



Party Time!

Goal: To imagine God's gracious kingdom as a party.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 14:15-24

Jesus told a parable about how God wanted people to live with each other. A man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. When the dinner was ready, he sent a servant to tell the invited guests: "Come! The dinner is now ready" (v. 17, CEB). But one by one, all began to make excuses about why they could not attend. One bought a farm and had to see it; another had to check on his oxen; and one person had just gotten married (vv. 18-20).

When the servant reported the excuses, the party-giver was angry and told the servant: "Go quickly to the city's streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame" (v. 21, CEB). When there was still room, the servant was to go again to secure enough people to fill the house (v. 23). Of those invited, "not one" will "taste my dinner" (v. 24, CEB).

Those whom the man had invited rejected the opportunity for the dinner. Those in greatest need were brought in—receiving the grace of the host. They responded with gratitude as they received the great dinner.

No wonder Luke introduced Jesus' parable by quoting the dinner guest who said to Jesus: "Happy are those who will feast in God's kingdom" (v. 15, CEB).

. . . In your experiences with the children

Invitations to birthday parties or even an invitation to a friend for a playdate or sleepover are certainly experiences children know that are like the host and his dinner guests in this parable. This story invites children to think about what was going on with the host, his original guests, and their response, as well as the new guest list and their response. What were people doing, and why were they doing it? It invites children to wonder about the invitation to God's party and what their response might be.

. . . In your relationships with the children

R.S.V.P. is the abbreviation for the French phrase meaning "please respond." When issued with an invitation, the host is asking for your response. Will you be able to come or not? In today's world, an RSVP isn't what it used to be. There's something now called "FOMO" which means "fear of missing out." We don't want to commit to something because something better might come along. So RSVPs are left to the last minute or changed all together if it seems like something better is happening. Today's parable has an invitation to attend a great feast. Guests respond, but then at the time of the party, other things have come up. The party just doesn't seem worth it. So the host invites more people—all that can be found. These folks accept the invitation and show up to the great feast. Help the children understand that we are all invited to God's great party—God's kingdom on earth. What's their response going to be?

*O Jesus, thank you for inviting me to your party.
Help me not to be a party pooper. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i-iv, 3, 15, 25

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

blanket or mats

snack (optional)

Guided Play

choice 1: crepe paper
streamers

choice 3: dress up
clothes, such as fancy
dresses, sweaters, hats,
ties, and so forth

Exploring

choice 1: copies of **Grace
Notes (GN) 1**

choice 2: **SCM 3a**,
copies of **GN 2**, special
“party” snacks and drink

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.

Post **SCM i-ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker onto a clothespin. Use the 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 your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Before the session, cut out large triangles from white paper to make pennant flags for “Guided Play,” choice 1.

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 2 requires more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play

Greet the children as they arrive and say, “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.” Be attentive to any children who might be coming for the first time.

Introduce yourself to parents and caregivers who you do not know personally. Tell the parents today’s story is about being invited to God’s party.

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

1. **Decorating the Room**—Tell the children that they are going to prepare the room for a party. Give the large triangles to the children to color. Invite children to decorate the room with their flags and crepe paper streamers.
2. **Kitchen Area**—Invite the children to prepare for a party. Engage them in conversation about party food, what they like to eat at a party, and so forth. If pretend food is available, encourage them to pretend to share a meal.
3. **Dress Up**—Invite the children to dress up for a party.

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 the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Thank You, Holy God”—SCM 15. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Come and Hear

Say or sing the following song to the tune of “The Bear Went Over the Mountain” and do the motions indicated. Invite the children to join in with you.

Come and hear God’s story. (*walk four steps to the right*)

Come and hear God’s story. (*walk four steps to the left*)

Come and hear God’s story. (*walk four steps to the right*)

Sit down and fold your hands. (*sit and fold hands in your lap*)

Jesus Calls the Children

Invite the children to repeat each line with its motions after you.

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

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

Children big and children small, (*put arms out wide, then curl into ball*) /

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

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

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

He calls us all to come, you see. (*motion with hand to come*) /

Jesus loves both you and me. (*hug self 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



Open the Bible to Luke 14 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about being invited to God's party.

Read **SCM 3**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, "Amen."

Read the story on **SCM 3**, inviting the children to wave their hands in the air and shout out, "Yay! Party!" when ever they hear the word "party."

EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Invitations

Tell the children that everyone is invited to God's party. Suggest that when they come to church on Sunday it is like coming to God's party. Give the children copies of **GN 1** and invite them to color the invitation reading, "You are invited to God's party every Sunday!" Children may tape the invitation around the church or hand them to people after class.

2. Have a Party!



*Before the session, cut out the nine pictures from **SCM 3a**.*

Invite the children to have a party together! If you serve food, have some special items other than your normal snack. Play music and invite the children to dance and sing.

Play a party game. Give each child a copy of **GN 2** and then place the pictures from **SCM 3a** upside down on a table. Invite the children to take turns turning over a picture. As each one is turned over, invite the children to color the corresponding square on their paper.

