

# ROUNDabout

Fall 2009



The newsletter for Gather 'Round leaders

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

For Fall 2009 Gather 'Round focuses on the capture and exile of the Israelites and their eventual return to Jerusalem. A happy ending!

These days we too may feel like strangers in a strange land. For many the past year has been a time of uncertainty as we lose jobs, watch businesses fail, and see entire industries stagger. Many congregations have also been coping with a strange new world, where church and Sunday school attendance are sporadic, where we struggle to provide an influence that counteracts societal impulses toward selfishness and thoughtlessness, and where many people hunger for spiritual nourishment but don't look for it in churches.

What is our opportunity in the midst of crisis? Can we, like the children of Israel, learn to sing our song in a strange land?

The Gather 'Round curriculum helps you apply the eternal truths of God's active presence in the world to the present reality. It gently guides children, youth, and adults into thoughtfully exploring how that old, old story speaks to them today. It provides resources for teachers who may be new to teaching or to the church itself. Using the same story for all age groups provides a platform for families to grow in faith together. We nurture the church of today to create the church of tomorrow.

—Anna Speicher,  
Director and Senior Editor

## God's constant love

This quarter's Bible stories, on the theme Exile and Restoration, are from the Old Testament. We wrap up the epic story of the people of Israel as they adjust to the new reality of living in exile. Derek Suderman, writer of the Bible insights essays, guides us through this difficult time by helping us reflect on what it means to live faithfully under the rule of different worldly empires. Through snapshots from Ezekiel, Job, Ezra, Daniel, and Esther, we learn how people responded to this new reality. The exile story provides a backdrop to how we understand the New Testament stories and the life of Jesus.

These stories are not easy, but they need to be told. Gather 'Round writers are sensitive to different age groups. They do not gloss over sadness but also convey hope and consolation. The time of the exile was Israel's darkest hour, yet the people discovered that God remained with them. As teachers we may wish that all children would have lives of perfect safety and happiness, but we know many experience pain and sadness. This quarter's stories remind us that God's love remains constant, even in difficult times.

Teachers of younger ages will be guided to tell these stories simply and honestly but without some of the harsher details. Those working with youth and adults will be able to help learners grapple with what it means to live faithfully in a "post-Christendom" world. In these stories, may we discover anew the Word of God for our time as we reflect on the agony of exile and rediscover the hope of restoration.

## Prepare to be a spiritual leader

You are the leader of a small group of people on a spiritual journey. How is God calling you to lead effectively? How will you prepare yourself to be a strong spiritual leader?

One way is to practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. *Lectio divina* is a prayerful reading of the scriptures over and over. Try sitting with the weekly Bible text for a minimum of 10 minutes three times a week before you prepare to teach. You will be amazed at what comes to mind if you listen attentively for new ideas.

### Age group review

Fall is a good time to review age-specific teaching tips. Read about the different ages in chapter 9 of the Gather 'Round Handbook, and review what you can expect from your group. Jot down reminders that will help you as you begin this spiritual journey with a new group of eager learners.



### Fall schedule reminders

Gather 'Round's Fall quarter begins August 30, the week before Labor Day. The quarter ends November 22. The Winter quarter begins with Advent on November 29. Beginning in 2010, the Fall quarter will always start on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend.

Another important way to prepare is to become familiar with the teaching materials. Take time to review all the content, and look for the following:

- Resource packs are filled with creative teaching aids—fun games, colorful Bible story pictures, and many more items to add variety in teaching and learning.
- Primary students have 3 activity pages per session in their books. Note that one activity page is especially designed for nonreaders.
- The Multiage student book has 4 activity pages per week. One is geared specifically to nonreaders and one to readers.
- Preschool children will have an activity each week that provides something they may take home.
- The Bible insight essays provide excellent study materials—use them alongside your personal study and you will be enriched spiritually.
- Glance through the teacher's guide for an overview of the quarter. Plan to stretch yourself as a teacher by offering activities that may be beyond your own comfort zone, for the sake of the children.

## Set up for success!

As you prepare to teach this fall, think of how you can set up your room to help children become thoroughly involved in learning. What visuals or interactive displays could help them experience the theme of Exile and Restoration?

Perhaps you can move around your room, telling the story in a different area each week. Bring **artifacts**, such as pottery or furniture, that are in various stages of restoration. Have a **globe or world map** with sticky notes or pictures to show places where people have been forced to move from their homes. On a **bulletin board**, post clippings or pictures of people who have been displaced from their homes. Does your congregation support mission workers who work with refugees? Write or e-mail them and post your communications. Assign **one wall** to be a “wailing wall” where children and youth can offer notes or prayers of lament for people who are suffering or displaced. Have children write messages of hope on **lengths of ribbon** and tie them to a **tree branch** or hang them from the ceiling.

Copy and distribute to  
all teachers and leaders.

PDF at:  
[www.gatherround.org](http://www.gatherround.org)

## Fall 2009 Talkabout • Exile and Restoration

Bring the Bible stories home with the Fall 2009 Build and Lock Talkabout. Two cards accompany each weekly story. Follow the activity ideas on the cards, then build and lock them together.



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Free sample sessions,  
Bible texts, and more at  
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