



Blessed Are . . .

Goal: To practice being a blessing by helping others.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Luke 6:17-26

People in Jesus' time were quite familiar with beatitudes. They were a common literary form of blessing. The Hebrew Scriptures included more than fifty different "blessed is . . ." sentences. Each blessing promised a reward.

Jesus, a faithful Jew, offered a fresh take on these traditional blessings. His beatitudes offered happiness to people who seemed to be the least blessed in society. The rewards they offered included life in Jesus' new vision of society where "the last will be first."

These sayings appear in both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, but with different wording to express the two writers' different interpretations of who Jesus was. The phrase that in Luke is "blessed are you who are poor" turns up in Matthew as "blessed are the poor in spirit." One refers to poverty and the other to personal spirituality.

The blessings in today's reading encouraged and empowered Christians to follow Jesus' way by offering hope to people in especially difficult times. Paradoxically, they offered blessings to people in ill fortune, because these people would know happiness in the society for which Jesus longed.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Younger children love repetition in storytelling. The repetitive structure of these four blessings, so like the ones they learned last week, will make it possible for children to commit them to memory. Encourage them to share the blessings with friends and members of their families.

Be sure to invite older children to dig more deeply into the meaning behind the blessings. Emphasize the concrete ways we can all work for justice. Be open to hearing children share their own experiences with poverty, hunger, and bullying. Unfortunately, all too many young people in our communities experience being bullied or marginalized. Listen carefully to the stories that older children share and affirm their insights.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Younger children will like the ways in which Jesus blessed people. Many will have had experiences of a teacher, grandparent, or older friend praising and encouraging them. In this session, provide them with opportunities to bless others with their encouragement and support.

Older children may be more interested in exploring the concrete realities that Jesus was addressing. For them, the poor are people who struggle with real challenges. Encourage older children to grapple with the challenges Jesus raised when he blessed the most marginalized and vulnerable in our society.

*Loving God, I am a child of yours. Bless me
that I might be a blessing to others. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 12, 16, 22

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

green cloth

candle

gift-wrapped box with
a 36" piece of string
inside

Responding

Praying

pictures of people in
need from magazines
and newspapers

Offering

tree branch or twigs,
vase or pot, sand or
rocks, several colors of
1/2" to 1" wide ribbon

Extra

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

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.

“Praying God’s Grace” and “Offering God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing



As the children arrive, greet them warmly. Welcome each child with “Grace and peace be with you, *(Name)*.” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.”

Ask for help in arranging the green cloth in the center of your meeting space and placing the candle on it. Encourage some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Gather the children in a circle and ask them what they think a blessing is. If not mentioned, suggest that a blessing is like a gift, something we need or that is useful, or something totally unexpected.

Place a wrapped box in the center of the circle and ask the children to imagine what might be in it. Let their imaginations run wild!

After a minute or two, open the box slowly and take out a piece of string. Be a bit surprised and wonder with the children if the string is a blessing. Then ask them to imagine all the things they could do with that string and how it might be a gift to someone. Remind the children that blessings sometimes are unexpected.

Explain that we may be blessed by God or be a blessing to someone else. Tell the children that today they will hear a story about Jesus in which he tells about people we may not expect to be blessed, and how we might be a blessing to others.

Singing



Gather the group around the candle. Play and sing “This Is the Day”—**SCM 16**—inviting the group to sing along.

Praying



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

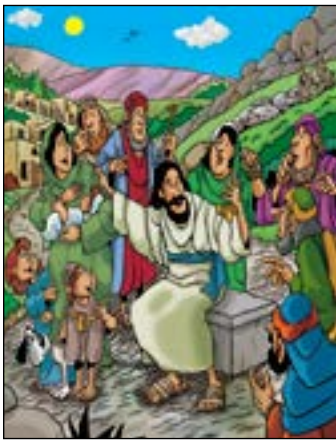
God of all people, help us to hear your word in the Bible and as you speak to our hearts. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

T *Many younger children function better with the sense of security and order that routine provides. Remember to use the Visual Schedule to reinforce the routine.*



Preparing to Hear the Story

Remind the children that Jesus announced the beginning of his ministry when he read Scripture in the synagogue. Wonder if anyone can retell the story when Jesus was preaching in the synagogue (found in Luke 4:14–21). Read aloud Luke 4:18–19 and note to whom Jesus brings good news (*to the poor, to captives, to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free*). Explain that in today’s story, Jesus blesses the same kinds of people. Ask the children to listen to the story and to name where they hear good news.



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.

Hearing the Story

LD C L TD A

Invite a child to find Luke 6 in the Bible and place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 12** or play the story audio. Conclude by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.”

