



Spreading the Good News

Goal: To discover ways that God's love turns expectations upside down.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 4:16-30

Jesus went to Nazareth to visit the town and the synagogue where he grew up. At first, the people marveled at the gracious words coming from Jesus' mouth (v. 22). The people saw Jesus only as the son of Mary and Joseph, the boy they had watched grow up in their city (v. 28). To make matters worse, they wanted Jesus to perform the same miracles he had done in Capernaum, but he refused.

Then Jesus reminded the people of God's grace extended to the Gentiles. Jesus named two instances in which God's prophets reached out with God's grace to Gentiles while Israel was in unbelief—Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (vv. 25-26; compare 1 Kings 17:8-16), and Elisha and Naaman the Syrian leper (v. 27; compare 2 Kings 5:1-19). Jesus' remarks filled the people of Nazareth with rage (v. 29) because he was saying that God chooses to offer grace and acceptance to both Jews and Gentiles.

Miraculously, Jesus slipped through the crowd unharmed (v. 30). Thus, his active ministry began.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Children today, even in less-populated areas, are more aware of diversity around them. They encounter other ethnic groups and religious groups in their schools and community. Unfortunately, they may also be aware of how diversity can spark anger. This session provides a place to counter such anger and actions. As children grow older, they may experience cliques at school and in other settings where they are excluded or encouraged by peers to exclude other children. Children can follow Jesus' ministry by standing up to bullies or helping others who have been bullied.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Consider the different ways children experience and learn about the world. As you plan activities and design a learning environment, keep in mind the diversity of the children in your group and the needs that may be expressed. Recall the ideas in the story that spoke to you and consider whether these same ideas might have a point of connection with the children. Look for ways to affirm that God loves all people, including people who look or speak differently. As you model acceptance of others, the children will learn by your example that you too are a disciple of Jesus.

*God of all people, help me hear your message
of broad acceptance of others today. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 9, 10, 18, 23

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

green cloth

candle

shiny metal spoons

Responding

Claiming

copies of Grace Note
(GN) 1

Celebrating

chairs

Offering

quart-size ziplock bags,
granola or snack bars,
fruit snacks, mini water
bottles, pairs of adult
socks

Extra Activity

copies of GN2

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual 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.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **B** **C**

Welcome each child with “(Name), the grace of God be with you.” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.”

Invite the children to set up a worship space using their creativity. Provide a Bible, a candle, and a green cloth.

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

Hand a shiny metal spoon to each child. Have them hold it in their left hand and look at themselves on the back of the spoon. Ask, “What do you see?” Have them turn the spoon around. Ask the question again. Have them raise their right hand. Ask, “What do you see in the spoon?”

Explain that in today’s Bible story, some people’s ideas are turned upside down.

Singing

A **MS**

Sing “He Came Down”—**SCM 18**. Form a circle and have everyone put their hands on the shoulders of the people on both sides. Walk to the right as you sing the first stanza. Stop on the phrase “hallelujah forevermore” and clap. Then circle to the left for the next stanza; stop and clap on the fourth line.

Praying

Turn on the candle as a reminder of Christ’s presence with you. Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for bringing the light of your love into the world through Jesus Christ! Bless our time together and open our hearts to your Word. Amen.

B *Children can be distracted by ordinary items. Giving children the choice of putting items away first helps gain buy-in to better behavior. Removal of distracting items becomes necessary if children fail to willingly put them away.*



Preparing to Hear the Story

Explain that today's Bible story follows the story studied last week when Jesus spoke in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. Show **SCM 9** to refresh memories. Ask for volunteers to recall what Jesus read from the scroll. You may read aloud this portion of the story, Luke 4:18-19. Say that the story ended with Jesus in the synagogue and ask them what they think happened next.



Hearing the Story

C L

Invite a child to find Luke 4 in the Bible and place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 10** or play the story audio. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Remind the children what Jesus said he would do: tell good news, bring freedom to prisoners, help the blind see, set the captives free, and proclaim this is the year God will act. Ask, "Why were these things surprising to the people listening to Jesus that day?" Tell the children that these things seem "upside down" because he was saying that God's love is for everyone, not just for them.