Talk about parties the children have been to, what they like about a party, and how church is like a party.



3. God's Party, the Church



Tell the children that coming to church is like being at God's party with all of God's people. Invite them to repeat after you and follow your actions as you lead them in the familiar rhyme, "Here is the Church," with some new additions!

Here is the church, (*interlock fingers, palms facing each other*) /
and here is the steeple. (*point index fingers up to make a steeple*) /
Open the doors, (*move thumbs out and away from each other*) /
and see all the people. (*wiggle fingers*) /

Here people worship, (*stand up*) /
and here people pray. (*fold hands in prayer*) /
It is God's party (*wave hands in the air*) /
each time that we say, (*cups hands around mouth*) /

"Praise God! And thank you. (*arms up, then touch middle three fingers of right hand to chin and move them out*) /
"I'm sorry, it's true. (*bow head*) /
"Here I am, send me. (*point to self*) /
"And God, I love you!" (*cross arms over heart*) /

Use "wonder" questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wonder 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. Engage the children in conversation as they color using the following wondering questions.

- ▼ I wonder, "Why is the party outside?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What did the guests talk about at the party?"
- ▼ I wonder, "How is church like a party?"

T Don't ignore what happens in between activities. Even if it is just moving from centers to story time, the abruptness can cause problems with some children. Give the time a focus by engaging the children in a simple activity such as marching from one place to another, lining up by height, or clapping hands.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Encourage each child to put away one toy or object. Invite the children to sit around a table or on the floor.

Call the children together, singing “We Are Dancing in the Love of God (Danzaremos en amor de Dios)”—**SCM 25**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Say that they are invited every Sunday to come to church and that they can invite others as well.

Call the children to snack time if you did not do “Exploring God’s Grace” choice 2.

Invite the children to follow your motions and repeat the echo prayer.

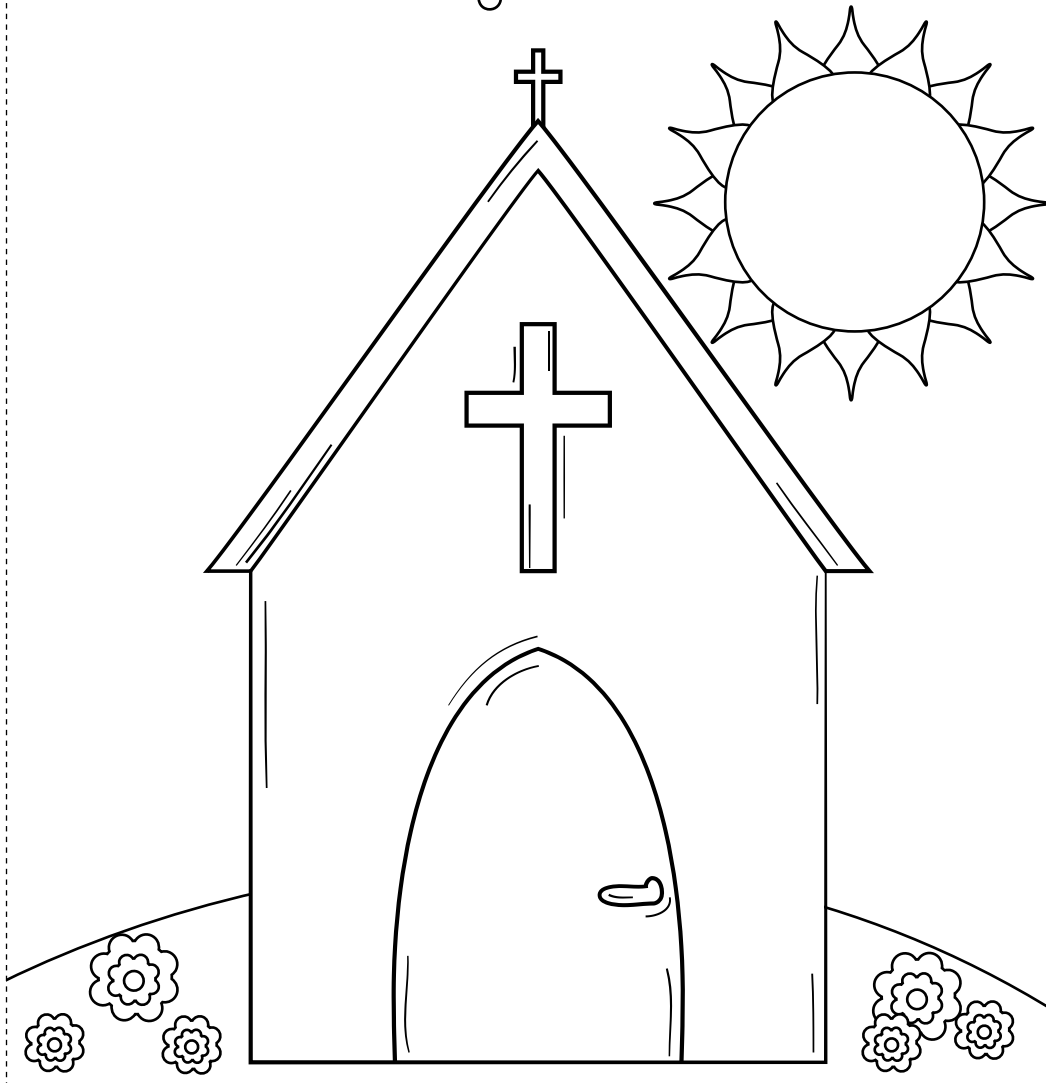
For food to eat, (*raise hands to mouth*) /
and friends to share, (*hold hands out*) /
for those we love everywhere, (*place hands over heart*) /
we thank you, God. (*put hands together in prayer*) /