Hand out construction paper, pastels, and chalk. Explain that there are many ways to understand a Bible reading—we hear it with our ears, read it, and understand it with our minds. We can also experience it with our emotions. Invite the children to draw pictures as they hear and “feel” good news in today’s Bible story while you read the story again or play the story audio.

Reflecting on the Story

C

Invite the children to share what they have drawn. Ask volunteers to share what they thought about as they listened and drew. Discuss:

- What do you think it means to be blessed? Do you think it is good news to be blessed?
- Who does Jesus say are blessed?
- Has anyone ever made fun of you for going to church or believing in Jesus? What does Jesus say about that? (*Jesus says that you are blessed when people treat you badly for believing in him.*)
- How can you be God’s blessing to others?

Singing

Celebrate that our lives can be a blessing to others. Play and sing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me”—**SCM 22**. While the children sing, encourage them to pantomime a way to be a blessing. Turn off the candle.

T *For children who have tactile sensitivities, stimulations that most people do not particularly notice, or at least are not bothered by, could cause extreme reactions that may be interpreted as bad behaviors. Avoid activities involving tactile materials such as chalk and finger paint. Offer alternatives such as markers or painting with paint brushes.*



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Celebrating God's Grace



Play a game to help the children hear that they are blessed and to offer that others are blessed too.

Have the children stand in a circle and then take two giant steps backward before they sit down. Select one person to be “it.” Have that person walk around the outside of the circle, tapping each child gently on the shoulder and calling out the word “praise” or “blessed.” If the person who is “it” calls out “blessed,” the one who is tapped must jump up and say, “Blessed be, you and me!” Then the one who is “it” changes places with that child, who then becomes “it.” The game continues until every child has had at least one turn as “it.”

After, ask the children how it felt to be blessed. How can we bless others?



Praying God's Grace



Before the session, find pictures of people in need from magazines and newspapers or Internet searches.

Tell the children that they can respond to God's blessings by helping others. Prompted by the pictures you found, have the children reflect on the needs shown and ways to respond.

Invite the children to form pairs and select one of the pictures. Have the pairs spend a few minutes talking about their picture, what the persons in the picture need, and how they can be helped. The pairs should also talk about how they would pray for the people.

Allow each pair to share what they discussed with the group. As the children share their suggestions for prayer, jot down the individual ideas. Display the pictures together and, using your notes, pray for the people pictured. Prompt the children to echo your phrases.

LG *Look for opportunities for children to practice leadership and generosity, such as helping set up the space, saying prayers for people in need, or offering help to other children in and outside of church.*



Offering God's Grace



Before the session, collect a tree branch or gather several twigs in a vase or pot. Set them in place using sand or rocks. This will also act as a sturdy base for the tree.

Remind the children that one way to help others is to offer prayers or blessings. Tell them that they will make a blessing tree as an offering to the congregation.

Set out several colors and widths of ribbon along with fine-tipped permanent markers.



Ask the children to brainstorm ideas for blessings. They can offer prayers for those who are sick, blessings for new babies, wishes of peace, and so forth. Jot one or two-word ideas (such as babies, or sick friends) on newsprint so that children can copy the words. Give each child a few sheets of paper to use to practice writing on and then to use under the ribbons as they write their blessings. Help as needed. Encourage the children to tie several blessing ribbons to the tree.

After the session, place the tree branch, along with ribbons and markers, in a common area with a sign inviting folks to add their blessings to the branch.

Extra Activity

LG T

Tell the children that they will make a mandala describing ways they can be a blessing to others. Provide copies of **GN 1** and colored pencils. Explain that we will use the mandala with a central focus, blessing, and prayerfully respond in the outward sections.

Encourage the children to work silently, considering ways that they can be a blessing by helping others. Tell the children to write or draw a way that they can commit to helping others in each of the open spaces. Encourage the children to hang their mandala at home to serve as a reminder of their commitment.

Traditionally, a mandala was a spiritual and ritual symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism, representing the universe. Today, many people use mandalas, including Christians, as a centering prayer or for meditation.



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

LG

Ask the children if they have ever seen a minister raise his or her hands at the end of the worship service when giving the benediction or blessing. Tell them that this is a way of placing a blessing on everyone's head. Invite the children to raise their hands and speak to each other as they repeat your words, saying the following:

Jesus shares God's love with you! /
Jesus calls you God's children! /
Blessed are you! /

Looking at each child individually, offer her or him a personal blessing that affirms one particular quality or something kind she or he does. "Bless you, *(Name)*, for you . . ." Close the blessing by saying, "Amen."

