



The Generous Landowner

Goal: To explore the grace in God's generosity.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 20:1–16

Jesus used parables to challenge people to think. Sometimes parables seem to mean one thing on the surface, but if we look at them more deeply, we see how they challenge us, how they invite us to ask questions about what we value and what we think is important.

The parable of the generous landowner raises immediate questions about the fairness of the landowner who decided to pay the workers the same wages. Those who worked all day received the same as those hired later in the day. And when the workers questioned his action, the landowner asserted his right to do what he wanted to with his money, to be generous. In paying everyone equally, the rich landowner ensured that all those who had less were cared for.

The parable is framed by Jesus saying that those who are first will be last, and those who are last will be first. And we are left, like the hearers, to wrestle with its meaning. Jesus' teachings, and particularly his parables, keep reminding us of what is most important, what to remember, how to live and act. And today, this story reminds us that, when we act with generosity toward others, we are acting in the way that God wants.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Children can understand what it means to be generous. They watch faithful adults share their time with someone, or share their financial resources with someone who needs it. As author James Baldwin observed, children learn much more by what they see us do than by what we say.

Invite the children to think about what it means to be generous, to share out of what you have. After reading and thinking about the parable, they will be able to consider the reason Jesus told this story. Invite them to think about other titles for the story.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Younger children will probably question the fairness of the landowner who paid the workers the same wage, even when the time they worked wasn't the same. That is a great question to wrestle with: "Why would the landowner do that?" Or "If you had been one of the workers who had been hired first, how would you feel?" Older children will be able to consider the landowner and speculate about his reasoning and what it means to be first or last.

*Gracious God, pour out your spirit of generosity on me as I prepare
to guide your children. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 11, 22, 23, 25

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

blanket or mats

pennies (optional)

snack

Guided Play

choice 1: a lot of the
same small objects,
such as pennies,
pebbles, or pony beads

choice 2: red and green
seedless grapes, large
bowl, colander, small
bowls

Exploring

choice 1: **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, **SCM 11a** and **11b**,
length of rope or yarn,
two chairs, clothespins

choice 2: copies of **GN 2**,
undecorated cookies,
frosting, decorations
such as sprinkles or
colored sugars, plastic
knives, ziplock plastic
bags

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 1 and choice 2 require more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet the children and parents/caregivers by name and with the words “Jesus is alive.” Prompt the children to respond with “Jesus is alive.” This is the season of Easter, and we continue to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection.

Option: Use the traditional greeting, “Christ is risen,” with the response, “He is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

Explain that the children will hear a story that Jesus told about a farmer who was very generous with his workers, which tells us how generous God is.

Introduce children to your helper or helpers. Invite them to look at the guided-play activities and pick one to start:

- 1. Everyone Gets the Same**—Encourage the children to divide the objects evenly. Have them count: one for me and one for you, two for me and two for you, three for me and three for you, and so on. See how high they can go while counting out the objects. Wonder aloud why we share. Ask how we can share our things in a fair way.
- 2. Working Together**—Provide grapes. Invite the children to cooperate washing and draining the grapes, pulling the grapes off the stems, and putting the grapes in individual bowls. Have them place an equal number of grapes into each bowl. Save the grapes for snack time.
- 3. Making Coins**—Make several coins out of play dough, forming a ball about the size of a donut hole and pressing it into a round, thick “coin.” Have them as examples so that the children can make their own. Help as needed. Work together to make many coins, and pretend to use them. While the children create, wonder together about how we use coins.

TD *For some children with tactile sensitivities, textures can cause extreme reactions that may be interpreted as bad behaviors. Avoid activities involving tactile materials such as sand, finger paint, and play dough.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When the children are ready, ask the children to sit on the floor wherever they choose. Sing “Hello, Hello! How Are You?”—**SCM 22**. Shake hands or fist bump while they sing the song. Repeat words and phrases as seems appropriate.

We Praise God

B M MS

Play a game like “Follow the Leader,” except all the sounds and actions are ways of praising God. Encourage the children to think of other ways to praise God. Allow the children to take turns leading the group:

We praise God when we walk! (*walk around the room in a line*)

We praise God with our hands! (*clap your hands*)

We praise God when we bounce! (*jump up and down*)

We praise God with our voices! (*shout “Praise God!”*)

We praise God when we spin! (*spin around*)

We praise God with our feet! (*stomp your feet*)

We praise God when we skip! (*skip around the room*)

We praise God with our arms! (*give hugs*)

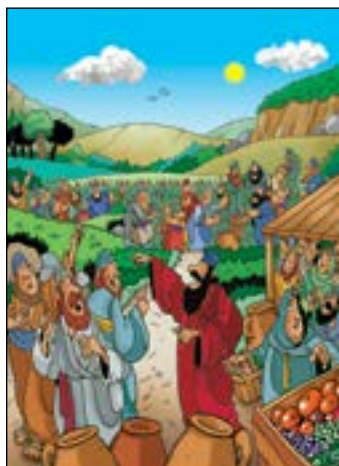
We praise God when we dance! (*dance with your whole body*)

March and Stretch

M MS

Play “Thank You, Jesus”—**SCM 25**—and let the children march to the music. Use the music and marching first as a time for stretching and movement, and then as a calming activity. While the music plays, bring children back together in a circle. Lead them in a series of movements that go from bigger and more active to smaller and less active while keeping the beat of the music. For example, start by marching in place with knees high, swinging arms wide and then making progressively smaller movements, stopping the arms and feet altogether, and gently swaying to the music.

MS Make sure children with mobility issues are included in all activities. Find ways to adapt activities to ensure all are able to fully participate, such as instead of dancing and moving around the room, suggest that all children sit and raise arms up and down or tilt head from left to right.



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

L B F

Open the Bible to Matthew 20. Comment that we read the Bible to hear stories about all of God's people. Tell the children that they will hear a story that Jesus told about a farmer who was very generous with his workers, which tells us how generous God is. Ask the children to describe what *generous* means. Suggest, if necessary, that it means sharing, giving more than necessary, and showing kindness. Encourage the children to listen for how the farmer is generous.

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."

Before you read the story again, form three groups. Tell the children that when you point to their group, they should pretend to pick grapes and not to stop until the farmer pays the workers. Point to each group as they are mentioned in the story. Act as the farmer and call all the workers in from the vineyard a short time after the third group begins picking grapes. Beginning with the early workers, give each child that pretended to pick grapes one coin. Note that the second and third groups received same money as the early workers. Explain that God wants us to be generous too.

EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Telling the Story with a Timeline

F L T LG

*Before the session, cut apart the pieces from **SCM 11a** and **SCM 11b**.*

Create a timeline by tying a length of rope or yarn between two chairs. Tell the story using **GN 1**. As you tell the story, pause and ask a volunteer from the group to clothespin the pieces cut from **SCM 11a** and **SCM 11b** to the line as they appear in the story. Wonder together how the people in the story felt—the different workers and the landowner.

2. Giving Cookies Away

FA

*Before the session, cut apart the cards on **GN 2**. Be sensitive to any allergies in your group.*

Jesus calls us to rejoice in God's generous love and share it with others. Practice being generous by decorating cookies and giving them away. Hand out cards from **GN 2** and invite the children to color and decorate the cards.

Invite the children to frost the cookies and then decorate them. Place the cookies in ziplock plastic bags and attach notes that say: "God loves you!" Deliver the cookies to another class or to your church's coffee hour fellowship.



You can also video the children sharing the story and post it on the church's website or Facebook page. Remember that you need a video release form to make that happen. You could also email the video to the congregation. If you need a photo release form, you can go to the "Leader Helps" section at www.pcusastore.com/gggdownloads.





LG *Help children build a firm foundation by telling them the stories that Jesus told and by modeling the behaviors—prayer, study, and service—that put Jesus’ words into action.*

3. Generosity Placemat

F LG

Before the session, cut small squares (about one inch) of different colors of construction paper. Make sure there is plenty to share. If possible, have the same number of colors as there are children in the group.

Remind the children that, just as the farmer was generous with the workers, God is generous. Wonder together what it means to be generous. Help the children understand that generosity means giving to or sharing with others. Tell the children they will make a placemat to take home and remember what it means to be generous.

