



God Blesses Ishmael and Isaac

Goal: To celebrate the grace of God by being kind to people who are outsiders.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Genesis 16; 21:1-7, 9-13

God desires peace for all God's children. Love for other people—welcoming them as brothers and sisters—is one of the signs of God's kingdom. We can imagine God's heart breaking when sibling rivalry overtakes and underscores divisions in the human family.

Sarah is learning to trust God, but it is so hard. Sarah gives up on God's promise that she will have a child with Abraham and comes up with her own plan. But God honors Sarah's plan. Sarah insists that Abraham and her slave Hagar produce an heir. When Hagar becomes insolent with Sarah, Sarah deals harshly with Hagar. Hagar flees into the wilderness and meets an angel who instructs her to return to Sarah. A son is born to Abraham and Hagar, and they name him Ishmael, meaning "God hears."

Thirteen years later, Isaac is born to Abraham and Sarah. Naming the child Isaac (meaning "laughter") characterizes the old couple's joyous gratitude and reminds Sarah of her initial laughter. Even though jealousy and discord led Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, God's blessing—God's grace—is on both children, Isaac and Ishmael. Indeed, it is on all children.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Children may struggle with the thought of Abraham, a parent, deserting a child. Some may have felt or have been deserted by a parent; they may have friends or family members who have experienced such feelings. Others may have experienced desertion or rejection in other ways. Children may hear people comment that certain people are different from, better than, or not as good as others. Some children tease or ridicule others about their families' backgrounds or origins, about their physical attributes, or about their socioeconomic status. The effects of such experiences can range from a momentary sense of sadness to deep pain and affected self-esteem.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Be sensitive to the different experiences represented in your group. Help the children see that God remembers them, cares for them, and calls their names even when they feel alone and are unaware of God's presence. There is tremendous security and safety in that knowledge. Help them see the beauty within the diversity that God has made and the image of God in one another. Just as God extends love and hospitality to every person and does not cast us away, you demonstrate God's love when you recognize the worth of every child.

I praise you, God. Help me understand your unconditional love and empower me to give that love to others. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 3, 3a–3b, 16–17

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

natural or tan-colored
bedsheet

candle

Responding

Offering

yarn in a variety
of colors

Extra

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.

A bedsheet from previous sessions will be used this and the next session. If you choose not to use the bedsheet, plan to adapt the activities.

Welcoming and Preparing **LG**

Greet the children by name and say “Grace and peace be with you, (*Name*).” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.”

As they arrive, invite the children to prepare a worship space using the bedsheet as the desert. Provide a candle and Bible to add to the worship space.

Show **SCM 3a**. Explain that today’s story is about how God fulfilled the promise to Abraham and Sarah. This promise has something to do with stars in the night sky. Wonder together what stars have to do with God’s promises.

Invite the children to make stars to decorate the space using paper, crayons, and scissors. Let them make their own decisions about how to make stars. Ask children to write their names on the stars. Encourage them to make additional stars and write names of friends and family members. Tape the stars to the walls and ceiling, if possible.

While the children create stars, cut out the figures on **SCM 3b**. Attach the figures to craft sticks.

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

Gather on the bedsheet, pretending it is the desert. Encourage children to make room for all.

T *For children who struggle with transitions, consider a quick physical activity such as squeezing your hands together before story time.*

Singing

Invite the children to imagine it is nighttime. Ask them what they see in the sky. Tell the children God promised Abraham and Sarah that the number of their descendants would be like the number of stars in the night sky.

Sing “God’s Promises”—**SCM 17**. Help the children learn the song. Sing the words one phrase at a time, and ask the children to repeat each phrase. Add simple movements as the children sing.



Praying

Turn on the candle as a reminder that God is present among you. Ask the children to join you in this echo prayer:

Loving God, /
thank you for blessing all people of the world /
with your love. /
Amen. /

Preparing to Hear the Story

Show the figures cut from **SCM 3b**. Introduce Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, asking the children to say what they know about each biblical person. Say that each person was a blessing, a person God loved.

Show the Hagar and Ishmael figures. Say that they, too, were people God loved. Explain that Sarah and Hagar were not nice to each other. Today's story is about the blessing of children and the grace that comes out of a difficult situation.



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

L B

Open a Bible to Genesis 21 so that children know that the story comes from the Bible. Read **SCM 3**, a retelling of the story, or use the story audio. Express the emotions of the story with your voice, facial expressions, and gestures. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Invite volunteers to use the figures from **SCM 3b** to act out the story as you read the story again.

Reflecting on God's Grace

C

Wonder with the children what an outsider is. If necessary, tell the children that an outsider can be someone who is left all alone or is not chosen by others to join in. Wonder aloud how Hagar and Ishmael were outsiders. Assure the children that God loved them.

Share a personal experience of being treated as an outsider (for example, if you were left out of games at school). Tell the children what difference God's love and grace made for you then.

Invite the children to name personal experiences of being treated as an outsider or of treating someone else as an outsider. Ask the children how God is active in this story. Affirm God's desire for us to treat one another with kindness, even if we are different from one another.



