



# Welcome Home

**Goal: To know that God loves us and forgives us.**

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Luke 15:1-2, 11-24

Luke 15 includes the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Following Jesus' teachings on discipleship in Luke 14, these parables respond to the religious leaders' grumbling about how Jesus apparently welcomes "sinners." In the story of the father and his two sons, the younger son takes action to reject his father and his home. He spends wantonly and then has a moment of turning, maybe even repentance. Yet the father receives the son who returns, even after the son had sought his part of his future inheritance—in effect, wishing the father were dead. Despite such an attitude, the father runs to welcome the son home and celebrates. The one who was lost is now found (v. 24).

Each story points us toward God as the One who seeks and saves the lost and who takes the initiative to bring all who are in the wrong place to where they should be. God rejoices when the lost are found, no matter how they became lost, no matter how long it takes to be found. The God of grace seeks us and saves us. We rejoice in gratitude!

### . . . In Your Children's Experiences

Hide-and-seek is a game children have played for years. Losing and finding are experiences for which we all have stories. Games and stories help children connect with the parables Jesus told. Parables are stories that invite us to go inside an idea. Jesus used them a lot in his teaching, because he thought stories were a great way to encourage his followers to think about how they were living in gratitude to God's love.

### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

The introduction to today's parable tells us that Jesus knew that people were having a hard time with his teaching about loving all kinds of people. So he told them stories in parables. Like the shepherd looking for a lost sheep, or a woman trying to find a precious coin, or a parent who never stops loving a child, so too you know the children in your group. Be aware of the one who may be a bit lost, the one who has a happy story to tell, or the one who is struggling with an issue at home or at school. Pray for each one by name this week.

Children love to hear a good story, so practice your storytelling skills, gather some props to use with each parable, and get ready for good conversations!

*God, you are the good shepherd who always welcomes us with your love and abiding care. Thank you. Amen.*



## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

[bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies](http://bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies)

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i-iv, 5, 16, 18

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

blanket or mats

snack (optional)

## Guided Play

choice 3: 2 to 3  
types of dry cereal,  
mini pretzels, dried  
fruit, candy-coated  
chocolate pieces,  
peanuts or sunflower  
seeds (be mindful  
of food allergies), ½  
cup measuring cups,  
tablespoons

## Exploring

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

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

## 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!

### Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet the children by name and with the words “Grace and peace to you.” Prompt the children to respond with the same words.

Introduce yourself to parents and caregivers who you do not know. Be sure they know who will be caring for their children. Explain to the parents and caregivers that their children will hear a story Jesus told about a father and son, showing the forgiveness and love the father has for his child.

Invite the children to look at the guided-play activities and encourage them to participate:

- 1. Making Family**—Prepare a space with paper and crayons or markers. Invite the children to draw a portrait of their family. After they are done, invite them to tell you about their picture. Ask them who is in their family, and help them to count the number of people. Write the children’s names on their papers.
- 2. Making Faces**—Provide small white paper plates and crayons or washable markers. Ask the children to show you how their face looks when they are happy, then sad. Ask them to put a happy face on one side of the paper plate and a sad face on the other side. Discuss what things make them happy and what makes them sad. Reserve the paper plate faces for “Hearing the Story.”
- 3. Making Party Mix**—Have the children wash their hands. Tell the children they will make a party mix to eat at the end of the session. Place the ingredients for party mix in individual bowls using half-cup measuring cups with the cereals and pretzels, and use tablespoons for the other ingredients. Write children’s names on ziplock bags. Invite the children to place a scoop or spoonful of each ingredient in their bag and then seal the bag. Set the bags aside for “Loving and Serving God.” Encourage the children to listen carefully to the story to hear why there is a celebration at the end of the story.



- T** *Washing hands can take time! Waiting in line for the sink may make some children anxious. Devise a routine for your group so they know what to expect. Use a song, movement poem, or physical activity to match the time required.*

## Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Jesus Loves Me”—**SCM 18**. Repeat words and phrases as seems appropriate.

### Welcome Back Game

**B**

When children settle in the story corner, invite the children to close their eyes and not peek. While the children’s eyes are closed, quickly tap a child on the back or shoulder and guide him or her to a place out of sight with another leader in the hallway, behind a piece of furniture, or behind a door.

After the child leaves, invite the other children to open their eyes and look around the circle. Ask them if anyone is missing, giving clues to the child’s identity if the children need help naming the missing child. When the children guess the missing person, invite the child back into the space and encourage the other children to shout greetings such as, “Welcome back! We missed you! We’re glad you’re here!”

Play the game a number of times, letting more children experience a hearty welcome from the other children. Invite the children who are welcomed back after leaving to share how it feels to be gone, greeted, and welcomed.

### Responsive Prayer

**L**

Invite the children to respond, “Thanks be to God” after each line you pray.

When we feel alone, God is with us.

**Thanks be to God.**

When we feel like a stranger, God knows our name.

