



# The Spirit in Action

**Goal: To follow God's Spirit as we welcome and include others.**

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Acts 8:26-40

Philip was led by God's Spirit to encounter an Ethiopian official (a Gentile) who was in his chariot, reading a scroll of the writings of Isaiah. Then something very special happened.

The official was returning home from worshiping in Jerusalem. Philip asked if he understood what he was reading (v. 30). The official said he needed someone to guide him (v. 31). The passage spoke of "like a sheep he was led to the slaughter" and one who "in his humiliation justice was denied him" (vv. 32, 33). When the official asked who this referred to, Philip started with this Scripture and "proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus" (v. 35). Philip's words were so persuasive that the official wanted to be baptized in the water they were passing. Philip baptized him and was gone.

Philip interpreted the Scripture (Isaiah 53:7-12) as referring to Jesus, who sacrificed his life for the forgiveness of sin. This good news led to the official's desire to be baptized.

What a grace-filled experience for the official and for Philip! God sent Philip to interpret the Scriptures, and this led the official to desire a new life. How grateful they must have been!

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

Stories in Acts help us see how the early church grew, person by person, as stories about Jesus were shared. In this story, Philip met the Ethiopian official and offered to help him understand what he was reading from the book of Isaiah. In that offer to help, a relationship was built between two very different people. The Ethiopian listened to and trusted the words of Philip, and Philip baptized a man who was not Jewish. Children know and understand being different. They also are learning what it means to help someone else by listening. This story provides the chance to help them know that God's Spirit is alive and present when we help someone else and when we accept those who are different.

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

Young children are good at asking questions. They are curious about the world around them. When children ask questions, they are seeking the knowledge they want and need to grow and learn. Much like Philip was for the Ethiopian, you can be present when the children encounter Bible stories and matters of faith and the church about which they are curious.

As you think about this story and the children in your class, try to recall examples of children helping each other that you have witnessed with your children or times when they have related to someone who is different than they are. One way to close this session would be to help them respond to this statement: "God's Spirit is alive when we . . ."

*Holy Spirit, be present with the children and me.  
Inspire us to love Jesus Christ. Amen.*



## Supplies

Music & Melodies  
(MM) 2023-2024

Stories, Colors & More  
(SCM) i-iv, 3, 15, 18

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

clear bowl of water

## Responding

### Celebrating

internet-connected  
device

### 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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep.

### Welcoming and Preparing

**M** **LG**

Greet the children by name and with the words “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” Smile and acknowledge your pleasure in seeing them.

Invite the children to help prepare the worship space. Ask the children to include a Bible bookmarked at Isaiah 53, a candle, a green cloth, and a bowl of water.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Invite volunteers to practice the Scripture reading for today.

Meeting new people can be quite easy for some and anxiety-producing for others. Invite the children to practice introducing themselves to one another. Form pairs or groups of three and have the children talk for a minute or two. Tell them to find out the other person’s name and an interesting fact about them. Then gather and have the children introduce one another to the group. Tell the children that, in today’s story, one of Jesus’ disciples, Philip, meets someone and has a very interesting conversation with a most surprising outcome.

### Singing

Gather around the worship table. Invite the children to name people, places, and things for which they thank and praise God. Invite them to sing a song of commitment to God.

Play “Praise God, Praise God”—**MM 7**; **SCM 15**—and encourage the children to sing.

### Praying

Turn on the candle, reminding the children that the light represents Jesus the Christ and the light he brings into the world. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Be with us today, God. /  
 Quiet our minds so we can hear your voice. /  
 Open our hearts so we can receive your love. /  
 Create in us grateful hearts that care for your world. /  
 In Jesus’ name. /  
 Amen. /



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

### Preparing to Hear the Story **F**

Ask the children to imagine that you must decide who is eligible for membership in a special club. You have chosen to make that decision based on the color of the clothing they are wearing. For example, anyone who is wearing the color red on something visible may be selected. Ask:

- ▼ If you are not wearing something red, how do you feel about my decision?
- ▼ If you are wearing something red, how do you feel about my decision?

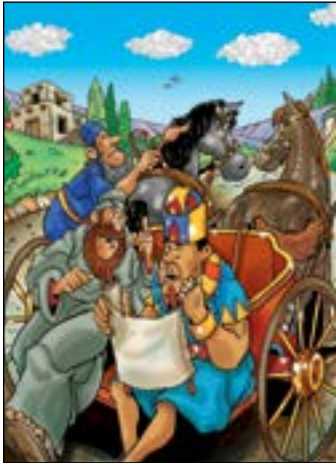
Explain that the people who are not wearing red have been excluded because they are not wearing the right color. Wonder together how people are excluded or left out today based on something they cannot change.

Invite the children to listen for someone who was excluded and then welcomed in the Bible story.

### Hearing the Story **C**

Invite one of the children to find Acts 8 in the Bible. Have a couple of volunteers read Acts 8:26–40. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible on the table.

Form pairs. In each pair, one child will be Philip and the other child will be the Ethiopian official. Give the Ethiopian officials scrolls (sheets of paper rolled up). Set up two rows of two chairs facing forward. Invite the children to imagine the chairs are a chariot. Read the story again using **SCM 3**, or play the story audio, and pause when necessary as one pair at a time acts it out, repeating their lines after you.



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](http://www.pcusastore.com).

### Reflecting on God’s Grace

Engage the children in conversation using the following questions, and encourage them to ask some of their own:

- ▼ Why do you think Philip did what the angel and the Spirit told him?
- ▼ How do you think the Ethiopian official and Philip understood each other?
- ▼ I wonder why the Ethiopian official wanted to be baptized.
- ▼ I wonder how you might help others understand each other.



### Singing

Sing “I’m Gonna Sing When the Spirit Says Sing”—**MM 19**; **SCM 18**—and celebrate how the Holy Spirit moves us to act in the world. Invite children to add verses reflecting the actions in the story or ways that the Spirit moves them to act.

Turn off the candle.

**T** *For children who struggle with transitions, consider a quick physical activity—such as doing chair push-ups, squeezing hands together, and stretching—before story time.*

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.

### Claiming God’s Grace



Role plays are an effective way for children to practice including others who might not feel welcomed. Select one or more of these scenarios for the children to use or create your own:

- ▼ A mother and child are standing in the doorway to your church sanctuary. They look uncomfortable and seem hesitant to enter. What do you do?
- ▼ A young woman is standing outside the church as your family arrives. She looks uncertain about going into the building. What do you do?
- ▼ When you get to your meeting space, a new boy is there. The adult leader says, “This is Safir. He and his family have just come to our town. He speaks little English. