



Jesus Loves Children

Goal: To celebrate that we are loved and blessed by Jesus.

RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

. . . In Mark 10:13–16

Jesus scolded his disciples for trying to prevent children from coming to him. He saw them as an important part of his ministry. “Don’t forbid them,” said Jesus, ‘because God’s kingdom belongs to people like these children. I assure you that whoever doesn’t welcome God’s kingdom like a child will never enter it.’ Then he hugged the children and blessed them” (vv. 14–16, CEB). Children are model citizens in God’s kingdom, since the reign of God “belongs to people like these children.” Children are central!

Jesus embraced the children and blessed them, encompassing them in his grace. As John Calvin put it, Christ’s grace “reaches to this age of life also.” This is the most vivid expression of receiving the grace of Christ and being assured of his love and care.

If Jesus regarded children in this special way, the church and all followers of Jesus ought to have a special concern for children also. All are to enter the kingdom “like a child.” We receive the embrace of the blessing of Christ as Jesus’ gracious love reaches out to us, drawing us into the family of God. We receive Christ’s grace with the gratitude and excitement of a child!

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

This most familiar story offers a great way for the children to think about all the reasons Jesus thought children were special and important. Invite them to respond to the question, “Why do you think Jesus thought children were important?” This way into the story invites their imaginative responses as they prepare to hear it and respond. A follow-up question might be to invite them to think about how their church thinks they are important—“What are the kinds of things you do in the church?”

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Be attentive to all the children in your group. The extroverted and most verbal will be able to respond quickly and loudly to your questions. Make space for the quieter or more introverted children who need a bit of space to quietly respond to a question. A great way to do that is, after you ask a question, count to 10 or 20 and ask the children to wait before they start responding. That way, everyone has a chance to think for a few seconds. Jesus loved all children, and we show our love for all children by making space for each one.

O God, open my heart to all the children and to greet them with the love of Jesus. In his name, I pray. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 11, 19, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

snack

Guided Play

choice 1: dolls, Jesus doll
(optional)

choice 2: children's
Bibles

choice 3: copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

Exploring

choice 1: **SCM 11a**

choice 2: copies of **GN 2**

choice 4: copies of **GN 3**

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 2 and choice 3 require more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet children as they arrive and say, “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.” Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time. Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers whom you do not know personally. Tell the parents/caregivers that today’s story is about a time when Jesus welcomed and blessed children.

Invite the children to choose a guided-play activity to start:

- 1. Playing with Dolls**—Invite the children to play with babies and dolls. Engage the children in conversation about what they are doing with the dolls and what children like to do. If you have a Jesus doll, introduce it and invite the children to have their dolls interact with Jesus, asking them what they would like to do with Jesus and what they would like to talk about with Jesus.
- 2. Picture Corner**—Open children’s Bibles to pictures of Jesus with children. Invite the children to look at the pictures. Engage them in conversation about the pictures, using questions such as: “Who is in the picture? What are they doing? How do you think the children feel? How do you think Jesus feels? What do you think they are talking about?”
- 3. Jesus Welcomes Children**—Tape a piece of mural paper to a wall and write a large title saying, “Jesus Welcomes Children.” Give the children copies of **GN 1** and invite them to color the picture of the child as themselves. When they are finished coloring, help them cut out the picture and have the child glue it to the mural.

T *For some children, consistency in transitions is the key. Growing in Grace & Gratitude utilizes familiar songs and rhymes as a way to aid in the ease of routine without making it feel stale.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Tell Me the Story of Jesus”—**MM 16; SCM 21**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Be a Friend

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Using the tune to the song “She’ll Be Coming Around the Mountain,” teach the children the following song:

If you want to make a friend, shake a hand. (*shake hands*)
If you want to be a friend, give a high five! (*give a high five*)
If you want to have a friend, be a friend that never ends,
If you want to be a friend, give a hug. (*share a hug*)

Jesus Calls the Children

MS

Invite the children to repeat after you and follow your motions.

Children short and children tall, (*squat down and then stand up tall*)

Jesus loves them all the time. (*hug yourself and then make a big circle in front of you with both arms*)

Children big and children small, (*reach up high with one hand, place other hand at knee level*)

Jesus loves them all the time. (*hug yourself and then make a big circle in front of you with both arms*)

Babies, toddlers, big kids like me, (*rock a baby, hold a hand down by the side of your body as if holding the hand of a toddler, then put your hands on your hips and stand up tall*)

Jesus loves them all the time. (*hug yourself and then make a big circle in front of you with both arms*)

He calls them all to come, you see. (*motion with your hand to come*)

Jesus loves them all the time. (*hug yourself and then make a big circle in front of you with both arms*)



Today’s story can be found in *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

Hearing the Story

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Open the Bible to Mark 10 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about a time when Jesus welcomed the children to him.

Read **SCM 11**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Teach the children the following finger play. Invite them to repeat after you and follow your motions.



Here is Jesus, *(hold up the index finger on your right hand)*
 And here are his disciples. *(wiggle the other fingers and thumb on your right hand)*
 Here are the children, *(hold up your left hand)*
 Laughing and playing. *(wiggle the fingers on your left hand)*
 “Go away!” said the disciples. *(make a “Go away!” motion with your right hand, then hold up the [Jesus] index finger)*
 The children were sad. *(stop wiggling your left fingers and fold them into a fist)*
 “Come here,” said Jesus, talking to the children. *(motion with your right index finger to come)*
 The children jumped up and ran to Jesus. *(pop up your left fingers and wiggle them toward your right index finger)*
 “You are my friends . . .” *(make the sign for friends, linking your right index finger over the left and then your left index finger over the right)*
 “. . . and I love you!” *(point to yourself with your right index finger as you say “I,” cross your arms over your heart as you say “love,” and point to the children as you say “you”)*

Once they have learned the finger play, repeat it so the flow is smoother.

EXPLORING GOD’S GRACE

1. Stop and Go



Cut the Jesus figure and the disciples figure from **SCM 11a** and tape a large craft stick to the back of each picture. Tell the children that they are going to play a game.

Line up the children along one wall. Tell them that, when they see the picture of Jesus, he is welcoming them to move forward. Tell the children that, when they see the picture of the disciples, they are sending the children away. Choose different options for having the children move forward or back, such as two small steps, one giant leap, two hops, and so forth.



2. Jesus' Hugs



Before the session, cut out the Jesus and child figures from GN 2 and make a slit where indicated in the Jesus figure for each child.

Tell the children they are making a hug from Jesus.

Invite the children to color the Jesus figure and to draw themselves on the child figure. Help them tape a craft stick to the child figure. Instruct the children to slide the figure of themselves in Jesus' open arms. Wonder together how it feels to get a hug from Jesus.



3. Jesus Loves the Children



Before the session, decorate a paper bag with hearts. Write "Jesus Loves the Children" on the bag. Cut out a heart shape for each child, at least 4 inches wide.

Give each child a heart and invite them to decorate it. Invite them to write their name on their heart. Help children who need assistance. Have the children place their hearts in the paper bag.

Gather in a circle. Shake the bag. Ask the children, "Who does Jesus love?" Have the children take turns drawing a heart out of the bag. Say, "Jesus loves (Name)." Have the children repeat, "Jesus loves (Name)." Give the heart to that child. Repeat the action until all have received their hearts. Play again if desired.

Use "wonder" questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.

4. Coloring Page



Hand out copies of GN 3 and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture of Jesus and children. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ▼ I wonder, "What are Jesus and the children talking about?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What are the disciples thinking when they see Jesus playing with the children?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What does Jesus say as he blesses the children?"

T *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as touching toes, wiggling fingers, moving arms in circles, and so forth.*

LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Call the children together, singing “Jesus Says God Cares for Us”—**MM 12; SCM 19**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Remind the children that Jesus welcomed and blessed children around him. Tell each child that Jesus loves them and blesses them. Tell them that they can tell others this too.

