



Specks and Logs

Goal: To offer grace to others rather than judgment.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 7:1-5, 12

To enter the kingdom of heaven, a disciple should live actively with the perspective of love and seek to practice mercy, forgiveness, and justice. To live as a child of God is to imitate the behavior and attitudes of God. In today's lesson, Jesus teaches his disciples, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged" (Matthew 7:1). Judgment can mean two things: 1) sitting in judgment over people and 2) exercising discernment. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul writes that we can discern God's will because "we have the mind of Christ" (v. 16). Spiritual discernment is the gift and the ability to listen for and recognize God's will for us, the church, and the world. It is necessary to practice discernment in all aspects of life.

Jesus warns about the danger of being critical of others or judgmental. Jesus decries self-serving, judgmental attitudes by which we make ourselves feel more worthy by criticizing others. Whenever we judge, we set ourselves up as an authority with power, a judge who passes judgment on others. But we are not judges. We are sinners, saved by God's grace in Jesus Christ. We have no standard for our lives other than Jesus Christ himself. We have no righteousness in ourselves; the only righteousness that is ours is in Christ.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." Children have differing abilities to see others' points of view, even in the same age group, but most elementary children can grasp this idea at some level. Children can learn to recognize the feelings of others and that the choices we make matter because they affect both others and ourselves. Even children can make a kingdom difference by practicing God's love by the way they live!

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

If the word *judge* seems too confusing, substitute *criticize*. Most children know how it feels to be criticized by others. Many also know the flip-side, how it feels to criticize someone else. Instead of judging others, model for the children ways to practice praise as a way of serving and loving them. This is not to be insincere flattery. That kind of praise is a way of judging in itself. Insincere praise creates anger. More biblically, *praise* means "to call forth, to encourage." This is praise that is sincere and true. It means to ascribe worth to someone.

*Loving God, may we treat others as we want to be treated.
Help me be an example of that for the children in my care. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 12, 21, 22

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

candle

green cloth

mountain mural from
Winter 9

log

tweezer

Responding

Claiming

SCM 12a, sunglasses,
vegetable oil or
petroleum jelly

Celebrating

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, GN 2

Praying

copies of **GN 3**

Extra

copies of **GN 4**

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.

“Claiming God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **C**

Welcome each child with, “Grace and peace be with you, (Name).” Prompt children to respond, “And also with you.”

Invite children to help prepare the worship space. Provide a candle, a green cloth, and a log. From the log, use a tweezer to take a “speck”—a splinter-sized piece of wood—and place it on a sheet of white paper. Suggest one or two children design a poster that reads, “Be Kind. Don’t Judge.” which can be placed in the worship space. Hang the mountain mural in the worship space.

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

Have the children take turns making an exaggerated statement, such as, “In my soccer game this week, I scored 47 goals.” Encourage the children to be silly and make things longer, taller, higher, faster, bigger, and so forth. Tell the children that, in the story today, Jesus uses exaggeration to make a point.

C Give children time to respond. Each child’s contribution is valuable.

Singing

MS **L**

Play, listen to, clap, and dance to “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the Morning”—**SCM 21**.

Praying

M **MS** **A**

Invite children to gather and to sit cross-legged with their hands open in their lap. Turn on the candle as a reminder of the light in the world that Jesus brings. Provide a few moments of silence and then lead them in a breath prayer. Encourage them to breathe in and imagine God’s grace filling them. Then tell them to breathe out and imagine sharing God’s grace with others. Comment that, with each breath in and out, they are receiving and sharing God’s grace. Allow for several deep breaths, saying with each one: “Breathe in God’s grace, breathe out God’s grace.” Allow a few more moments of silence, and then finish with the following prayer:

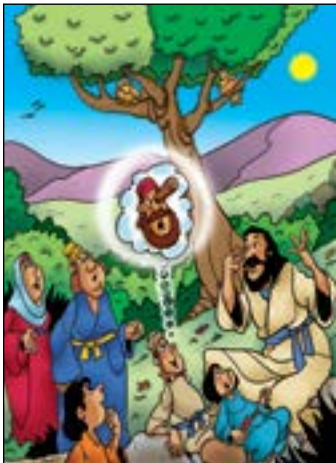
God, we are grateful for your grace. Help us, as your people,
to offer your grace to others. Amen.



