



# Jesus Loves Children

**Goal:** To celebrate our place in God's caring family.

## 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, 11a, 14, 22

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

streamers

## Responding

**Celebrating**  
SCM 11b, 11c, 11d

**Offering**  
smartphone or tablet

**Extra**  
card-stock copies of  
**Grace Notes (GN) 1**,  
envelopes

## GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **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.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

### Welcoming and Preparing

**A** **LG** **C**

Welcome each child with “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt children to respond, “And also with you.” Invite children to prepare the worship space. Play celebratory music as they work. Place a green cloth, a Bible, and a candle on the worship table. Have the children use mural paper to make a banner that says “Welcome” in the center. Invite children to make it colorful and fun; tape streamers to the bottom of the banner and hang it.

Ask the group to look around the space and consider what else would make it welcoming. Encourage them to follow up on their ideas, creating the most welcoming space possible.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Invite one or two to lead today’s singing. Invite a volunteer to practice reading the Scripture passage for today’s reading.

Encourage conversation as the group works by asking these questions:

- ▼ What is the best part about being a child?
- ▼ What is the hardest part about being a child?
- ▼ What do you think are the best and hardest parts about being an adult?

### Singing

**MS**

Sing “Wherever I May Wander”—**MM 2**; **SCM 14**. While singing, invite the children to form a line and wander through the space.

**M** *Sitting quietly for a prayer may be difficult for some children. Consider having them hold something that may be needed soon, giving them a focus point as well as providing an important role for them.*

### Praying

**M** **C**

Turn on the candle as a reminder of Jesus’ presence with us. Offer that you will help the children use their imaginations as you pray together. Invite them to close their eyes and silently picture their favorite place: their bedroom, their yard, a family member’s home, and so on. Ask them to imagine how it feels: Is it warm or cool? Are they sitting somewhere comfortable? Are there any smells?

Now ask them to imagine that Jesus sits with them. Where is he sitting? What does the expression on his face look like?



Ask them to hear Jesus say, “I am so glad you are here!” Allow for a few silent moments as they imagine sitting with Jesus. Do they talk? Do they sit quietly? End with these words:

Thank you, Jesus, for wanting to be with us and for making each of us a part of your caring family. Amen.

### Preparing to Hear the Story

VI C

Display **SCM 11a**.

Ask these questions:

- ✎ I wonder, “What is happening in this picture?”
- ✎ How do you imagine the children might feel?
- ✎ How might Jesus feel?

Wonder together what it would feel like to get to sit in Jesus’ lap or stand beside him with a bunch of your friends.



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](http://www.pcusastore.com).

### Hearing the Story

L

Invite a child to find Mark 10 in the Bible. Have volunteers read Mark 10:13–16. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible on the worship center.

Comment that there were lots of feelings mentioned in the story. Explain that they will hear the story again. Invite children to use their facial expressions and bodies to represent the feelings they hear. Read **SCM 11** or listen to the story audio. Pause when necessary to discuss the feelings. Some key places may be:

- ✎ The disciples got annoyed when they saw the parents and children coming toward them.
- ✎ The children were disappointed.
- ✎ The parents felt sad.
- ✎ When Jesus saw what was happening, he got upset.
- ✎ The disciples were puzzled.

### Reflecting on God’s Grace

C

Ask the children to imagine how the children’s faces and bodies looked when Jesus hugged and blessed them.

Use these questions to engage the story further:

- ✎ What did you like best in the story?
- ✎ What did it make you wonder about?
- ✎ Why do you think children understand living in God’s ways so well?
- ✎ Jesus wants people of all ages to think about trusting God like a child does. What advice would you give a teenager or an adult to help them understand living in God’s ways and trusting God?



### Singing

MS T

Give the children streamers and invite them to enthusiastically sing “Jesus Says God Cares for Us”—**MM 12**; **SCM 22**—while dancing around the room. Turn off the candle.

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

### Celebrating God’s Grace

LG F C

Read the following situations. Invite children to form groups of two or three people and act out responses that show ways of welcoming using **SCM 11b** (Felipe), **SCM 11c** (Tasha), and **SCM 11d** (Ari).

