



Return with Thanks

Goal: To express gratitude for God's grace by praising and thanking God.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 17:11-19

Jesus' healing the ten persons with skin diseases ("lepers") is a dramatic demonstration of grace and gratitude. These ten persons, who would have been ostracized and kept away from society because of their disease, cried out: "Jesus, Master, show us mercy (grace)!" (v. 13, CEB). This led to Jesus healing the ten while they were on their way to show themselves to the priests.

Only one—a Samaritan, and thus one disliked by the Jews—came back, praising God with a loud voice, thanking Jesus for the healing. Jesus pronounced, "Your faith has healed you" (v. 19, CEB).

The true response to grace given to us is gratitude. The thankful person praised God for the health provided by the power of Jesus. Gratitude in praising and thanking God shows we recognize God's gift.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

In ancient times, lepers—those with a variety of skin diseases—weren't allowed to participate in the religious life of the community and were shunned even by their own families. Children may not know lepers today, but they have noticed people who are poor, sick, and homeless in your own community. Some in your group may have experienced poverty; others may know what it is like to be excluded on the basis of culture, race, gender, or simply because they are somehow "different" from others in their own peer group. Affirm that these experiences are similar to that of the ten lepers in today's story.

Some children may struggle to imagine different kinds of healing other than physical healing. Simply naming renewed friendships as a kind of healing will help prepare the children to embrace a larger view of God's grace when they are older. Affirm the mysterious aspects of God's presence and power. Acknowledge that while physical healing does not always happen, we can trust that God's grace is always present with us.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Thank you! Along with please, these are probably two of the first words that parents teach their children. By using these responses, parents are helping their children learn how to express gratitude. We also say "thank you" in our prayers to God. Prayers of thanksgiving are the first and easiest prayers we teach children. They grow in their ability to express gratitude for the many ways that God is present in their lives.

As the children gather at the end of the session, help them fashion their own prayers of thanksgiving in response to God's love in their lives: For what are you most thankful today?

Loving God, make me more aware of all that you have given me so I may express my gratitude wholly. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 11, 15, 26

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

white candle

white cloth

Responding

Claiming

eight spring-type
clothespins

Praying

choir director or
member (optional)

Extra

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

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the children arrive, post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker on 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.

“Claiming God’s Grace” and “Praying God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing **MS C**

Play “Thank You, Holy God” as children arrive. Greet the children with the words “Christ is risen!” Prompt them to say, “He is risen indeed.” Welcome them to the fifth Sunday of the Easter season.

Invite the children to prepare the space for Easter worship, telling the children that Easter is not just a day; it’s a season. Wonder what the group could add to the worship table to signify the Easter season.

Ask them to include a Bible and a white cloth, the color for Easter. Place a white candle, representing the light of Christ.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Gather the children in a circle and play a game. Say, “I’m (*Name*; such as Samantha) and I’m thankful for (*something they are thankful for that starts with the same letter as their first name, such as surprises*).” Invite the person to your right to repeat your name, what you are thankful for, and then add their name and what they are thankful for. Have the group continue in this manner until all have added their thanks. Tell the children they will hear a story about giving thanks.

Singing

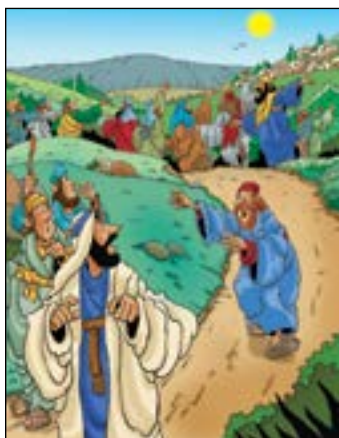
Play “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”—**SCM 26**. Each time the children hear the word “Alleluia,” encourage them to stand, raise their arms in the air, and sing the word loudly.

Praying **T C**

Turn on the candle on the worship table. Remind the group that candles were extinguished when we read about Jesus’ death. This candle is lit to remind us that Jesus lives and is with us always. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray the following echo prayer.

Dear God, /
today we have two words: /
thank you. /
Amen. /

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.



You may want to go to cdc.gov/leprosy for more information about Hansen's disease (leprosy) if children have questions about the disease.

Preparing to Hear the Story B LG

Invite the children to consider silently what might be the most special gift they could get. Then ask the children to act out their idea and their response to such a gift. Encourage the children to listen for a surprising gift and what the response to that gift is in today's story.

