- Depending on the age of your children, you may want to remind them that climate change is hindering the ability for plants to rely on God's trustworthiness in some places because there is more drought, more frequent and more intense storms, and more wildfires. We know that God is still trustworthy and we also can help God by decreasing our impact on climate change. Can you think of any ways we can reduce our impact on climate change? (ride bikes and walk more, eat foods grown locally, use electric appliances in areas where the electric grid is supplied from mostly renewable resources, buy less plastic).
- Invite children this next week to notice the trees that provide protection. Inspire their curiosity with questions like: Do people seek shade under them? Are there any other places people seek shelter?

Part 3: Interact with the tree

- Have the children say aloud and write words on a bird-shaped paper that relates to how they have trusted God in their school, home, church, or community in relation to personal experience or in nature. If they are still learning to write, help them record the words they say on the papers. Then have them attach the bird to the tree or birdbath near the tree (if you have one) in the worship space.
- Say the prayer that is written on a bird shaped paper and then attach it to the tree in the worship space.

Repeat after me prayer:

Holy God,
We are thankful that we can trust you.
We trust that you take care of the world.
Teach us to be trustworthy.
Amen

Ideas for extending to Sunday school or at home:

- Have the children make origami birds. Instructions can be found online, for example here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_C2DpD7EIM or here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zW8DkZI1fbo>. Discuss how plants and birds depend on one another for existence.
- Bring "The Curious Garden" by Peter Brown
From a review on the website "[Storypath](#)" - "Liam decides to take care of struggling garden he encounters in his city, where there is no greenery, trees, or gardens. As Liam works to restore the garden, the illustrations become more and more colorful, drawing more people in and bringing life back to his city. Similar to how Liam's city was transformed, our lives, too, can be transformed when we choose to trust in God."
To find a paper copy in a library near you, search here: <https://search.worldcat.org/title/243777496> for your zip code. Audio recordings in libraries are searchable here: <https://search.worldcat.org/title/495585238>. It is also included in a DVD recording with other children's stories about gardens, entitled, "The Curious Garden and other stories about nature" which is available at libraries, organized by zip code here: <https://search.worldcat.org/title/812197118>.

Week 5: Flourishing-

How to prepare:

- Make flower-shaped papers and attach a string or tape so they can be attached to the tree. Bring crayons or markers to write on the flowers.
- Bring the plant you planted in week one. Explore with your church Trustees or other leadership whether there is a place on the church grounds where you can plant it after the worship series. If not, explore other options for the plant so it will be able to continue to grow and flourish.
- Write the repeat-after-me prayer for this week on a flower-shaped paper.
Holy God,
Thank you for providing for our needs

so that we can flourish and help others too.
Amen.

Time with children:

Part 1: planting

- Ask: How is the seed you planted doing? Is it beginning to flourish? What is helping it to grow? Now that you are almost done with the series, what will you do with the plant? Will you plant it in your church yard?
- Take time with the children to make plans for the future flourishing of the plant you have grown.

Part 2: Notice & Compare

- Explain that today's theme is flourishing, which means something similar to thriving or living your best life. Ask children to share signs of flourishing in their own life and the community around them. (They may notice that when they feel like they are flourishing, they feel like dancing or singing or shouting or writing or having a party. Children might recognize a hug from a loved one or a promise kept as a sign of a family flourishing. If a school is flourishing, it might have artwork from many children on the walls, smiling teachers in the hallways, or awards in an award case. If a church is flourishing, it might have new ideas for ministry that children can participate in.)
- Help children recognize that flourishing applies to plants too. During this time of year, children may have heard of harvest parties or harvest festivals where produce is brought in from fields and saved for the year. Some farmers don't take all the produce their fields produce, leaving some for other animals and the soil so they also have what they need. Harvest provides food for birds, humans, other animals, as well as the entire ecosystem, helping us all to flourish. When we flourish and are healthy, we can help others.
- Remind children that we talked about the fig in week one. The fig tree grows large and the leaves provide shelter/shade. In biblical times, communities gathered under the fig tree for shelter and fellowship and so not only did the tree provide food for their bodies to flourish, but it also provided space for the community to flourish through renewed relationships built during periods of rest in the shade of the tree. Inquire if children know of trees in your community that provide shade for people to gather for protection from heat? In much of the US, oak trees once were this kind of tree, although many oak trees have been cut to produce timber or to make space for human development. If there are oak trees near your church, consider bringing a picture of one. Ask if children know how oak trees can help communities flourish. (provide shade from sun, provide acorns for food for squirrels and others, provide leaves that fall and can be used for mulch in gardens and planting beds, etc.)

Part 3: Interact with the tree

- Invite the children to identify aloud and write words on a flower-shaped paper to show how God is growing them to help at home, school, church, or community in relationship

to personal experience. Then give them a chance to attach it to the tree in the worship space.

- Say a prayer that is written on a flower-shaped paper and then attach it to the tree in the worship space.

Repeat after me prayer:

Holy God,

Thank you for providing for our needs

so that we can flourish and help others too.

Amen.

Ideas for extending to Sunday school or at home:

- Read “City Green” by DyAnne Di Salvo-Ryan. Search for your Zip Code at <https://search.worldcat.org/title/28888338> to find it in a library near you.
- Visit the new site where the plant you have grown will be planted. Possibly, have children help to replant it there when it’s time. If it will be going to someone else’s home, consider having that person visit with children and answer their questions about how the plant can flourish in its new home.
- If your congregation has a coffee hour after worship, explore whether the children might be able to prepare some of the snacks for coffee hour to help the community flourish this week. Perhaps they could mix fruits together to make a fruit salad, bake cookie or biscuit dough so there are hot, fresh goodies for the adults as they come out of worship, or mix up some punch on this occasion. Perhaps include figs or fig newtons in the festivities.

References:

Fig biology resource:

<https://www.esa.org/esablog/2011/05/20/the-story-of-the-fig-and-its-wasp/#:~:text=That%20is%20C%20a%20fig%20is,navigate%20within%20these%20confined%20quarters>

Storypath website, connecting children’s literature with the faith life:

<https://storypath.upsem.edu/>

Information about native berries in North America:

<https://vividmaps.com/berries-of-north-america/>