



Party Time!

Goal: To imagine God's gracious kingdom as a party.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 14:15-24

Jesus told a parable about how God wanted people to live with each other. A man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. When the dinner was ready, he sent a servant to tell the invited guests: "Come! The dinner is now ready" (v. 17, CEB). But one by one, all began to make excuses about why they could not attend. One bought a farm and had to see it; another had to check on his oxen; and one person had just gotten married (vv. 18-20).

When the servant reported the excuses, the party-giver was angry and told the servant: "Go quickly to the city's streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame" (v. 21, CEB). When there was still room, the servant was to go again to secure enough people to fill the house (v. 23). Of those invited, "not one" will "taste my dinner" (v. 24, CEB).

Those whom the man had invited rejected the opportunity for the dinner. Those in greatest need were brought in—receiving the grace of the host. They responded with gratitude as they received the great dinner.

No wonder Luke introduced Jesus' parable by quoting the dinner guest who said to Jesus: "Happy are those who will feast in God's kingdom" (v. 15, CEB).

. . . In your experiences with the children

Invitations to birthday parties or even an invitation to a friend for a playdate or sleepover are certainly experiences children know that are like the host and his dinner guests in this parable. This story invites children to think about what was going on with the host, his original guests, and their response, as well as the new guest list and their response. What were people doing, and why were they doing it? It invites children to wonder about the invitation to God's party and what their response might be.

. . . In your relationships with the children

R.S.V.P. is the abbreviation for the French phrase meaning "please respond." When issued with an invitation, the host is asking for your response. Will you be able to come or not? In today's world, an RSVP isn't what it used to be. There's something now called "FOMO" which means "fear of missing out." We don't want to commit to something because something better might come along. So RSVPs are left to the last minute or changed all together if it seems like something better is happening. Today's parable has an invitation to attend a great feast. Guests respond, but then at the time of the party, other things have come up. The party just doesn't seem worth it. So the host invites more people—all that can be found. These folks accept the invitation and show up to the great feast. Help the children understand that we are all invited to God's great party—God's kingdom on earth. What's their response going to be?

*O Jesus, thank you for inviting me to your party.
Help me not to be a party pooper. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 3, 17, 23

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

purple cloth

six votive candles
(purple if possible)

party decorations
(i.e., streamers, balloons,
bright tablecloth, etc.)

prepared copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

Responding

Claiming

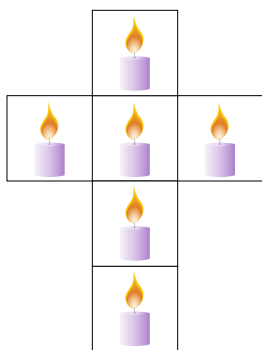
cupcakes or cookies

Celebrating

timer (optional)

Extra

copies of **GN 2** and
GN 3, poster board,
dowel or paint stick



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, cut invitations from **GN 1** for each child.

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

Welcoming and Preparing **LG**

Play “Dance and Sing” 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 third Sunday in Lent. 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.

Provide a variety of party decorations and encourage the children to decorate for a party. As the children are decorating, discuss great parties they have been to. Ask them to tell about the decorations, the food, the nature of the party, who attended, and so forth. Admire the efforts of the children to create a welcoming worship space.

Singing **MS**

Play and sing “Dance and Sing”—**SCM 17**. Encourage the children to joyfully move about the space.

Praying **LG**

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 three of the candles.

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

Dear God, /
sometimes we are happy /
and sometimes we are sad. /
Lent can be a time of both feelings. /

We are happy when we can have a party, /
but we are also sad when another light goes out. /
Amen. /

- T** *Giving the children a gentle warning that you will be shifting focus soon helps them mentally prepare for the change. Alerting them calmly makes any change feel like less of an emergency.*

Preparing to Hear the Story LD

Hand an invitation from **GN 1** to each child. Invite the children to read them together. Tell the children that this is an invitation to God's kingdom. God welcomes all and includes all. Ask the children how it feels to be invited. Ask how it would feel if they realized they were unable to attend.

Offer that today's story is about a host who invited some people to a party. Ask the children to notice who else was invited as the story unfolds.

Hearing the Story LG LD

Invite a child to find Luke 14 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship table.

Read the story on **SCM 3** or use the story audio. Use your voice, expressions, and feelings to make the story more lively. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

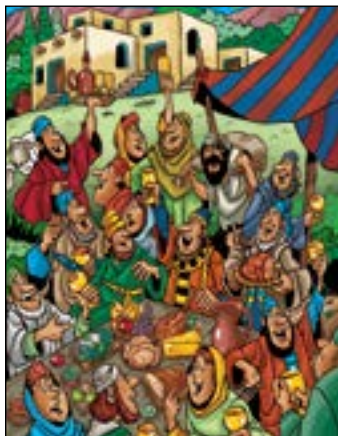
After you have read the story, ask the children to look at the area that is set up for a party. Wonder together how it would feel to do all the work of setting up the party and then have nobody come. Suggest that our worship service is like a party that God invites us to come to each week. How would God feel if nobody came? Invite the children to color the invitation as you read the story again.