Preparing to Hear the Story

F C

Ask children to consider what it means to judge someone else. Invite them to share their ideas. If necessary, comment that judging someone or something is to form an opinion or idea about that person or thing, sometimes with lots of information and sometimes with little information. Ask them what they think the phrase “Don’t judge a book by its cover” means. Wonder together about what could be good or helpful about judging something or someone and what might not be helpful. Ask them then to imagine what Jesus would have to say about judging others.



Hearing the Story

M L

Invite a child to find Matthew 7 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 12** or use the story audio. Conclude by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt children to say, “Thanks be to God.”

Offer that today’s story is best heard with the imagination. Invite the children to get comfortable, suggesting that they may sit in a chair or on the floor, stand against a wall, or lie on the floor. Encourage them to close their eyes as you read the story again. Use exaggerated tone and inflection to make the story come alive. Suggest they see the story in their imagination, like a movie. Tell them to pay attention to the setting and the conversation between Jesus and his listeners.

Reflecting on God’s Grace

C

Use the following questions, and those of your own, to prompt the children in describing this story as they saw it in their imaginations.

- ✎ What was the setting of this story?
- ✎ Where did it take place?
- ✎ What were people doing? Jesus? Adults? Children?

Engage the children in conversation about the story, using the following questions.

- ✎ What was surprising in this story?
- ✎ What made you curious?
- ✎ What are some of the most important things you heard Jesus say?
- ✎ What does this story teach us about how we are to treat others?

Singing

Sing “Jesus Bids Us Shine”—**SCM 22**—using exaggerated motions. Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



Claiming God's Grace

F LG C VI SD

Before the session, smear a little vegetable oil or petroleum jelly on a pair of sunglasses to make them blurry or difficult to see when wearing them.

Have one volunteer find an item in the room. While they are looking, give another volunteer the sunglasses and ask them to put them on and close their eyes. The first volunteer will stand in front of the one with the glasses and hold the object up at eye level. Tell the person with the sunglasses to open their eyes. Have the group say, “Do not judge.” Then the person with the sunglasses must close their eyes and guess what was being held up in front of them. Reveal the object. Play again until all who wish to have had a turn.

Read the story on **SCM 12a**. Comment that Karen was quick to judge her neighbor, saying that he didn’t know how to clean his clothes. In the end, we find out that Karen was looking through a dirty window. She made a wrong judgment, because she would rather judge her neighbor than consider that she had a problem—dirty windows! Wonder together about:

- ▼ A time when a new person moved in your neighborhood and you saw them and thought something about them based on how they looked;
- ▼ A time when you saw someone eating alone in the lunchroom and just walked by;
- ▼ A time when you may have been uncomfortable around another person just because they were different from you.

Comment that we often judge others based on what they wear, how big or little they are, what their hair looks like, and even who they play with. When we look only at the surface, we can make wrong assumptions, just like looking through that dirty window or the blurry glasses.

- *Talking about judgment can lead to conversations about fairness. Discuss different aspects of fair and unfair situations, helping children to be empathetic and understanding.*



-  – angry
-  – sad
-  – happy
-  – surprised
-  – worried
-  – love

Celebrating God's Grace C L

Play “Empathy Emojis.” Provide copies of **GN 1** and crayons, and invite the children to spend a few moments coloring the emojis then cutting them out. Ask them to name the emotion that each emoji is showing. Tell the children that emojis are made to show a picture of an emotion or feeling. Explain that *empathy* means to imagine how another person must be feeling. Offer that showing empathy is one way we offer grace rather than judgment.

Have the children place their six emojis in front of them. Read a scenario from **GN 2**. After you read a scenario, invite the children to hold up the emoji they choose to show the feelings represented. Encourage them to share why they came to the conclusions they did. Suggest that they listen closely to the scenario, because sometimes they may have to look beneath a person's actions to identify how they may really feel, not just how they are acting.

Praying God's Grace MS C L

Hand out copies of **GN 3**. Tell the children that the rings of a tree grow outward, each ring adding a new layer to a young sapling. Explain that a prayer of confession is something like that. It begins in the center, listening to God and God's Spirit. It moves outward by admitting your mistake or wrongdoing to God. The next ring is to ask God for forgiveness. The fourth ring asks for help to make it right and not do it again. The outer ring is growth. Growth is what we have learned. Now it is time to go and grow!

Invite the children to enter into a time of prayer using the rings of a tree to pray a prayer of confession. Suggest they confess a time when they judged another person or didn't treat someone the way they would want to be treated. Encourage them to focus on each ring and color it, moving from the center outward. When the children have finished their tree rings, pray:

Gracious God, thank you for hearing our prayers. Forgive us when we judge others or do not treat them the way we would want to be treated. Thank you for giving us another chance to do the right thing, for in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.


