



Little to Big

Goal: To explore how the kingdom of God can grow.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 13:18-21

In Bible times, the word “kingdom” meant many things, including the future and God’s presence with us now. In the Old Testament, it was described as a tree, and God’s power was symbolized by the nesting of birds in its branches. In Luke 13:18–19, a mustard plant is compared to God’s kingdom. In ancient times, such plants grew to heights of ten or twelve feet. The mustard plant in today’s story is even larger. It takes on the proportions of a tree, with birds nesting in its strong branches. Luke may have been using this image to suggest that even the tiny mustard seed can become a tree in the same way that the church can grow to represent God’s kingdom, gathering even Gentile people into its branches.

In Luke 13:20–21, Jesus compares God’s kingdom to yeast. In biblical times, yeast consisted of a piece of bread dough that had been reserved from a previous batch. The old piece of dough was added to fresh dough to produce fermentation. In today’s story, a woman hid some yeast in three measures of meal. The yeast and meal grew and formed the basis of three new loaves. Some scholars believe that the woman in this parable may represent a God who stirs things up and helps new life grow. For Luke, that new life came in the form of a church that was growing and that included many Gentile believers.

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Children often feel that their ideas and actions are ignored or minimized by those in authority. For that reason, children may find today’s Bible story especially affirming. Jesus uses two natural items (a mustard seed and yeast) to illustrate that the tiniest objects can have a huge influence on their environment. In today’s session, children will be given opportunities to explore how they, like the yeast and mustard seed, can make a difference in the lives of others.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Encourage children to share stories about how they have taken actions to support others. They also may have heard of compassionate actions undertaken by other children and young people in their community. Celebrate these important contributions to the fabric of our society. Children will especially appreciate the more tangible aspects of today’s session—the smell of the yeast, the taste of bread, and the strength of the tree branch. Help them to connect these objects with their own experiences as people whose faith is growing and strengthening each and every day.

O God, instill in me the commitment to live my life in a way that makes a difference for the children I teach. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 2, 16, 20

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

purple cloth, six votive
candles (purple if
possible)

packet of yeast, sugar,
bowl

pot of soil, packet
of seeds

*The Marvelous Mustard
Seed* by Amy-Jill Levine
and Sandy Eisenberg
Sasso

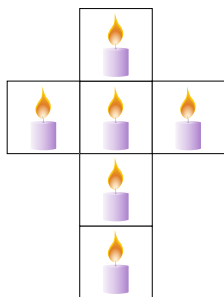
Responding

Celebrating

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, liquid food
coloring, Ivory soap
bar, microwave safe
plate, microwave
oven, popcorn kernels,
tablespoon, and air
popcorn popper or
microwave popcorn

Extra

card stock copies of
GN 2, cotton balls, water
in a bowl, fast-growing
herb seeds like basil



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.

Before the session, dissolve a teaspoon of sugar in a half cup of warm water in a bowl.

Obtain *The Marvelous Mustard Seed* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” and “Extra Activity” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

Play “This Is the Day” as children arrive. Greet each child by name and with the words “Grace be with you, (*Name*).” Prompt the children to say the same words to you.

Tell the children that this is the second Sunday in Lent. Ask if anyone remembers what the word Lent means. Explain, if necessary, that it comes from an old word that means to “lengthen,” referring to the lengthening of the days, or springtime. In the church, we observe Lent as a season of preparing for Easter and the promise of new life.

Invite the children to prepare the space for Lenten worship. Ask the children to include a Bible and a purple cloth, the color for Lent. Have them place six votive candles in the shape of a cross in the space. See the sidebar for placement of the candles. Turn on all the candles.

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

Singing

Play and sing “This Is the Day”—**SCM 16**. Have the children sing the song again as a call and response. Form two groups. Have one group sit on the floor and be the “Little” group. Have the other stand up and be the “Big” group. Invite the “Little” group to sing the call part of the song and the “Big” group to sing the response.

Praying

Point out the votive candles. Remind the children of the tradition to extinguish, or put out, a candle each week throughout the six Sundays of Lent. This is to remind us that even though Jesus was teaching and healing and serving people, some people were not happy with his actions. They wanted to put out the light that Jesus brought to the world. Have a volunteer turn off two of the candles.

Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray the following echo prayer.