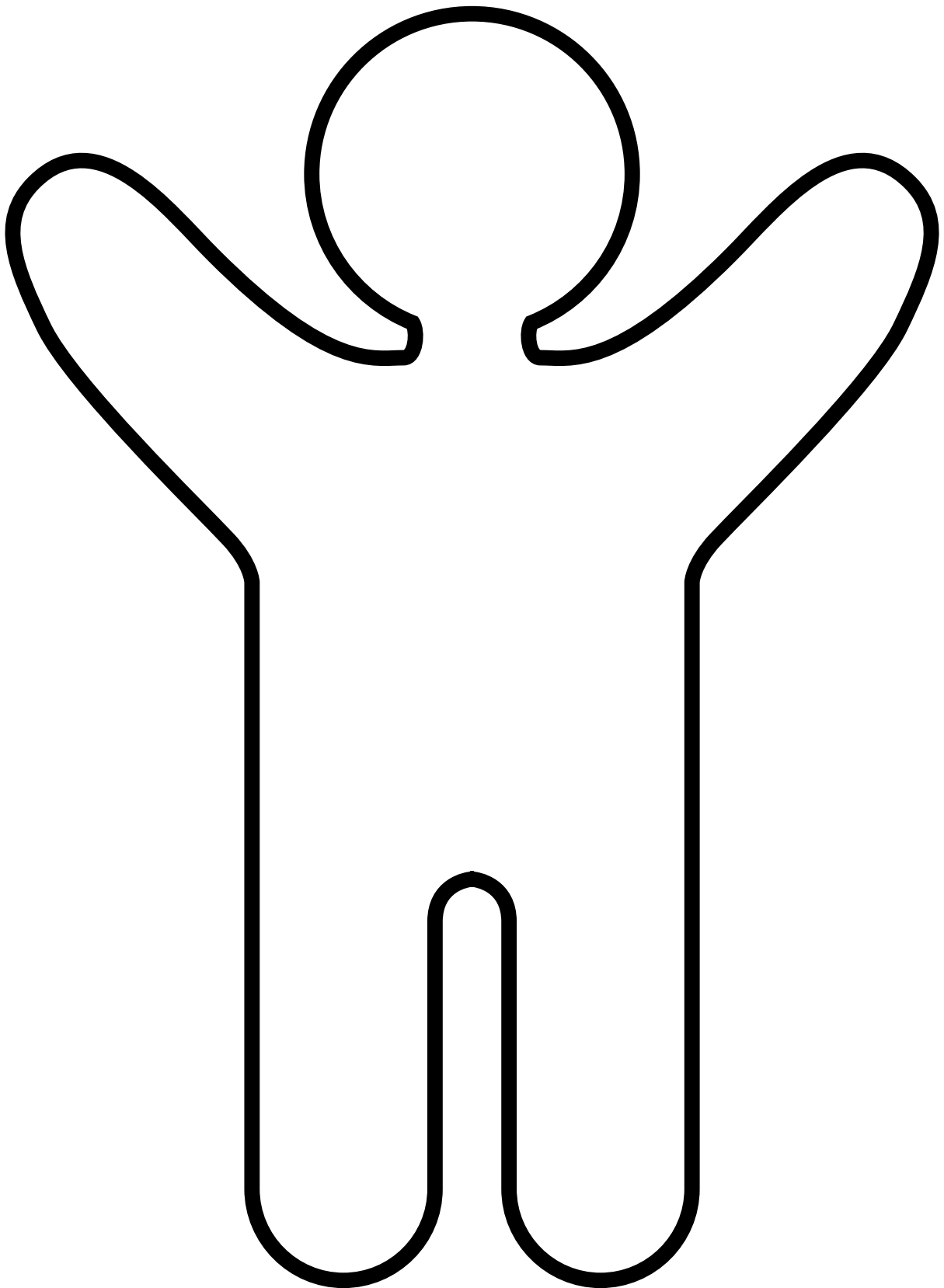
If you would like to share a snack, now would be a good time. Pray, inviting the children to repeat after you:

