



Welcome Home

Goal: To rejoice that God forgives and welcomes us.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 15:1-2, 11-24

Luke 15 includes the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Following Jesus' teachings on discipleship in Luke 14, these parables respond to the religious leaders' grumbling about how Jesus apparently welcomes "sinners." In the story of the father and his two sons, the younger son takes action to reject his father and his home. He spends wantonly and then has a moment of turning, maybe even repentance. Yet the father receives the son who returns, even after the son had sought his part of his future inheritance—in effect, wishing the father were dead. Despite such an attitude, the father runs to welcome the son home and celebrates. The one who was lost is now found (v. 24).

Each story points us toward God as the One who seeks and saves the lost and who takes the initiative to bring all who are in the wrong place to where they should be. God rejoices when the lost are found, no matter how they became lost, no matter how long it takes to be found. The God of grace seeks us and saves us. We rejoice in gratitude!

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Hide-and-seek is a game children have played for years. Losing and finding are experiences for which we all have stories. Games and stories help children connect with the parables Jesus told. Parables are stories that invite us to go inside an idea. Jesus used them a lot in his teaching, because he thought stories were a great way to encourage his followers to think about how they were living in gratitude to God's love.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

The introduction to today's parable tells us that Jesus knew that people were having a hard time with his teaching about loving all kinds of people. So he told them stories in parables. Like the shepherd looking for a lost sheep, or a woman trying to find a precious coin, or a parent who never stops loving a child, so too you know the children in your group. Be aware of the one who may be a bit lost, the one who has a happy story to tell, or the one who is struggling with an issue at home or at school. Pray for each one by name this week.

Children love to hear a good story, so practice your storytelling skills, gather some props to use with each parable, and get ready for good conversations!

God, you are the good shepherd who always welcomes us with your love and abiding care. Thank you. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 5, 16, 18

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

purple cloth

six votive candles
(purple if possible)

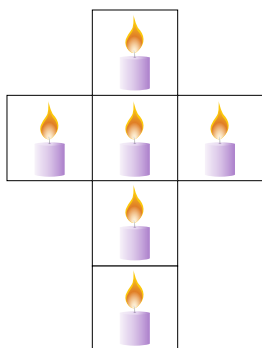
Responding

Claiming

The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein or *Mama, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara M. Joosse, or Internet-connected device

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” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing **B T LD**

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.

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

Invite the children to gather around the worship table. Admire their efforts to work together.

Listen to and sing “This Is the Day”—**SCM 16**—sing the song in a call-and-response format. Sing a verse and encourage the children to echo your words.

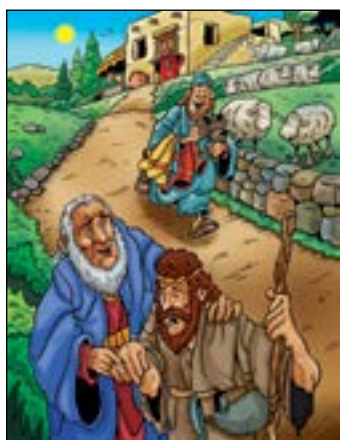
Praying **C**

Point out the votive candles. Comment that today marks the fifth Sunday in Lent. Remind the children, if necessary, 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 five of the candles.

Invite children to share how their week went and what concerns or challenges they are facing. Invite them to name people and concerns they wish to include in prayer. As each person or concern is named, prompt the children to say, “God of grace, hear our prayer.” Conclude prayer time with a group “Amen.”



Seeing where the story is found in the Bible reinforces the importance of this book for the church.



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 and in *Who Counts?* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

Preparing to Hear the Story B

Invite the children to take turns acting out a good or a bad choice for the group to guess what it is and why it is good or bad. Tell the children that they will hear a story about some bad choices someone made with a surprise ending.

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 B M L

Invite a child to find Luke 15 in the Bible and place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 5** or use the story audio. If reading, use your voice, expressions, feelings, and body to make the story more lively. Vary the tone, speed, and pitch of your voice to indicate changes in mood. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Ask the children to look around the room for props they can use to act out the story. As you read the story again or use the story audio, invite the children to act out the parts. Encourage children who are not playing a role to add sound effects.

Reflecting on God's Grace C

Engage the children in conversation about the choices the son made in the story using the following questions.