Let each child choose a large sheet of construction paper. Then give each child one color of the construction paper squares. Tell them that they will glue squares on their paper to make a placemat. Comment that each child has only one color of squares. Ask the children how they could make their placemats more colorful. Encourage the children to share their colored squares with each other. Give the children glue sticks and invite them to glue squares to their papers. When they have finished, write, “God is generous!” across the top of each placemat, and “I am generous too” across the bottom.

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

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 **GN 3** and tell you about the story. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ▼ I wonder, “What is the woman buying in the market?”
- ▼ I wonder, “Why was the farmer looking for people to help in his vineyard?”
- ▼ I wonder, “Why did some of the workers look angry?”



LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Have the children help clean. Use this simple rhyme to encourage them to clean up:

Child of God, child of grace,
clean up your place!
Child of God, child of grace,
make a clean space!



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).

Sing “Thank You, God, for Loving Me”—**SCM 23**—together while the children serve and enjoy a snack. Remember to have the grapes that the children cleaned in “Guided Play” choice 2.

After the snack, wonder together what the children enjoyed best today. Listen attentively as they tell you. Then tell the children what you liked. You might say, “I liked meeting (*name of a newcomer*) for the first time,” or “I liked how we gave away cookies.”

Ask the children who would like to be first to pray today. Tell them that we can tell God anything. We can say what makes us happy and what makes us sad. God hears our prayers.

Close the prayer with “Amen.”

As the children leave, bless them, saying, “(*Name*), be generous with others. Go in the grace of God.”

Leader: Jesus told a story to help the people understand God's generosity. There once was a farmer who went out at sunrise to hire workers for his vineyard. *(A volunteer pins the sun to the left side of the timeline.)*

The farmer said: "Will you work in my vineyard? I'll pay you one silver coin for working all day."

Children: Yes, we'll do that! *(A volunteer attaches Workers 1 to the timeline.)*

Leader: At nine o'clock in the morning, the farmer saw a group of workers standing in the marketplace. *(A volunteer moves the sun beyond Workers 1 on the timeline.)*

The farmer said: "Will you work in my vineyard? I'll pay you one silver coin for working the rest of the day."

Children: Yes, we'll do that! *(A volunteer attaches Workers 2 to the timeline.)*

Leader: At noon, the farmer saw another group of workers standing in the marketplace. *(A volunteer moves the sun beyond Workers 2 on the timeline.)*

The farmer said: "Will you work in my vineyard? I'll pay you one silver coin for working the rest of the day."

Children: Yes, we'll do that! *(A volunteer attaches Workers 3 to the timeline.)*

Leader: At three o'clock, the farmer saw another group of workers standing in the marketplace. *(A volunteer moves the sun beyond Workers 3 on the timeline.)*

The farmer said: "Will you work in my vineyard? I'll pay you one silver coin for working the rest of the day."

Children: Yes, we'll do that! *(A volunteer attaches Workers 4 to the timeline.)*

Leader: At five o'clock, the farmer saw another group of workers standing in the marketplace. *(A volunteer moves the sun beyond Workers 4 on the timeline.)*

The farmer said: "Will you work in my vineyard? I'll pay you one silver coin for working the rest of the day."

Children: Yes, we'll do that! *(A volunteer attaches Workers 5 to the timeline.)*

Leader: *(A volunteer removes the sun.)* When nighttime came, it was time to quit work and pay the workers.

First, the farmer paid the workers who started at five o'clock a silver coin. *(A volunteer attaches a silver coin to Workers 5.)*

