



Welcoming Zacchaeus

Goal: To express gratitude for God's grace by welcoming others.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 19:1-10

The story of Jesus calling Zacchaeus down from his perch in a tree to visit his house shows the giving and receiving of God's grace. Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus's house (vv. 3-4). Zacchaeus was happy to welcome him (v. 6). Zacchaeus extended hospitality to Jesus and received Jesus in his home. Others criticized Jesus for being the guest of a sinner (v. 7).

Most translations indicate that Zacchaeus's encounter with Jesus led to transformation in the tax collector's behavior. The NRSV says Zacchaeus promised that "half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much" (v. 8). The Common English Bible translates the same verse: "Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much." According to the CEB, Zacchaeus already lives a generous life. The community sees him as a sinner simply because he is a tax collector. What changes is how the community sees him after Jesus welcomes him. This was salvation for Zacchaeus (vv. 9-10).

When Jesus welcomes us into his life, we receive his love and grace. Our grateful lives then take on new directions of love for others who express Jesus' kind of hospitality.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Zacchaeus was not well liked because of his job as a tax collector. He probably knew what it was like to eat by himself. Jesus saw him not as a reviled member of the community but as a child of Abraham, a child of God. Jesus invited himself to eat at Zacchaeus's table.

Children will be able to identify with Zacchaeus's desire to see what is going on and to know more about Jesus. They may also agree with the people who thought Jesus should not reach out to Zacchaeus. Children this age are tuned into what is fair and what isn't. Many times they will be self-centered in their ideas of fairness, but they are becoming more aware of the needs of others.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

There are many ways to recognize God's grace in this story as you invite the children to look at it from different angles of vision: Jesus, Zacchaeus, and a member of the crowd.

Children may know from personal experience or from the experience of friends what it feels like to be excluded and what it feels like to be welcomed, invited, and included. Help them connect this story with their own lives and the opportunities they have to offer God's welcome—God's hospitality—to someone else, just as Jesus did with Zacchaeus.

After you help the children name the graceful actions in this story, you can then help them make the connections between the actions and their own lives. Whom do they need to see in new ways? Whom do they need to welcome with God's love?

*Give me, O God, a heart to welcome even those
I ignore and avoid. In Christ's name. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 12, 17, 27

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

white candle

white cloth

poster board

Responding

Claiming

lively music

Celebrating

invited guest, snack
foods and drinks,
tablecloth, napkins,
plates, centerpiece

Offering

SCM 12a

Extra

SCM 12b, cut out
Zacchaeus figure for
each child from copies
of **Grace Notes (GN) 1**,
blindfold

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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing



Greet the children with the words “Christ is risen!” Prompt them to say, “He is risen indeed.” Welcome them to the sixth 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.

Cut a hole the size of a face in the center of a sheet of poster board. Invite the children to draw branches all around the hole and make leaves from green construction paper. Have them glue the leaves to the branches. As they work, explain that a tree plays a big role in today’s story.

If you choose “Celebrating God’s Grace,” say that a special guest is coming to visit. Invite the children to help prepare some snack foods you have brought for your guest and the class. Ask the children if they can think of any stories in the Bible in which Jesus ate with someone.

LG *Teach kids about the power of teamwork. When kids learn to support others, cooperate, and problem solve as a group, they become better leaders.*

Singing

Sing and dance to the song “Dance and Sing”—**SCM 17**.

Praying

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, /
thank you for welcoming us /
into this family of faith, /



your church. /
May we help others /
feel welcome too. /
Amen. /

Preparing to Hear the Story

LG

Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about a tax collector. Give each person ten crayons (or other items). Tell the group that the people have to pay a part of their money, in this case crayons, to the government or ruler. Sometimes that tax is used for things people need, like roads and services.

Ask for a volunteer to be the tax collector. Tell the children that the tax collector needs to collect crayons from each person. Quietly instruct the tax collector to collect four crayons from each person. After the tax is collected, have the tax collector turn in three crayons from each person to you, the ruler, including three crayons from the tax collector.

Ask:

- ▼ How many crayons does each person have left, not counting the tax collector? (6)
- ▼ How many crayons does the tax collector have now? (7 plus 1 from each person)
- ▼ How do you feel that the tax was three crayons but the tax collector took four crayons from each of you?

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.

People didn't always like tax collectors. Explain that sometimes tax collectors were dishonest and took money or goods for themselves. Suggest that the tax collectors worked for the ruler who oppressed the people, taking part of what little money and goods people had.

Tell the children that today's story is about a man named Zacchaeus, who was a tax collector. Invite them to hear what people thought of him and how Jesus treated him.

Hearing the Story

M C D

Invite a child to find Luke 19 in the Bible and place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 12** 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 crowd and the disciples, and a third group can pay attention to Zacchaeus. Invite each group to listen as you read the story again or replay the story audio.