- ▼ Which were good choices and which were bad choices?
- ▼ How do you think the father felt about his son's choices?
- ▼ What was the turning point of the story?
- ▼ What did the father do?
- ▼ When you have made a bad choice, what happened?
- ▼ When have you experienced forgiveness for a bad choice?
- ▼ How does forgiveness feel?

Singing

Listen to "God Gives Us a Gift (Dios nos da un regalo)"—**SCM 18**. Ask: Where did you find mercy in the story? Where did you find love in the story?

Remind the group that this is a bilingual song and that they are invited to sing in English and Spanish. Sing, rejoicing in the beautiful gift that is the grace of God.

Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.

Claiming God's Grace

C L VI

Before the session, obtain the book *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein or *Mama, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara M. Joosse or find the YouTube video of one of the stories to show: “*The Giving Tree - Animated Children’s Book*” (bit.ly/2jMsc9P) or “*Mama, Do You Love Me? by Barbara M. Joosse. Grandma Anni’s Storytime*” (bit.ly/2wDZMZd).

Read or show the YouTube video of the story *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein or *Mama, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara M. Joosse. Both stories share themes with today’s parable. Have a conversation with the children using the following questions.

- I wonder, “How is this story like the parable of the father and the son?”
- I wonder, “When do you feel like the boy in *The Giving Tree* or the daughter in *Mama, Do You Love Me?*”
- I wonder, “What does it feel like to be the tree or the mama?”

Suggest that like the tree’s love for the boy or the mama’s love for her daughter, God’s love never ends.

Celebrating God's Grace

MS C F B

Play a game to welcome one another with rejoicing. Form two teams and line up across from each other. The first team chooses one player to call from the opposite team and chants, “Come home, come home, (*player’s name*) is welcome home!” The person called comes up with a way to go to the other line (*walk, skip, crawl, hop, and so forth*). The person called is welcomed home with rejoicing and shouts of joy. The next team takes a turn calling. The player called must choose a way to get to the other side that has not been used before. If they can’t think of a new action, all the players on the welcoming side cheer and help think of a new way. Continue the game for several rounds. Help the children realize how good it feels that God always welcomes them.

- *One way to talk about fairness is to discuss collaboration. Children tend to believe that when people work together, whatever benefits they obtain as a result should be shared.*



Offering God's Grace



Discuss what the father did in today's story to welcome his younger son back home. Ask:

- What does it mean that God welcomes us to church?
- When do we feel God's love at church?
- When do we feel forgiveness at church?

Tell the children that after the confession of sin, there is an assurance of pardon or declaration of forgiveness. We rejoice knowing that God forgives us.

Spread a long sheet of mural paper on the floor. Invite children to lie on the paper in poses showing how they would rejoice—dancing, jumping, and so forth. Draw outlines of the children in their poses. Have the children paint their silhouettes. Title the banner, "We are forgiven! Rejoice!" Hang the banner in a visible area in your church as a visual offering to the church about the joy of forgiveness.

Extra Activity

Hand out copies of **GN 1** and pencils. Ask the children to look at the two men and describe how they might be feeling. Tell the children to help the son (top) find his way back home to his father. Suggest that they collect the letters along the correct path (in order) and write them on the line below to see one thing that the father did for his son (*Forgive*). Ask:

- How do you imagine the son was feeling as he made his way home?
- How can we forgive others?
- How does it feel to be forgiven by others?

Challenge the children to offer forgiveness to someone and let them know they are welcome—to be part of their group, to come to their home, to eat lunch with them, and so forth.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD



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

Sing “God Gives Us a Gift (Dios nos da un regalo)”—**SCM 18**.

Suggest that God feels the same kind of joy toward us that the father in the parable felt. God forgives us and welcomes us home. We are precious to God.

Conclude the session by inviting the children to express joy:

- ▼ Shout it out: On the count of three, give them ten seconds to create as much noise as they can to express joy.
- ▼ Freeze a scene: On the count of three, ask them to strike a pose that shows joy. Hold the pose for ten seconds.
- ▼ Keep it going: Brainstorm words and phrases that relate to joy. Point to the children one by one. Each of them names a word to describe joy. Keep going until everyone is speaking a word at the same time.

Challenge the children to find ways to offer the gift of forgiveness during the next week.

Send the children with a blessing saying, “(Name), God always loves you and rejoices in 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).