Dear God, /
the light of Christ is being put out. /
We know, though, /
that little things grow into big things. /
May our little light shine and grow /
so that the light of Christ may grow. /
Amen. /

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

Preparing to Hear the Story

© LD

Gather the children around a table. Place the yeast, seeds, pot of dirt, and prepared bowl of water on the table.

Open the package of yeast. Pour a little onto a piece of clean paper. Ask children to suggest some one-word descriptions of the yeast and write them on a sheet of newsprint. Pour all the yeast into the bowl of warm water. Ask them what happens right away and then what they think will happen.

Next show children the seeds. Ask the children to suggest some one-word descriptions of the seed and write them on the sheet of newsprint along with the other words for yeast. Plant a seed in the middle of the pot of soil. Ask them what happens right away and then what they think will happen.

Invite the children to look at the newsprint. Read the words and ask what words were used for both the yeast and the seed. Explain that one word that could be used to describe yeast and seeds is "powerful." Ask the children why they think something so small might be considered powerful.

Hearing the Story

LG LD

Invite a child to find Luke 13 in the Bible and place the open Bible on the worship table. Ask the children to look at the seeds and the bowl with yeast as you read **SCM 2** or use the story audio. Tell them to remember what happens to the seeds and to the yeast (*they are small, but they grow and are powerful*). Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Have the children stand up and instruct them to touch their toes when they hear the following words: tiny, small, little, and so forth. Tell them to raise their arms, stretching as much as possible when they hear the following words: full, tall, big, rise, stretch, and grow. Practice with the different words and actions. Read the story again, having the children touch their toes or stretch tall at the appropriate times. Direct the children as needed. You can read again at a faster

Matthew's telling of 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.





pace to add an element of fun. Tell the children that the kingdom of God grows as we “move” or do things that remind others of how God wants us to live.

Reflecting on God’s Grace A

Read *The Marvelous Mustard Seed*, by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. Discuss the growth of God’s kingdom using the following questions:

- ▼ Why do you think Jesus used the examples of a mustard seed and yeast to represent how God’s kingdom grows?
- ▼ How do you think God’s kingdom has grown?
- ▼ How can we help grow God’s kingdom?

Singing

Sing “I Am the Salt of the Earth”—**SCM 20**.
Turn off the candles.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God’s Grace MS L

Remind children that God’s kingdom grows and grows from little to big. Invite them to crouch down and make themselves very little. Tell them each time they hear the word “grow” they should stretch up a little higher and reach up on tiptoe with arms outstretched when you say big.

- ▼ God’s kingdom is like a tiny mustard seed. It starts out little and grows and grows and grows and grows . . . into something big!
- ▼ God’s kingdom is like yeast in flour. It starts out little and grows and grows and grows and grows . . . into something big!

Ask the children if they can think of something else that starts off little and grows to something big. Fill in the blank with their answers.

- ▼ God’s kingdom is like _____. It starts out little and grows and grows and grows and grows . . . into something big!

Tell the children that just as they are growing, God’s kingdom grows too.



Celebrating God's Grace

FA L SD TD

Before the session, gather the following supplies: liquid food coloring, bar of Ivory soap, microwave safe plate, microwave oven, popcorn kernels, tablespoon, air popcorn popper or microwave popcorn.

Children love science experiments. It's an opportunity to learn scientific concepts through real-world application. The stories of the mustard seed and yeast lend themselves to science since they are part of the natural world. They show how small things can grow into big things. Jesus was a genius at using common items to demonstrate divine things. Hand out copies of **GN 1** and ask the children to follow along while you have volunteers do each of the science experiments.

Remind the children that the stories of the mustard seed and yeast help explain how God's kingdom can grow and grow and grow. Tell them that they are going to use some other items, such as food coloring, soap, and popcorn, and the science concepts of dispersion and expansion to show other ways that God's kingdom can grow.

Encourage the children to take **GN 1** home and try the experiments with their families.

SD *Sensory issues may affect one or more senses, like hearing, touch, or taste. For some children, common sounds may be painful or overwhelming. Help these children by providing advance warning. Putting them in charge of the challenging situations, such as starting the popcorn popper, allows them time to process the stimuli.*

Praying God's Grace

Remind the children that Jesus said God's kingdom is like a tiny mustard seed and like a small amount of yeast. Both items, when mixed with water, soil, and other things, transform into big and powerful things.