After the story, ask each group to share what their person or people saw, heard, and felt. Invite those who focused on Zacchaeus to "sit" in the tree you made in "Welcoming and Preparing" while each person





shares their observations by putting their face in the hole. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- ▾ How did the crowd feel about Jesus? about Zacchaeus?
- ▾ Why did Jesus call Zacchaeus down?
- ▾ What do you think Zacchaeus and Jesus talked about at dinner?
- ▾ Where is God's grace in this story?

C *Some children don't verbalize quickly. Nod and show them you are listening, giving them time to formulate an answer.*

Reflecting on God's Grace **C**

Ask children to name some of the ways Jesus showed grace to Zacchaeus (*he spoke to him, he went to his house to eat, he heard his confession of any wrongdoing and promise to do better, he assured him of God's love and grace*). Remind the children that it wasn't Zacchaeus who invited Jesus to his home for a meal; Jesus told Zacchaeus that he would come to Zacchaeus's house. Wonder together who is being hospitable and who is being welcomed.

Suggest that being welcoming or hospitable is one way we show God's grace. Invite children to talk about people who have been welcoming to them. Wonder together how we might show gratitude for such grace.

Singing

Sing "God Loves You, and I Love You (Dios te ama y yo te amo)"
—SCM 27.

Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God's Grace **MS**

Practice welcoming others through play. In an open space, tape pieces of paper to the floor, using two fewer pieces than there are children. Play some lively music and ask the children to move around the playing area. Stop the music and tell each child to touch a piece of paper in some way—even with a fingertip is sufficient. Some children will have to share a sheet of paper.

Remove one sheet of paper and play again. Continue playing until the group has found a way to include everyone on one piece of paper.

Afterward, ask children to describe what they had to do to include everyone. Wonder what the children can do to welcome and include everyone who wants to be friends.



Celebrating God's Grace



Before the session, invite someone to be a guest who will tell about a time of hospitality and welcome they have experienced either as the host or the guest.

Practice hospitality for a special guest. Involve children in setting a table with a tablecloth, napkins, and centerpiece, and getting food items ready.

Introduce your guest. Brainstorm together simple ways to welcome someone. Choose two or three that you could act out. Suggestions: give a hug (*hug yourself*) or say hello (*shout hello and wave*). Then sing the following song to the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know It" and do the actions you've agreed upon:

If you want to welcome others, go like this. (*action*)

If you want to welcome others, go like this. (*action*)

If you want to welcome others,
so they're your sisters and your brothers.

If you want to welcome others, go like this. (*action*)

Share the snack. As you eat, talk about the story of Zacchaeus, who welcomed Jesus to his home for a meal. Invite your guest to tell their story about hospitality and welcome.

Wonder together how the children would prepare for Jesus to come to their house. What foods would their family serve? What do they think Jesus might talk about? What would the neighbors say?

Ask the children to think about what they would want to talk with Jesus about. What kind of questions would they have for him? In what ways do you think your life and your family's lives would change after meeting Jesus?

Offering God's Grace



Welcoming worshipers on Sunday morning is a way for the children to act out what they learned about hospitality from the story of Zacchaeus. Practicing how to welcome people will make them more comfortable when it is their turn. More importantly, practice will help the children prepare to extend the grace of God to others in tangible ways.

Show **SCM 12a**. Talk about the picture and how people are greeted when they come to your church.

Model greeting at the church door with another leader or a volunteer from the group being the guest. Be specific about how to be pleasant and what to say. Form pairs or small groups, with the children taking turns being the greeter and the guest(s). If feasible, go to the door of the church to practice. Arrange for the children to greet worshipers before next Sunday's worship service.



LG *Providing opportunities for children to welcome others, offer help, and express generosity helps build their confidence. This also helps them learn that they are gifted members of your community.*

Extra Activity

F B MS TD VI SD

Before the session, cut a Zacchaeus figure for each child from copies of GN 1.

Have some fun with the story by putting Zacchaeus in a tree. Tape **SCM 12b** to a wall. Hand out the Zacchaeus figures and allow time to color. Provide tape circles to each of the children to put on the back of their Zacchaeus.

Take turns blindfolding the children and letting them try to put Zacchaeus in the tree. Suggest that there are no winners, rather all are welcomed to try.



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).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

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

Sing “God Loves You, and I Love You (Dios te ama y yo te amo)” —**SCM 27**. Use the poster from “Hearing the Story,” having the children take turns being Zacchaeus in the tree while they sing.

Encourage the children to remember, as they go about their activities this week, to show their gratitude for God’s welcome by welcoming others.

Send each child with a blessing: “(Name), God welcomes you and calls you beloved. Go and welcome others in Jesus’ name.”



