



The Two Houses

Goal: To make a strong foundation for our lives by doing what Jesus taught.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

... In Matthew 7:24-29

When you look at this story about the building of two houses, you will see that it comes right after the Sermon on the Mount and immediately follows Jesus' teaching about prayer and fasting, seeing, judging, and worrying about what's important. Jesus asks those who are following him to think about their lives and how they will put into practice what they have been hearing him say.

Jesus describes the two builders, one who built a house on rock and one who built a house on sand. When the storms came, the house of the wise builder survived while the house of the foolish builder was destroyed. And we are left to think about what it means.

What kind of house are you building in response to Jesus' teaching? Is it a house that is built on hospitality and love for others, a house where there is justice and mercy for all? Or is it a house built on judgment and worry, stocked with treasures?

With this parable, Jesus invites the hearers to consider a different way of living. He is challenging his hearers then and now to let his teachings take shape in the ways that we construct our lives. A life lived in grace and gratitude and thanks to God is surely built on a strong foundation.

... In Your Children's Experiences

Some of your children may have had the experience of building a house on the sand at the beach and coming back the next morning to discover it had been transformed or removed by the tides. In telling this story of the two builders, children will be able to understand how important it was for Jesus to keep helping the people remember what was important. Some have said that this story summarizes the earlier teaching in Matthew 5 of what it means to be blessed. Helping children be aware of how they live their lives in response to God's gracious love is a process of building, a little bit each day. The good news is that we do this all our lives until we take our last breath.

... In Your Relationships with the Children

This story of the two builders is concrete and abstract at the same time, so it can work on several levels with younger and older children. Younger children will quickly grasp the story about the two builders, one wise and one foolish, and what happened when the storms came. The story you will tell the children will remind them that when they follow Jesus' way of love, they build a strong life. Both younger and older children will be able to talk about ways they can follow Jesus' way of love so they will build a strong life.

God of wisdom, forgive my foolish ways. Help me build a strong foundation of faith for your children. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies
bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i-iv, 13, 22, 23

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

green cloth

candle

mountain mural from
Winter 9

several sets of building
blocks

paper towel tube

Responding

Celebrating

15 cups (same size and
shape) per pair or small
group, tennis ball or
other small ball

Praying

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

Extra

copies of **GN 2**

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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

Play “I Am the Salt of the Earth” as the children arrive.

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

Ask them to create a worship space, using a green cloth, a Bible, and candle. Hang the mountain mural in the worship space. Invite a child to write the word *wise* on the mural. Have another child add the word *foolish*.

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 reading today’s Scripture passage.

As the group completes creating the space, form pairs. Give each pair a set of building blocks. Tell the children that, when you say, “Go!” they are to build the tallest tower possible. After the towers are built, wonder what the most important part of a building is. Say that any building needs the right kind of base, called a *foundation*.

Singing

Play “Thank You, God, for Loving Me”—**SCM 23**—and let children listen, sing together, and move gently as they sing.

Praying

Turn on the candle, reminding the children that the light represents Jesus the Christ and the light he brings into the world. Pray:

Loving God, open our hearts and minds for the message you have for us today. Help us to build our lives on the sturdy foundation of your grace. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

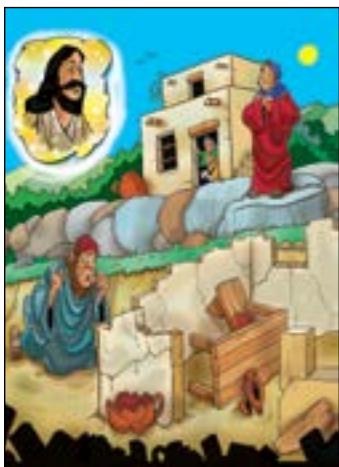
T *Transition times can be more frustrating to children if they have to wait. Be prepared to move to the next activity and alert children of upcoming changes. If children will need to wait, provide a simple task, such as standing on one foot or lining up by height, to occupy the time and lessen the frustration.*



Preparing to Hear the Story C

Tell the children that, if we listen to Jesus, we will learn how to live good lives. Point to the word *wise*. Ask the children what this word means (*having experience, knowledge, or good judgment*). Share that we are wise when we live the way Jesus wants us to live.

Point to the word *foolish*. Ask the children what this word means (*lacking good sense or judgment*). We are foolish when we don't do what Jesus wants us to.



Hearing the Story C L

Invite a child to find Matthew 7 in the Bible. Have a volunteer read aloud Matthew 7:24-29. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible on the worship table.

Provide crayons and paper. Invite the children to draw a house that they would like to build while you tell the story from **SCM 13**.

Invite the children to share the houses that they drew.

Reflecting on God's Grace C

Demonstrate foolishness and wisdom. Set the paper towel tube upright on the table, like a tower. Ask a volunteer to blow it over. Note how it falls easily. Say that the tower has a weak foundation, a decision Jesus called foolish. Invite the children to name other decisions that are foolish (*disobeying parents, playing video games before homework*).