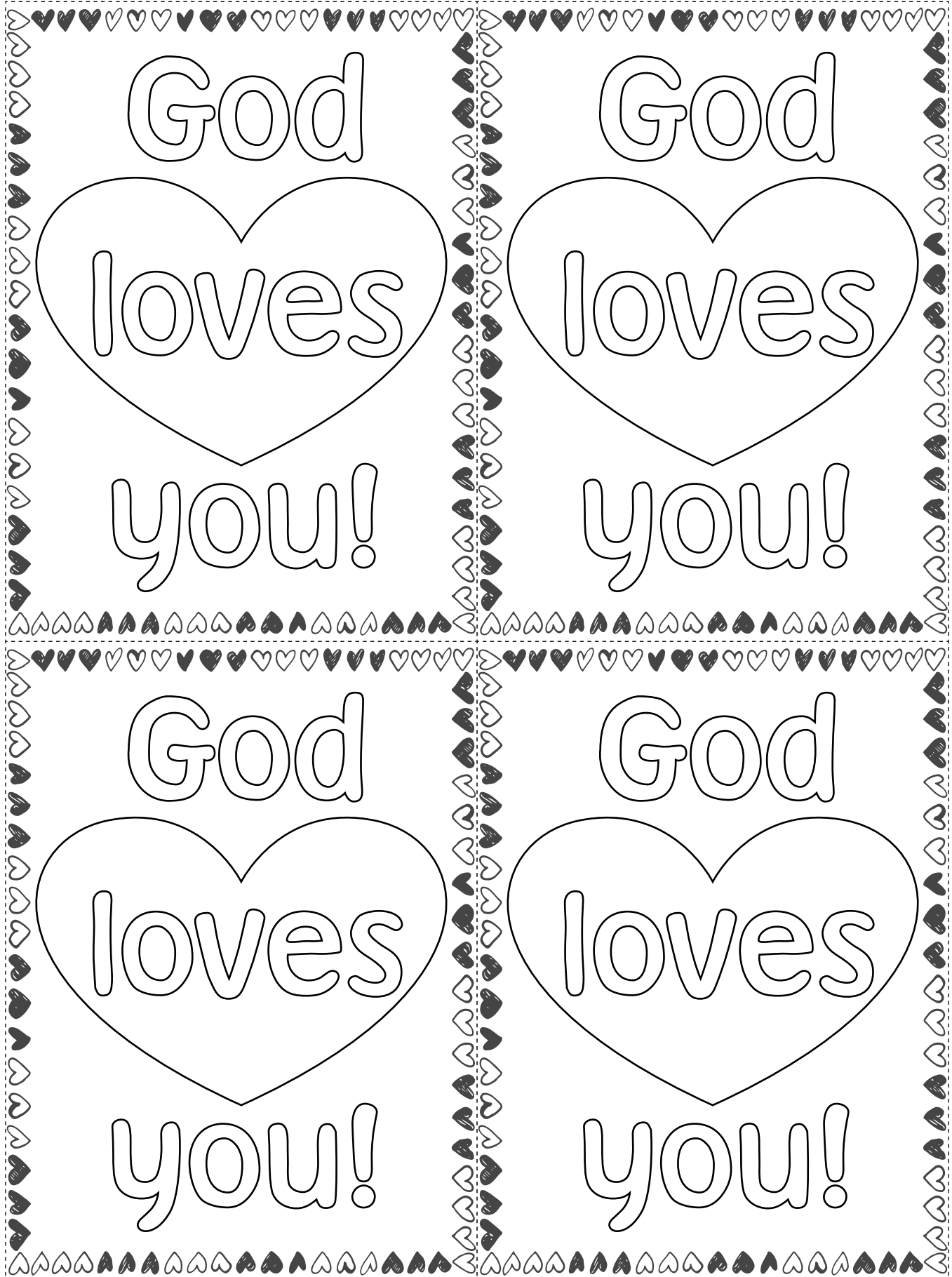
Then the farmer paid the workers who started at three o'clock a silver coin. *(A volunteer attaches a silver coin to Workers 4.)*

Then the farmer paid the workers who started at noon a silver coin. *(A volunteer attaches a silver coin to Workers 3.)*

Then the farmer paid the workers who started at nine o'clock a silver coin. *(A volunteer attaches a silver coin to Workers 2.)*

Then the farmer paid the workers who started at sunrise a silver coin. *(A volunteer attaches a silver coin to Workers 1.)*

The workers who started at sunrise said, "That's not fair! We worked all day! Why did they get paid the same amount as we did?" The farmer said, "I promised you a silver coin, and that is what I paid you. I choose to be generous with everyone."



The Generous Landowner



The farmer is generous with all the workers.