Encourage the children to take the invitations to family members and friends to remind them that they are invited to God's gracious kingdom.

Reflecting on God's Grace C

Play a game where the children make up excuses why they can't attend a party. Stand in a circle and turn to the child on your right, saying, "I'm having a wonderful party. Please come!" That child then makes up an excuse as to why he/she can't come. Encourage the children to think about activities that fill their days (*homework, sports, chores, etc.*) and to use those as their excuses. The crazier the excuse is, the better! That child then turns to the next person, repeating, "I'm having a wonderful party. Please come!" and the invitations/excuses continue around until all are invited and have offered an excuse.

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.



Have a conversation using the following questions:

- How is our excuse game like what happened in the story Jesus told?
- How do you think the host felt when none of his friends showed up for the party?
- How do you imagine the poor, hungry, and sick felt when they were invited to the party?
- What do you think happened after the dinner?
- What can this story teach us about God?
- How do you think God feels when people make excuses?

Singing

Thank the children for preparing for the party. Share the snack you brought. Play “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me”—**SCM 23**—while the children eat the snack. As the children finish eating, play the song again and encourage them to sing along.

Turn off the candles.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



Claiming God’s Grace

F LG

Wonder aloud about what kind of party God would throw. Ponder together the decorations, food, and who would be invited. Have fun imagining together! Encourage the children to close their eyes and imagine the party they have just described; in their minds, what do they see? Hear? Smell? Taste?

Celebrate that you are all invited to God’s kingdom and that God asks us to bring others to the “party” as well. Roll out the mural paper on the floor. Invite the children to take turns lying down on the paper. Then ask another child to draw around the child with a crayon. Ask the children to add features and clothing to the figures. Have the children cut out the paper people and attach them to chairs or to the wall with tape.

As the children work on the figures, discuss ways we can invite others to experience God’s gracious kingdom. Once complete, take a moment to notice how each child present is unique, as are the “paper people.” Celebrate that God’s kingdom is full of uniquely created individuals who are all welcome. Enjoy cookies or cupcakes together.

- F** *Notice and listen carefully to children’s concerns about inclusion and exclusion. Discuss different aspects of fair and unfair situations, helping children to develop strong ideas of fairness.*

Celebrating God's Grace MS

Play a game to celebrate that we are all invited! If your group is large, consider forming two or more teams. The objective is to get the message from the back to the front of the line without talking.

- ▼ Have the children line up, with each child facing the back of the person in front of them.
- ▼ Whisper a simple message—such as “Come to dinner” or “Welcome to my home”—to the last person in line.
- ▼ Have the person that received the message tap the shoulder of the person in front of them and then pantomime the message.
- ▼ The children can turn around only when they are receiving the message from the person behind them.
- ▼ Repeat until the message makes it to the front of the line.
- ▼ Have everyone in the line turn around and then give another message going the other direction.

Consider timing the game to see if the children have improved their communication in the second round.

Praying God's Grace A

Tell the children that coming to church is like being at God's party with all of God's people. Invite them to repeat the following action prayer after you as you lead them in the familiar rhyme, “Here is the Church,” with some new additions!

Dear God, *(place hands in prayer position with fingers straight up and palms touching each other)*
 here is the church *(interlock fingers, down and between palms)*
 and here is the steeple. *(point index fingers up to make a steeple)*
 Open the doors *(move thumbs out and away from each other)*
 and see all the people. *(wiggle fingers)*

Here people worship *(stand up)*
 and here people pray. *(fold hands in prayer)*
 It is God's party *(wave hands in the air)*
 each time that we say . . . *(cup hands around mouth)*

Praise God! And thank you. *(arms up, then touch middle three fingers of right hand to chin and move them out)*
 I'm sorry, it's true. *(bow head)*
 Here I am, send me. *(point to self)*
 And God, I love you! *(cross arms over heart)*
 Amen! *(jump up with arms outstretched)*



Extra Activity

*Before the session, cut apart the letters on **GN 2** and **GN 3**. If you have more than eight children, make two copies of each **GN** and plan on making two posters.*

Invite the children to make a poster to place outside your church welcoming people. Tell the children the poster will say, “God WELCOMES all!” and they will be making the “WELCOMES” part of the poster. Hand out a letter to each child. Children may decorate more than one letter or make more than one poster depending on the number of children. After the children have decorated their letters, have them arrange them in the center of the poster. Once they like the position of the letters, have them glue them in place. In large block letters, add the words “God” above “WELCOMES” and “all!” below “WELCOMES.” Tape a dowel or paint stick to the back of the poster. Place the poster in a visible spot outside your church.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

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

Listen to and sing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me”—**SCM 23**.

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 grows. Ask them what they can do to welcome all to God’s kingdom.

Pray the following prayer or one of your own choosing.

Dear God, thank you for this story that Jesus told.
Thank you for inviting us to your gracious kingdom.
Be with us this week.
Help us to welcome all people to your church.
Amen.

Bless the children, saying, “May God’s grace be with you.”



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).