- B *Providing opportunities for children to act in front of others can be a fun way to learn from one another and can build children's confidence. However, it can also provide opportunities for unwanted behavior such as bullying or fidgeting. Help children focus on respecting others and being polite.*

Hearing the Story M

Invite a child to find Luke 17 in the Bible and place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 11** or use the story audio. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Form three groups. One group can focus on Jesus, another group can focus on the nine lepers who didn't return to Jesus, and a third group can pay attention to the Samaritan leper. Invite each group to listen as you read the story again or replay the story audio.

Reflecting on God's Grace C

After the story, ask each group to share what their person or people saw, heard, and felt. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- ▼ Who was grateful (or thankful)?
- ▼ Who showed gratitude (or thanks)?
- ▼ Why do you think the one person showed thanks to Jesus?
- ▼ Where is God's grace in this story?

- C *Give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.*

Singing

Sing "Thank You, Holy God"—**SCM 15**. Invite the children to come up with motions to the song and to repeat the song using the motions. Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



Claiming God's Grace

LG A

Remind the children of the words that the Samaritan said to Jesus in today's story ("thank you"). Wonder together what it means to say thank you. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- ▼ When do we say thank you for things that people do for us?
- ▼ How can we thank God?

Invite the children to print each letter of the words "thank you" on eight sheets of construction paper. Invite others to print the same letters on eight separate clothespins. Two children can tie a length of yarn between two chairs.

Invite the children to arrange the construction paper sheets so they spell "thank you." Then have them do the same with the clothespins. Ask them to clip the sheets to the yarn in the proper order. Encourage the children to think of someone in the church they would like to thank, such as the pastor, the custodian, etc. Post the "thank you" where that person/group will see it.

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.*

Option: To include children who have physical limitations, provide two scarves or washcloths for each child. The cloths can be tucked into a shirt, held in a hand, or set on a lap. Jesus takes one away to heal the children.

Celebrating God's Grace

B A MS

Ask two volunteers to prepare small strips of paper with the following words on them: one strip with "Jesus," one strip with "Grateful," and enough blank strips for all other players. Fold the slips in half and place them in an open container. Clear a large area in your meeting space.

Tell the children they are going to play a game. One person will be "Jesus," one person will be the "Grateful" player, and everyone else will be players. Use the following directions to explain the game.

- ▼ Each child selects a paper strip from the container.
- ▼ Everyone but "Jesus" keeps their slips a secret.
- ▼ All the players, except "Jesus," hop on one foot or hold an arm behind their back while moving around the area.
- ▼ "Jesus" walks to people and touches them gently on the arm or leg.
- ▼ When "Jesus" touches an arm or leg, the player can use it again and walks around the area.
- ▼ When "Jesus" touches the "Grateful" player's arm or leg, the player should jump up and down, saying, "Thank you, Jesus!"

Play the game. Collect the strips and play the game again each time the “Grateful” player is discovered.



Praying God’s Grace L

Before the session, invite your choir director or a member of your choir to lead your group in singing the Doxology.

Tell the children that a *doxology* is a short hymn of praise to God. The word *doxology* means “saying glory.”

Ask the children when they have heard the song “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow.” Comment that singing the Doxology is one way to thank and praise God.

Invite your guest to lead the children in singing the Doxology. If children are rarely in worship, encourage them to be present in worship to join in the song next Sunday.

LD *Don’t assume what children can or cannot do with regard to participating in activities. Think of multiple ways children may be able to participate without feeling excluded.*

Extra Activity

Hand out copies of **GN 1**. Ask the children if they can guess what part of the story the picture depicts. (*When the ten are healed.*) Ask the children how many said thank you to Jesus for healing them. Show the children how to fold the picture along the outside two dotted lines and then matching the “A”s and “B”s in the center. The transformed picture reveals the answer. (“One!”)

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

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

Sing “Thank You, Holy God”—**SCM 15**.

For thirty seconds, brainstorm as a group words or phrases that relate to gratitude (*thanks, praise, grateful, grace*). Next, give the children thirty seconds to think of words and phrases of things that they are thankful for and that they did not put on the mural in “Offering God’s Grace.” Then invite the children, one by one, to say a word or phrase to describe the feeling of thanksgiving or how you could give thanks.

Encourage the children to say thank you to people during the week, sharing the story of the one person who said thanks.

Send each child with a blessing: “(Name), may the grace of God be with you this week, and may you be thankful.”



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).



TEN WERE HEALED.

“OH,” THEY SAID, “OUR SORES ARE GONE!”

THEY PACKED TO GO HOME.

