



# Only Say the Word

**Goal:** To marvel at an example of great faith.

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Matthew 8:5-10, 13

A centurion was responsible for a military force of one hundred men. The position of the centurion was prestigious. They were quite well rewarded for their service and were given substantial pensions upon retirement. The centurion at Capernaum was a slave owner. As offensive as this may be to us, it was merely a part of life in biblical days. The centurion is presented as a caring, generous man, humble and unwilling to claim any special privilege from the itinerant teacher/healer. There was no pleading, no effort at persuasion, just a simple request for help from one recognized as able to offer it, if he chose to do so.

It is significant that Jesus never comes into contact with the slave. There are centuries of believers who have never actually come into contact with Jesus either, but who believe in his healing power. The Spirit of Christ effectively sustains the church and the faith of his followers living in another place and time.

### . . . In Your Children's Experiences

The children may question how Jesus healed the slave from a distance. They also may have questions about why some people are healed and others are not. Let them know that not all healing results in physical cure. Some people talk about experiences of healing through prayer that give a sense of peace or comfort. The children may not think about themselves as healers. Challenge them to begin to think of themselves as everyday healers, for example, through kind words, a smile, and so on.

### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

If you know of illness or a death in the family of one or more of your children, find some ways to help individuals talk about their experience. Talk to the family before the lesson to be sure to address specific concerns about healing and faith that they may have, or to avoid areas of sensitivity. Try to be clear in your own mind about your own feelings and thoughts on the relationship between healing and faith.

*Gracious God, may I be an instrument of your healing through my words and actions, offering hope to those in need. Amen.*

## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

[bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies](http://bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies)

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 9, 9a, 17, 25

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

white cloth

candle

red, gold, and gray cloth  
or ribbons

biblical costumes  
(optional), long strip of  
red cloth

## Responding

### Claiming SCM 9a

### Offering invited guest

### 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,  ) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

### Welcoming and Preparing

Play “Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord!”—**SCM 17**—as the children arrive. Greet the children by saying, “Christ is risen!” and prompt them to respond, “He is risen indeed!”

Ask the children to place a white cloth on the worship table. Note that the white cloth means the church is in the Easter season, which lasts fifty days. Invite the children to add a Bible and a candle to the table. Provide red, gold, and gray cloth or ribbons (the colors of the Roman centurions) for them to arrange or drape on the worship table and **SCM 9a** to be displayed on the worship table. If your church has a Roman soldier costume, add it to the table.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Ask for a volunteer to practice today’s story from **SCM 9**.

### Singing


Sing “Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord!”—**SCM 17**.

### Praying



Turn on the candle as a reminder of Jesus, the light of the world. Invite the children to echo your prayer, line by line:

God of grace, /  
lead us to walk in faith, /  
to live by faith, /  
and to have hearts filled with faith. /  
For the gift of faith we are grateful. /  
Amen. /

 *Use transition cues to give plenty of warning that a change is coming. Clear, tangible signals that are obvious help alleviate tensions. Consider using countdown numbers on a whiteboard.*

### Preparing to Hear the Story

Draw the children’s attention to the Roman centurion on **SCM 9a**. Offer a little bit of background information about Roman centurions:

- ▼ Centurions were officers who commanded 100 men.
- ▼ They wore large crests on their helmets. This allowed the soldiers to see them better in battle.



- ✎ They carried at least 90 pounds of armor and equipment and often had to march 20 miles a day.
- ✎ Centurions had good armor and weapons. Roman soldiers had armor made of strips of strong iron. They also had iron helmets. All of this iron armor was heavy, so they needed to be strong and in good shape. They also carried tall shields.
- ✎ Centurions were well trained and prepared for battle.
- ✎ Jewish people feared Roman soldiers, because the Romans occupied the Jewish land.

Imagine how centurions may have felt about the power they had. Imagine how the Jewish people may have felt when centurions came walking down their streets.



### Hearing the Story

A L

Invite a child to find Matthew 8 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship center. Ask for a volunteer to read **SCM 9**. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.”

Invite the children to do the corresponding motions when they hear the following words in the story:

- ✎ Centurion—stand tall with hands on their hips
- ✎ Jesus—reach out a helpful hand
- ✎ Disciples—do the motions indicated in the story (*stiffened, stunned, confused*)
- ✎ Faith—raise praying hands

Read the story again. Use your voice to portray the nervousness and then the bewilderment of the disciples, the humility of the centurion, and then the tenderness of Jesus.

### Reflecting on God’s Grace

L C

Have the children act out the story. Some possibilities for characters may be: a centurion, another soldier, Jesus, the sick servant, and a few disciples. Provide biblical costumes if the children enjoy using them. Use a long strip of red cloth to make a sash for the centurion. Encourage them to use the words in the story, but also to ad lib and create dialogue that feels natural to the story.

After acting out the story, engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- ✎ Was there anything in the story that made you curious or left you with questions?
- ✎ What do we learn from the centurion about what it means to have faith?
- ✎ How do you think the centurion came to have the faith that he had?
- ✎ What does this story teach us about Jesus?



### Singing

Play, sing, and dance to “Thank You, Jesus”—SCM 25.  
Turn off the candle.

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

### Claiming God’s Grace



Place **SCM 9a** on a table among the children. Invite one child to write the word *faith* somewhere on the poster. Wonder together about the ways the centurion had faith. Ask the children who has taught them to have faith. Be sure to offer your own story of someone who has led you to have faith.

Provide light-colored construction paper and markers or crayons. Encourage the children to draw pictures of someone who has taught them to have faith. They may include names, and sentences or words about what they have learned. Just as with the picture of the Roman centurion, have the children include the word *faith* somewhere on their pictures. Encourage children to share with one another who they have depicted and why. Display these posters of faithful people in your learning space or in a hallway where others may view them.

### Celebrating God’s Grace



Play a game to remember the story of the centurion and Jesus. In this twist on “Mother, May I,” one child is “Jesus” and stands at one end of your space, while the rest of the group lines up shoulder to shoulder as centurions at the other end. Use the following instructions to play the game:

- ▼ “Jesus” calls out the name of a child and then offers silly instructions on how that child should move forward (for example, 7 giant steps, 4 baby steps, 3 frog jumps, 6 criss-cross steps, 5 cyclone steps, 8 bunny hops, and so forth).
- ▼ After receiving instructions, rather than saying, “Mother, may I,” the called centurion says, “Only say the word,” in order to receive approval to move forward.
- ▼ Upon hearing that phrase, “Jesus” says, “Come to me.” The centurion completes the instructions that were given. If the centurion neglects to say the phrase, “Only say the word,” they return to the start line.
- ▼ Play until all centurions have reached “Jesus.”

**MS** *Make sure students with mobility issues are included in all activities. Find ways to adapt activities to ensure all are able to fully participate, such as raising arms up and down instead of jumping.*



## Offering God's Grace

L C B

*Before the session, invite your pastor or church member who can share stories of faithful people in your congregation. Ask this person to come with several stories. Perhaps a story is about a Sunday school teacher or a person who served in a local mission for many years. Maybe there is a story about a missionary or a person who faced a challenge in their life. Encourage your guest to bring any pictures or props that may help tell their stories.*

As an offering, the children will share the story of the centurion and Jesus, as well as be offered stories in return—stories of faithful people in your own congregation. Before your visitor arrives, have the children practice telling the story of the centurion and Jesus. Encourage everyone to share a part of the story.

Welcome your visitor and tell them that the children have heard the story of a man of great faith, a centurion who went to Jesus to ask for help. Have the children tell the story of the centurion and Jesus to your guest.

Then tell the children that your guest has some stories about some faithful people from your own congregation to tell them. Invite your guest to share their stories. Encourage children to ask questions as they connect with the stories being shared. Make sure the children express gratitude to the guest for their visit. Suggest that the children share the stories they heard about people of faith in your congregation with their families.

## Extra Activity

LD

Hand out copies of GN 1. Invite the children to use this page to imagine Jesus' expression as he is amazed by the centurion's faith, or any example of amazing faith. Have the children use the letters down the page—F, A, I, T, H—to write a word or phrase beginning with each letter that reminds them of faith. These could be the name of a person, an example of faith, or a prayer for faith. Let them enjoy coloring the page as they wish.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://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, and lead them in cleaning up the worship space.

Encourage children to retell the story of the centurion's great faith with their families.

If you hosted a visitor as part of "Offering God's Grace," lead children in writing a thank-you note to send them.

Gather in a circle, turn to the child on your right, and offer this benediction over them, "(Name), go in faith; Jesus is with you." Encourage that child to turn to the child on their right and repeat the same benediction. Continue around the circle until the child on your left offers the benediction over you.