Challenge the children to come up with ideas on how to help the tower stay standing. Ideas might include using play dough to make a base for the tower or using heavier objects, such as books, to support the tower around its base. After reinforcing the base, ask a volunteer to blow the tower over. It shouldn't move. Point out that the tower now has a strong foundation.

Recall the stories of the past several sessions that have taken place on the mountain and what Jesus taught (*the Beatitudes, salt and light, do not worry, do not judge others*). Comment that, when we do what Jesus says, we are wise. Invite the children to name actions that are wise.

Say that you and the children are building a strong foundation by learning about Jesus and doing what he asks us to do.

Have the children cut out the houses they drew and glue them to the mountain. Comment that the houses are now on a strong foundation.

Singing

Sing "Jesus Bids Us Shine"—**SCM 22**. Invite the children to come up with different movements for the words.

Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.

Claiming God's Grace

Invite the children to decide between wise and foolish choices.

Designate one area of the room as “wise” and another as “foolish.”

Read the following sentences one at a time. Ask the children to move to the area of the room they think best describes each behavior. Invite them to say why they chose the way they did.

- Tommy thanks his mother when she prepares a snack for him.
- Jessica picks up plastic bottles and throws them in the recycle bin.
- Henry talks back to his teacher using angry words.
- Carlos defends his sister against the bully who pushed her down.
- Marci gossips about her classmates all the time.
- Ella hides her report card from her mother and father.

Ask the children to think of other examples of wise and foolish behavior. Offer that you seek to be wise in your life by reading and following Jesus’ teachings. Give an example of how you have listened to and followed Jesus when making a decision. Invite the children to give some examples.

 *Activities that encourage teamwork and self-reliance model qualities of good leadership.*



Celebrating God's Grace

Have the children form pairs or small groups. Give 15 cups to each pair or group. Tell them that they will be given two tasks, and they are to make their own decisions about how to accomplish them. For both tasks, allow time for the pairs to talk about how to proceed.

Task 1: Build the tallest tower they can. Have them count how many cups tall it is before it falls. One child from each pair can roll a ball to the tower (if it is still standing). Note that the tower falls pretty easily because it does not have a sturdy base.

Task 2: Build the strongest tower. (This tower should have more cups on the bottom, forming a stronger base.) Have them count how many cups tall this tower is. One child from each pair can roll the ball to the tower (if it is still standing). Note that the tower may move a bit, and possibly a cup or two will fall, but with its sturdier base, much of the tower should remain. Discuss:

- I wonder why it's important to lay down firm foundations in life.
- What kinds of things form foundations in our lives?



- What kinds of things give us support and help us stay “grounded” during difficult times? (*friends, family, God’s love, church*)
- I wonder how we can be supportive foundations to each other.

Praying God’s Grace

C LD

Hand out copies of **GN 1** and invite the children to make a wise house to focus their time of prayer. Read through the sections of the house together. Have them write or draw pictures in the sections of the house. Encourage the children to write or draw quietly while listening to “Why Should I Feel Discouraged.”

When the children have finished, look at all the houses and comment that a strong foundation for our lives is built by doing what Jesus taught, and say, “Amen.”

Extra Activity

B

Jesus tells his disciples that anyone who hears his teaching and follows God’s way will build a strong foundation for life. He also says that whoever hears his teaching and does not follow God’s way will have a foundation that falls away. This experiment will remind the children of the importance of listening to Jesus’ teaching. Invite a volunteer to read the last three paragraphs of the story.

Hand out copies of **GN 2** and help the children cut out the shapes. Have the children decorate the large shape. Show the children how to make a narrow cone by wrapping the shape until the edge meets the star. Secure the cone with tape. Have the children draw a face on the circle and tape or glue it to the tip of the cone to make a person.

Give the children a piece of tan construction paper to represent sand. Have them put their cone person on it and blow. The person should fall over fairly easily. Explain that this is like the foolish person who does not follow Jesus’ teaching.

Challenge the children to find a strong foundation for the person. Have them try blowing and experimenting until they have made a strong foundation.



B *Providing opportunities for children to play games can be fun. However, it can also provide opportunities for unwanted behavior such as bullying or excluding children. Help children focus on respecting others and being polite.*



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite the children to help clean up the space.

Turn on the candle. Gather around it, as you tell the children that Lent, the forty days leading to Easter, will begin this week on Ash Wednesday. Invite the children to name what they will remember most from today's story. Ask them to name something they will do to act in ways that follow Jesus' ways this week.

Read the charge below. Tell the children that, when you say, "Let us turn," they may turn in any direction they choose.



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).

Jesus changes people who love him.

When Jesus changes us, he calls us to do God's work.

Let us turn . . . toward kindness.

Let us turn . . . toward generosity.

Let us turn . . . toward helping others.

Let us turn . . . toward prayer.

Let us turn . . . toward Jesus.

And let all God's children say, Amen!

Send the children with these words: "Hear Jesus' words and act on them, and you will be wise, building a solid foundation for your life."

I will thank God by ...

God, help me be wise by ...

God, help me be wise by ...

My foundation is made of ...