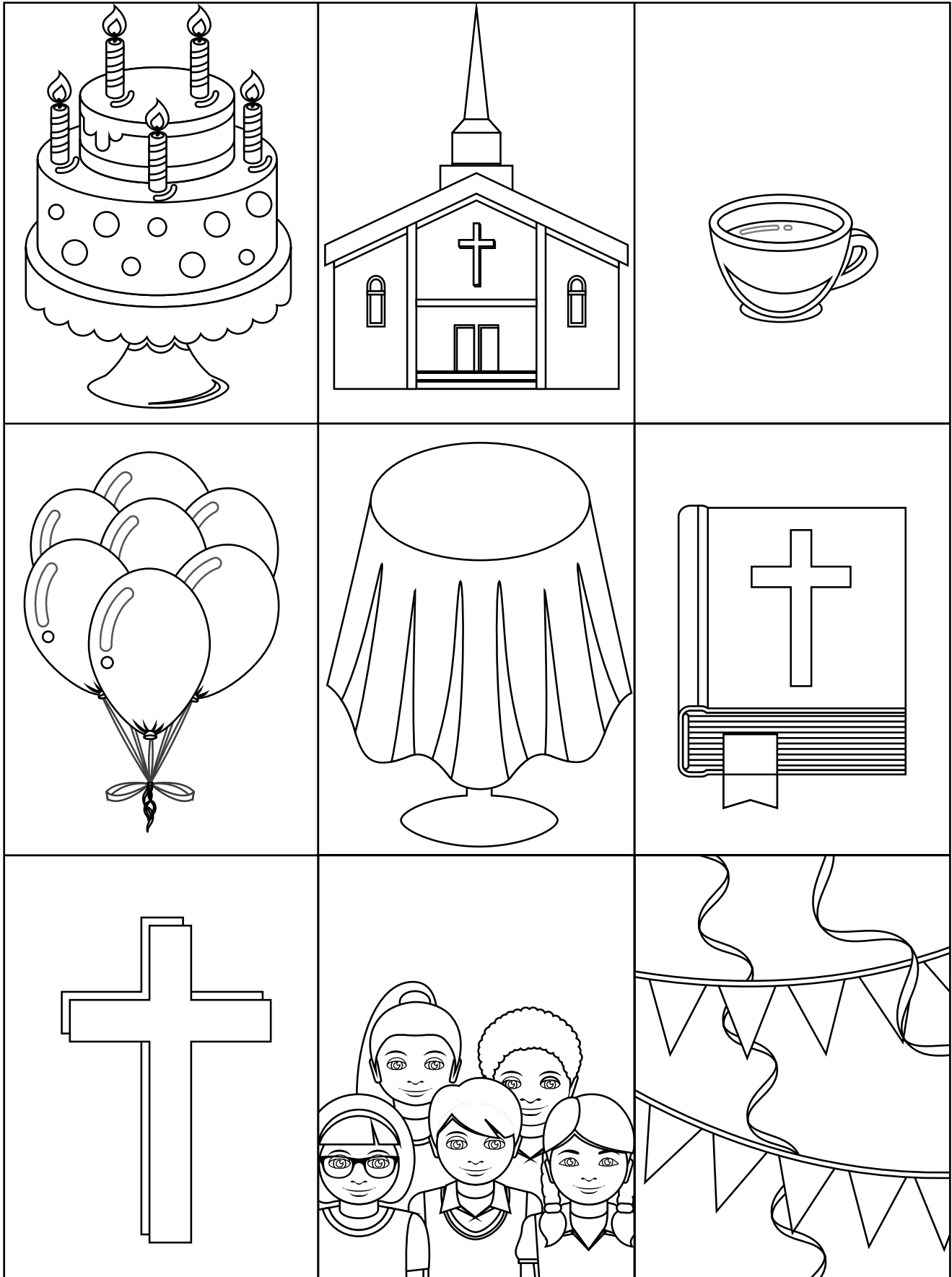
As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), you are invited to God’s party. Go in the grace of God.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

You are invited
to God's party
every Sunday!





Party Time!



Come to the party! You are welcome!