GN 4 solution:

blessing	log
comfort	message
cousin	mistake
failures	neighbor
faults	ourselves
hope	prophets
judge	speck
law	

Keep the mountain mural for use in the next session.



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).

Extra Activity

LD VI

Jesus taught us a story about not judging others. Jesus used the images of specks and logs to make his point. Sometimes it is difficult to see what is right in front of us.

Hand out copies of **GN 4** and invite the children to find the fifteen words hidden in the picture. Point out the word bank. Some are very easy to find, others are a little more difficult. You may want to work together and have children call out words as they find them.

Hand out crayons. While the children color, discuss what it means to not judge others. When the children have finished, read through the words and ask the children how the words relate to the story.

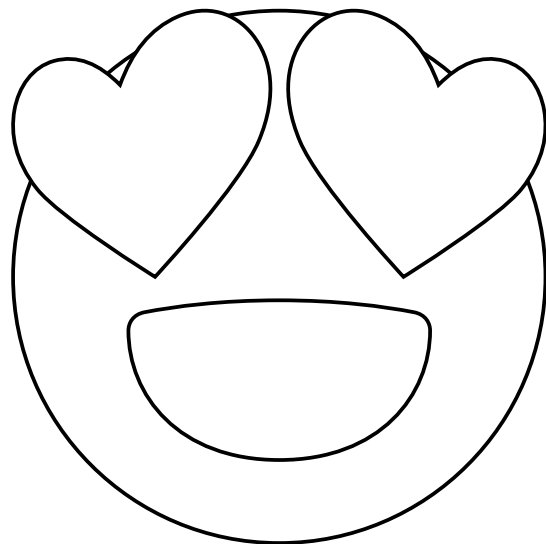
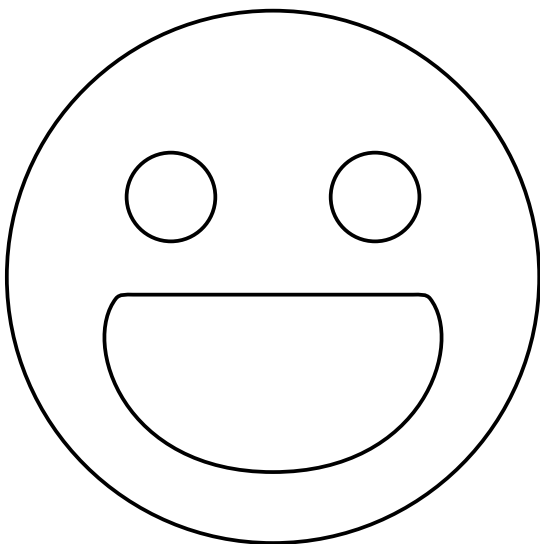
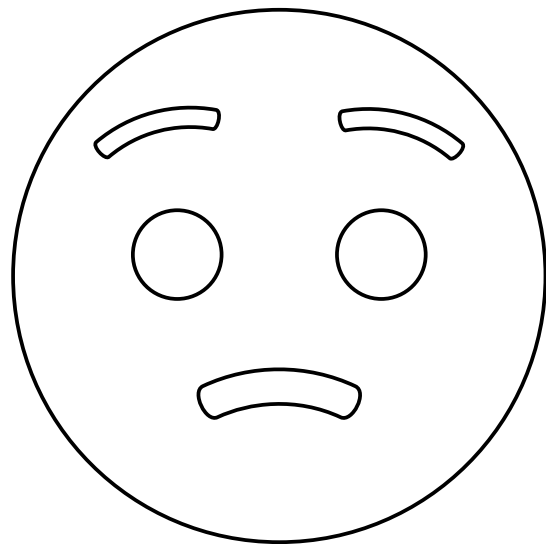
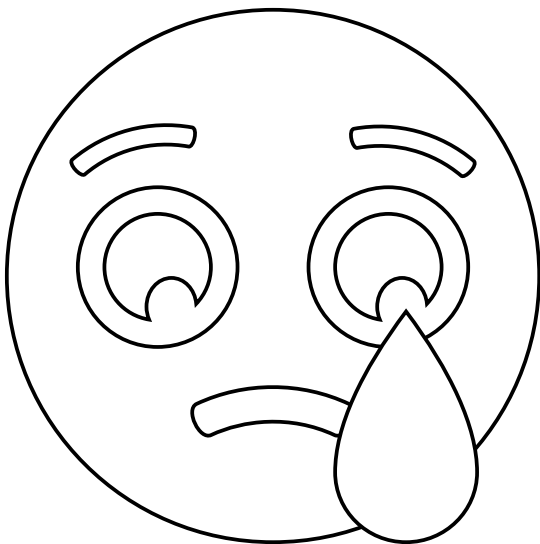
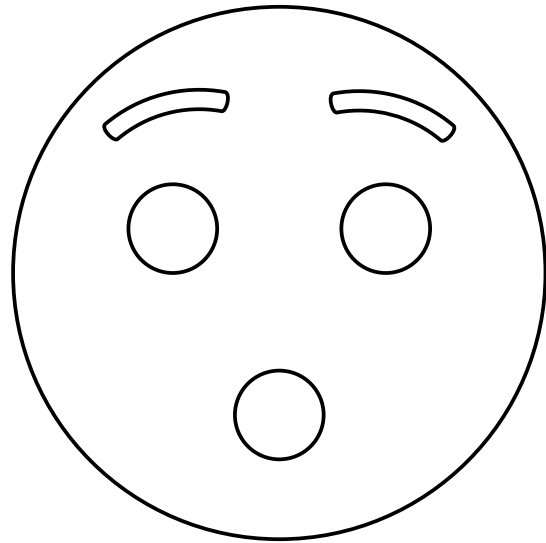
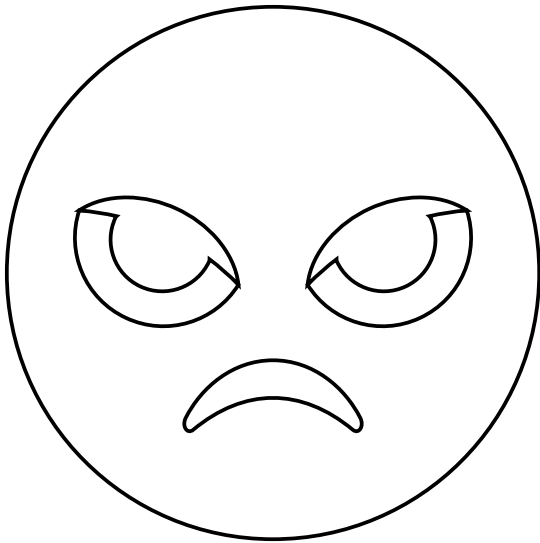
LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Lead children in cleaning up the worship space.