Singing

Sing “The Whole World Is in God’s Hands”—**SCM 16**. Help the children learn the song. Sing the words one phrase at a time, and ask the children to repeat each phrase after you. Turn off the candle.

A *Adapt any activity to suit your children’s needs. Ask yourself, “How can I change this activity so that this child can do it?”*

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

If you have red hair,
go to 1.
If you are wearing socks,
go to 2.
If you have more than one
brother or sister,
go to 3.
If you like milk, go to 4.
If you like broccoli,
go to 1.
If you don’t like
homework, go to 2.
If you can ride a bike, go
to 3.
If you like to draw,
go to 4.
If you are the oldest
child in your family,
go to 1.
If you are a boy, go to 2.
If you are good at math,
go to 3.
If you like ice cream,
go to 4.
If God loves you, come to
the center.

Celebrating God’s Grace **A**

Celebrate grace as being kind to one another as God is kind to us. Designate four corners (or areas) of your meeting space and number them 1, 2, 3, and 4. Invite the children to move to the appropriate corner if they identify with the prompt. Read each prompt, giving children time to move to the corner or stay in place. After they have played the game, invite ideas about how the prompts could have included more children. For example, the prompt, “If you have red hair . . .” could have been, “If you have hair . . .”

Encourage the children to name ways they can be kind to children who feel left out.

Praying God’s Grace **C L**

Help children think about kindness. Have the group stand in a circle, facing out. Ask the children to name some unkind things that people do to people who are different from them. After several answers, give the group the following directions:

- ▼ Without speaking, think about a time when you were unkind to someone who was different from you. (*pause*)
- ▼ Silently ask God to forgive you. (*pause*)
- ▼ Ask God to bless the person who was hurt by what you did. (*pause*)
- ▼ Repeat after me:

God, give me strength and courage /
to be kind and loving. Amen. /

- ▼ Turn around so you are facing into the circle. Repeat these words after me:

God, I am ready to follow you /
and to live in your ways. /



Say: “The Bible says to be kind to one another. We want to be kind to others because God is kind to us.” Open the Bible to Ephesians 4:32.

Ask the children what the word *kind* means. Invite them to name some ways people are kind to them and ways they are kind to people.

Encourage the children to tell how they can be kind. Can they help set the dinner table or unpack groceries? Could they hold a friend’s hand when he or she is afraid, play a game that someone asks them to play, or talk to a lonely, elderly neighbor?

Offering God’s Grace

LG

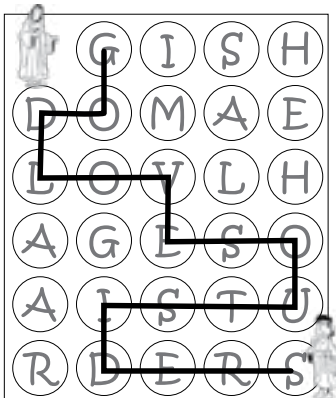
Brainstorm together ways the children can respond when someone is being excluded by a group. Tell the children they will make an “I will ‘knot’ let you down bracelet” to offer to another child.

Ask each child to choose two 12" lengths of yarn in different colors: one to represent a person they would like to give the bracelet to and one to represent themselves. Then lead the children in these steps:

- ▼ Tie the lengths together with a knot about 2" from one end.
- ▼ Tape the knotted end to a table and twist the yarn all the way to the other end.
- ▼ Gently pull the twisted yarn taut.
- ▼ Place a finger at the middle of the twisted yarn and bring both ends together.
- ▼ Let go of the middle and the yarn will twist together.

Encourage the children to give the grace bracelets to someone they will “‘knot’ let down.” Suggest that each child tie the ends together around his or her friend’s wrist after sharing the meaning of the bracelet.

GN 1 Solution: Ishmael, Hagar



Extra Activity

LB

Help the children show God’s kindness to Hagar and Ishmael by solving a puzzle. Distribute copies of **GN 1** and markers. Invite the children to help two people who felt left out find God’s promise to them by drawing one continuous line connecting the letters. (The letters spell “God loves outsiders.” If necessary, reveal the first word to the older children to give them a clue.)

When they have connected the letters in the phrase, fill the spaces below the puzzle with each remaining letter in order to find out who the two people were.

Help the children remember that, even though Hagar and Ishmael were left out—outsiders—God loved them. God loves everyone!

Wonder together how we can show kindness to people who feel left out.



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



Invite the children to gather in a circle. Sing “The Whole World Is in God’s Hands”—**SCM 16**. Ask the children what is in God’s hands (wind, waves, fish, birds, animals, people, the whole world!). Everything is in God’s hands because God loves all of creation. Ask the children how they plan to be kind and to share God’s love with those who are left out like Hagar and Ishmael this week.

Before the children leave, give them these words of sending and blessing: “Go into the world and be kind to others. May the grace of God help you.”



	G	I	S	H
D	O	M	A	E
L	O	V	L	H
A	G	E	S	O
A	I	S	T	U
R	D	E	R	S