**Thanks be to God.**

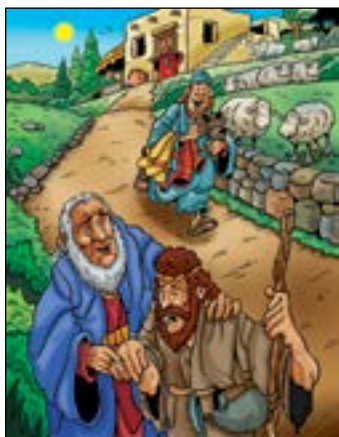
When we feel far away, God welcomes us home.

**Thanks be to God.**

When others feel alone, like a stranger, or faraway, help us to welcome them!

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Explain to the children that they will hear a story that Jesus told. It is called “Welcome Home.” Encourage them to listen carefully to find out why it is called that.



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

T L

Open the Bible to Luke 15 and point out that the story comes from the Bible.

Read **SCM 5**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, "Amen."

After reading the story, ask the children to show the happy faces on their paper plates and to tell all the happy things that happened in the story. Ask them to show the sad faces on their paper plates and to tell all the sad things that happened in the story.

Read the story again, inviting the children to hold up their happy or sad faces on their plates during the story when they hear happy things happening or sad things happening.

Explain that God gave us families to love us, to teach us what is right, and to forgive us when we do something wrong. We can feel happy because God loves us no matter what we do. God will always love us and forgive us.

## EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

### 1. Leaving Home and Returning Home

FM C

Remind the children that the son made some bad choices. He turned back and asked for forgiveness. The father welcomed him home. Give the children a copy of **GN 1**. Have them color the cards and cut them apart. Invite the children to put the cards in order and tell the story in their own words. Encourage them to take the scenes home in an envelope and share the story with their family.

### 2. Welcome, Welcome, Welcome

F LG A B

Provide a variety of stickers, tissue paper, pipe cleaners, construction paper, markers, and other colorful art supplies. Invite the children to think about ways to welcome someone who is new to the group, the church, or their home. Help the children decide the kinds of objects they can make to welcome others, such as placemats, cards, a bunch of flowers, or a big sign. Invite the children to create their welcome art and decide where to place the art around the room, in the church, or to take home to use when a friend comes to play.



### 3. Celebrating Being Welcomed

F LG A B M MS

Remind the children that the father welcomed his son home with a big hug and a party. He was so happy to see his child again. Help children experience the joy of being welcomed. Play a singing game together.

Choose two or three children to begin by holding hands and skipping in a circle while you sing the following song to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”:

Sing and dance and laugh you see,  
God loves you and God loves me.  
Come and join my happy song.  
God forgives when we’ve been wrong.  
Sing and dance and laugh you see,  
God loves you and God loves me.

Have the other children stand outside the circle. After the first time through the song, ask the skipping children to bring in, or “find,” one or two children and include them in the circle. This group holds hands and skips around the circle while everyone sings. After the second singing, more children are brought into the circle.

Continue until all the children have been welcomed and included in the celebration.

Play again switching places and having the “outside” children begin the song and those who skipped and sang first stand on the outside and be welcomed in to the group.

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. Color Page

C

Hand out copies of **GN 2** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture. Engage the children in conversation as they color using the following wondering questions.

- ▼ I wonder, “Where is the older brother?”
- ▼ I wonder, “How did the dad feel when he saw his son coming home?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What will the party be like?”

**LG** *Providing opportunities for children to make decisions about how they can lead, offer help, and express generosity helps build their confidence. This also helps them learn that they are gifted members of your community.*



## LOVING AND SERVING GOD

FA

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

Give each child their bag of party mix. Sing the second, third, and fourth stanzas of “God Takes Care of Me”—**SCM 16**—(beginning at :20) while you serve the snack. If you choose to sing the first stanza, replace the word “Moses” with “the son.”

Encourage the children to practice asking for forgiveness when they have done something wrong and to offer forgiveness to others when they have hurt your feelings.

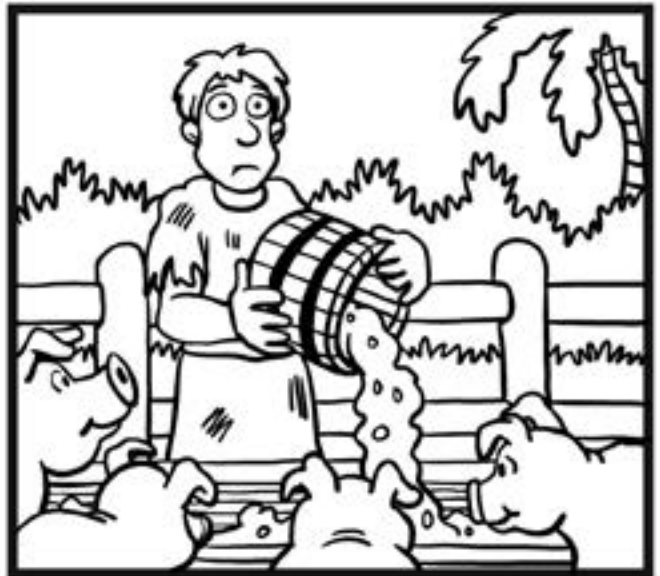
Invite the children to follow your motions and repeat the echo prayer.

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 each one: “(Name), love and forgive others as God loves and forgives you. The grace of God is with you.”



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







# Welcome Home



The father welcomes his son home.