Ask the children to imagine that they were in the crowd at the synagogue that day. Invite them to think about how they might have felt as Jesus said these surprising things. Tell them to show that feeling through exaggerated facial expressions as you read the story again or play the story audio.

Reflecting on the Story

C

Show the story art on **SCM 10** and ask if the artist captured the sense of surprise and the crowd's reaction. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- ▼ Why do you think the crowd got angry with Jesus?
- ▼ How did Jesus show that God's love is for all people?
- ▼ What do you think Jesus would say to the people today about what God expects from us?

Singing

Sing "Jesus Taught Us How to Love"—**SCM 23**. Invite the children to make up movements for the song and sing it again using the movements they devised. Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God's Grace C

Remind the children that Jesus shared what his ministry would be about with the people in his hometown, but they weren't happy to hear his news. There was, however, a crowd of people waiting to hear just what Jesus would bring into the world.

Form three groups. Give each group one of the scenarios on **GN 1** and read it to them. Invite them to act out the scenario with an ending they think Jesus would hope to happen.

Celebrating God's Grace LG F B MS

As you play this game, consider what it means to reach out in unexpected ways. Place one chair for each child in a large circle. Use a favorite song from **Music & Melodies** to play a traditional game of musical chairs: removing one chair each round and eliminating players who cannot find a chair when the music stops.

Then play a new version of the game. Continue to eliminate one chair each round, but do not eliminate players. Everyone must sit in or touch the remaining chairs, with more and more children piling onto fewer chairs. Stop while they are still having fun. Discuss:

- ▼ Which game was more fun? Why did it seem that way to you?
- ▼ In the first game, how did it feel to be eliminated from the game, or how did it feel to see others eliminated from play?
- ▼ Why do you think Jesus insisted on reaching out to all people with God's grace?

LG *Activities that encourage teamwork and self-reliance model the qualities of a good leader.*



Offering God's Grace FA

Before the session, gather supplies so you have an equal number of items for kindness bags. If you received donations, supplement as needed so that you have enough to fill all of the bags.

One of the ways we offer God's love to others is through unexpected actions of grace and kindness. Tell the children that when we see people who are poor, homeless, or hungry, we want to help, but we do not always know what to do. Suggest that one way to offer God's love is to provide snack bags for folks in the congregation to give when they see someone in need.

Give the children index cards and invite them to write a short message on each card such as:



Thinking of you.
Bless you.
God loves you.
You are loved.

Set up an assembly line with the following stations: quart-size ziplock bags, granola or snack bars, fruit snacks, mini water bottles, pairs of socks, and index card messages. Invite the children to move through the line and assemble kindness bags with each item. When the bags are assembled, gather the children around the bags and pray the following prayer:

Dear God, thank you for the gifts you give us to share with others in need. May these bags help those who receive them to know they are loved. Help us continue to be a part of Jesus' ministry sharing your love with others. Amen.

Encourage the children to make a sign on newsprint or mural paper inviting members of the congregation to take one or more kindness bags to hand to someone in need. Suggest that a good place to keep a kindness bag is in the car so it is easy to give to someone. Place the sign and kindness bags in a place where people will see them. Encourage the children to take home a bag or two to place in the car of a parent or caregiver.

A *thaumatrope* is an optical toy that was popular in the early 1800s. A disc that has pictures on both sides appears to magically create one picture. When the strings are twirled quickly between the fingers, the two pictures appear to blend into one due to the persistence of vision.

Extra Activity

Tell the children that things are not always as we see them. Sometimes, God's love can take expectations that feel upside down and turn them upright.

Give each child a copy of **GN 2** and ask the children if they can imagine both of the images as one. Provide colored pencils and scissors. Allow time for the children to color the figures; then have the children cut out the shape and fold it along the dotted line. Ask again if they can see both sides at the same time.

Cut 14" lengths of string and give each child 2 lengths. Show them how to poke holes with scissors or a pencil through both layers of paper where indicated. Thread a piece of string through one hole and tie the ends together to form a loop. Repeat for the other hole.

Demonstrate how to hold the strings at both ends and wind the disc, end-over-end, about 5 or 6 times. Gently pull the strings. The flipping motion will make the images appear together.