Felipe is from Mexico. He has moved to your area in the middle of the school year. His parents move a lot, so he doesn’t get to stay in any school very long.

Tasha has just started coming to your church. She uses a wheelchair. You thought about inviting her to your group, but it meets upstairs.

You have known Ari for a few months, but he doesn’t talk to people very much. He usually stands at the edge of the playground looking sad and lonely.

When children have had the chance to play-act ways of welcoming in their small groups, ask:

- ✎ What might prevent you from welcoming some of these people?
- ✎ What difference does it make if someone feels welcome or not?
- ✎ How can we make people welcome?

### Praying God’s Grace

A MS LG F

Invite the children to stand around the space, with plenty of room to stretch and move. Ask them to close their eyes, and explain that you will guide them through a time of movement prayer. With their eyes closed, ask them to imagine a place where they feel most welcome, then to move their bodies to show God the feeling they have there.

Ask them to imagine someone they know from school who may not always feel welcome, then to move their bodies to show God how they feel for those who feel unwelcome.

Ask them to imagine how Jesus would welcome others, then to move their bodies to show Jesus’ welcome.

Ask them to tell God “sorry” for times they have not welcomed others, then to move their bodies to show God they feel sorry.



Ask them to thank God for sending Jesus and for the ways Jesus teaches us to welcome others, then to move their bodies to show thanks.

**F** *Notice and listen carefully to children’s concerns about inclusion and exclusion. Discuss different aspects of fair and unfair situations, helping children to form strong ideas of fairness.*



## Offering God’s Grace

C

Ask:

- ▼ When have you felt especially welcome in church?
- ▼ Are there people who make you feel especially welcome?

Make sure you follow your church’s policy on posting video or photos on social media or your church’s website. If you need a photo release form, one is available at [www.pcusastore.com/gggdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/gggdownloads).

Invite children to create a video about how your church welcomes children. For starters, brainstorm ways your church does this. Create a video where they share their ideas by finishing one of these sentences: “Our church welcomes children by . . .” or “Our church can welcome children by . . .” Talk with the pastor about sharing the video in worship or on the church’s social media outlets.

## Extra Activity

LG

One way to be welcoming is to have something to give newcomers. Gather the children to make cards. Provide card-stock copies of **GN 1**, scissors, envelopes, and craft supplies.

Invite the children to decorate the cards with available craft supplies. Make sure to decorate the individual “U” but leave the broken-line “U” undecorated.

Once decorated, have the children cut out the card and the individual “U” along the solid lines. If your children are able, cut out the broken-line “U.”

Fold the card along the straight broken line. Invite all the children to sign the inside of each card as a reminder that they are important.

Have them place the individual “U” inside the card and the cards inside the envelopes. Collect the cards to give them to the hospitality ministry at your church.



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](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads). Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

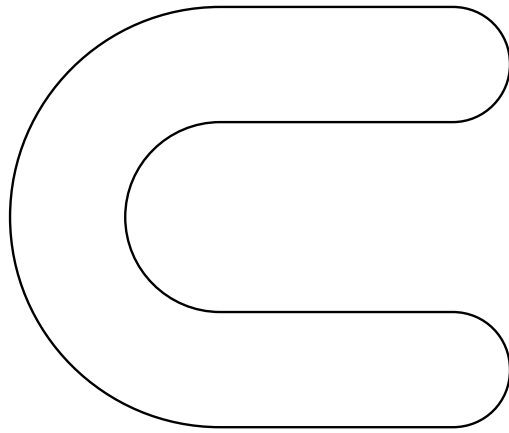
## LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite the children to gather, and lead them in cleaning the worship space.

Stand in a circle. Start by looking at the person to your left, placing a hand on their shoulder and saying, “(Name), Jesus welcomes you and so do I.” Invite the child to your left to turn to the friend on their left and repeat the blessing; continue around the circle until the child to your right blesses you.

As children leave, challenge them to tell their family and friends that Jesus welcomes them too.





Welcome! You FIT right in!