Praying may seem like something small to do. But prayer also grows when we mix it with praying with our hearts, with our feet, and with our hands. Prayer can be movement and action. We can pray for those that are in need and then help them with prayerful action.

Teach the children this prayer poem. Invite them to come up with movements for the poem. When you have all the movements, encourage the children to learn the poem so that they can share it with their family and friends.

God's kingdom can start very small,
one person, one prayer, one heart.
But when God's love is shared,
like the bread and the seeds,
what a powerful thing that is.
Thank you, God!
Amen.



Extra Activity



Before the session, put cotton balls into a bowl with water.

Remind the children that God's kingdom started small, and then it grew and grew. Explain that God's kingdom grew like a plant grows. It began with an idea being planted like a seed. The idea grew roots and then grew bigger and bigger.

- Hand out copies of **GN 2** on card stock and explain that they can watch a seed grow into a plant inside a tiny greenhouse.
- Allow time to decorate the front of **GN 2**, and then help the children cut out the house and the center rectangle.
- Have each child put six wet cotton balls in a plastic bag.
- Provide several seeds to drop into the bags.
- Tape the bags to the open window in the house.

Encourage the children to take their tiny greenhouse home and watch how the seeds grow.



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.

Invite children to tell what they will remember about today's story. Wonder what they will tell their families and friends about how God's kingdom can grow. Ask them what they can do to be a part of growing God's kingdom.

Say the prayer from "Praying God's Grace" or teach the prayer, so that the children can share it with friends and family. Repeat as needed. You might consider giving them a copy, so that they can take it home.

Send the children off with a blessing, "(Name), you are part of the growing kingdom of God!"

Experiment 1: Food coloring and water

What's happening? The food coloring disperses in the water. It is spread throughout the water and eventually becomes evenly mixed with the water.

Instructions:

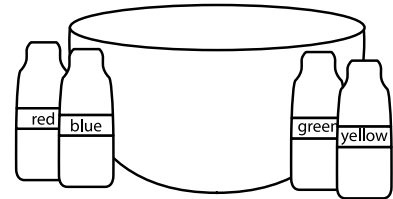
Give each child a clear plastic cup with water (food coloring spreads more quickly in warm water).

Allow children to choose a color of food coloring.

Have them drop 4–5 drops of food coloring in the cup of water.

Ask:

- What happens right away?
- What do you think will happen over time?
- How do you think this is like the kingdom of God?

**Experiment 2: Ivory soap and a microwave oven**

What's happening? The Ivory soap (must be this brand) has a high air content whipped into it. Water molecules vaporize in the tiny pockets of air when it is heated. The air expands. The heat also makes the soap softer, allowing the expanding air pockets to cause the whole bar to blow up like a cloud.

Instructions:

Invite the children to look at and touch the bar of soap. Ask them to describe its shape and feel.

Put the soap on a microwave safe plate and place it in the microwave oven.

Cook for 1–2 minutes. As it is cooking, gather the children around the microwave oven at a safe distance to watch what happens.

The soap will be hot. Let the soap cloud cool for 1–2 minutes before touching it again. Invite the children to touch the soap cloud.

Ask:

- What happened to the bar of soap?
- How do you think this is like the kingdom of God?

**Experiment 3: Popcorn and a microwave oven**

What's happening? Popcorn expands for much the same reason as the Ivory soap. It has air pockets with trapped water in the kernels. When the water is heated, it vaporizes and the air expands. These are like little mini explosions breaking out of each kernel. A small volume of kernels (2 tablespoons) grows exponentially into popped popcorn (4 cups).

Instructions:

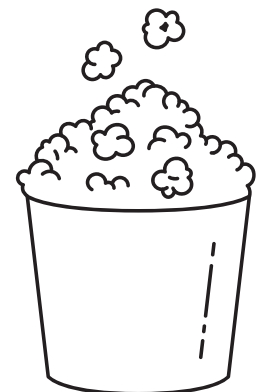
Put 2 tablespoons of popcorn kernels on a sheet of clean paper and ask the children to describe them.

Ask them how much popcorn they think these kernels will make.

Pop the kernels in an air popcorn popper or follow the instructions for microwaveable popcorn.

As the popcorn pops, ask:

- What happens right away?
- What will happen next?
- How do you think this is like the kingdom of God?



Growing
in Grace