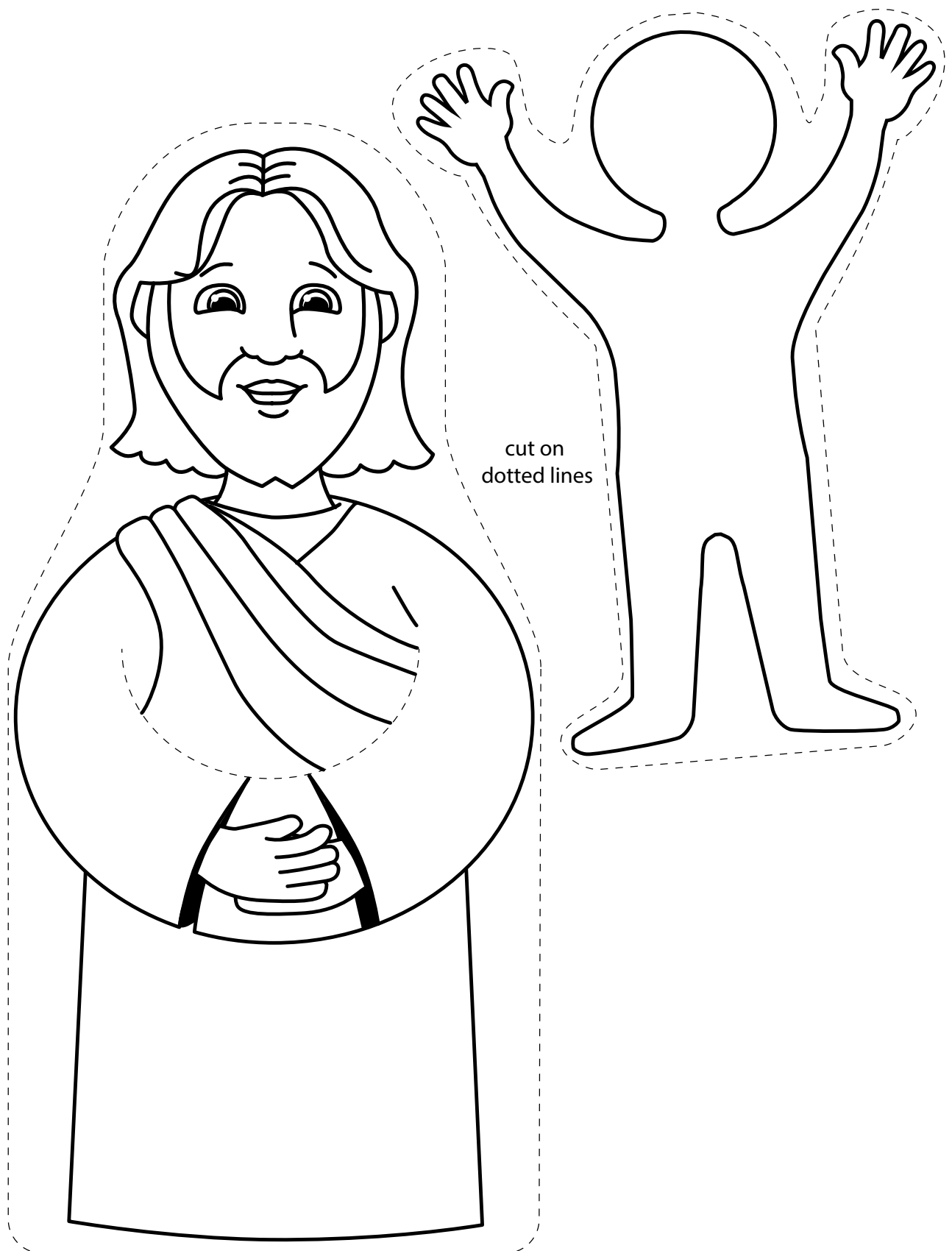
God is great /
and God is good,
and we thank God /
for our food. /
By God’s hand /
we all are fed. /
Give us, Lord, /
our daily bread. /
Amen. /

As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), Jesus loves you. The grace of God goes with you.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).





Jesus Loves Children



Jesus calls the children to come to him.