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

C

Gather the children and remind them that God's love turns our expectations upside down. Invite the children to look at the spoons again, this time looking just at the front of them. Remind them that Jesus says God's love is for everyone, even people we don't expect.

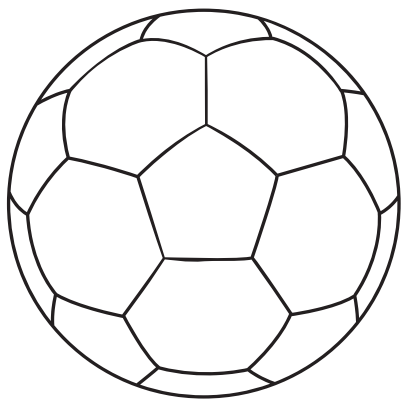
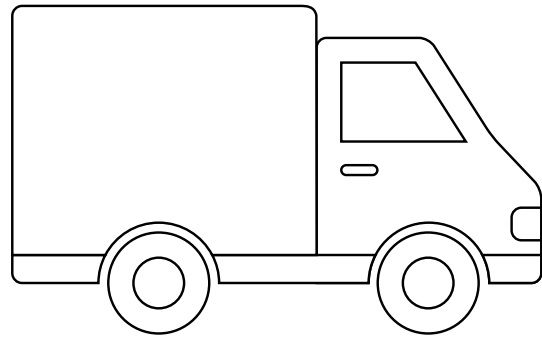
Ask the children to think of people who might need God's love. Close with a "popcorn prayer," inviting anyone who would like to pray aloud for those people to do so.

Sing "Jesus Taught Us How to Love"—**SCM 23**. Celebrate God's love by making a circle and holding hands. Go right and change direction every time you hear the words "Jesus Taught Us How to Love."

Invite the children to join in on the "Amen" of the blessing:

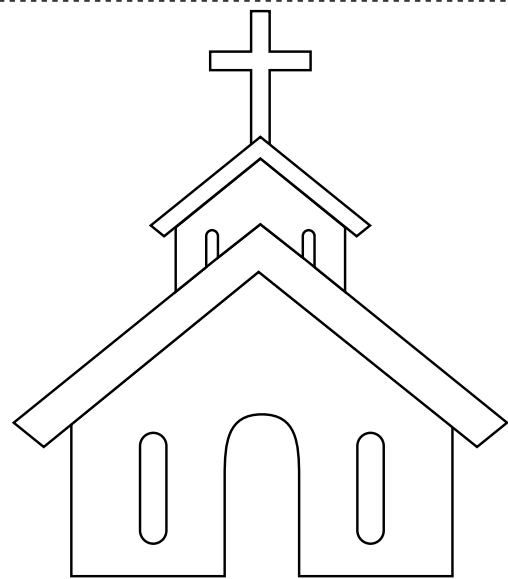
May the God of peace go with you as you leave this place.
Amen. (*Clap twice.*)

A new family is moving into the house next door to Olivia, whose best friend, Kathleen, is over to play. They watch as the furniture is taken into the house. It is evident that there is a child in the family. When a car drives up, they see a girl about their age helped out of the car and into a wheelchair. What happens next?

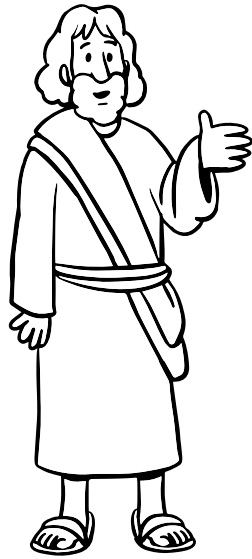


Malachi could hardly wait for Saturday when soccer tryouts were to be held. When he got to the field, he looked around for friends, but he didn't see anyone he recognized. Meanwhile, Ben and Jose saw Malachi and wondered who he was. What happens next?

Your Sunday school class has been together since the oldest children were in kindergarten. You are excellent friends. A new pastor from Puerto Rico has come to your church. He and his family speak Spanish. Your church wants to reach the many people who speak Spanish in your neighborhood. However, there are no people who speak Spanish in your Sunday school class. The pastor's children, who are more comfortable speaking Spanish, are coming to Sunday school for the first time today. What happens next?



JESUS SAID



God's grace is for everyone.