Ask them to picture a person with whom they have a difficult time. No names should be spoken aloud. Ask them to consider a way they could offer grace to that person this week, perhaps by offering a specific act of kindness, by praying for that person each day, or by speaking encouraging words to them. Ask the children to commit to themselves and to God that they will look for ways this week to offer grace.

As they gather in a circle, offer the following charge and blessing to each child, “(Name), share God’s grace with others, not your judgment. Go in God’s grace.”

As they leave, encourage them to join you again next week.



1

Billy's parents are getting divorced, and he no longer sees his dad much anymore. One day on the playground, Billy shoved Ethan to the ground just because he felt like it. The teacher sent him to the principal, and the principal called his mom. How do you imagine Billy feels?

2

Polly sometimes gets made fun of at school because her clothes aren't as nice as others', and her shoes have holes in them. When she gets home, her dad takes her for a ride with the windows down, plays in the yard with her before bed, and tucks her in tight with a prayer and a kiss good night. How might Polly feel?

3

Savanna has heard her parents fighting about money. She thinks her family may not have much. Her birthday is coming up, and she doesn't want to ask for a party or gifts. How do you imagine Savanna feels?

4

Matt is a nice kid, but no one likes him much. They knock his books out of his hands, and refuse to go near him at recess. Lana decides she's had enough of the way other kids treat Matt. She begins to play with him and defend him, and repeatedly tells the other kids to "knock it off" where Matt is concerned. How do you imagine Matt feels? What about Lana?

5

Leanne and her two brothers notice that Mom has worked late every night this week. So, to help out, they clean their rooms without being asked, fold a load of laundry, and unload the dishwasher. How do you imagine their mom felt when she came home?

6

Ben's best buddy is his dog, Ginger. Ginger is getting older and seems sick all the time. The vet suggests that Ginger won't live much longer, and Ben can't help but cry at school. Some of the boys in his class see him crying and have no idea why, but they make fun of him for being a baby. How might Ben be feeling?

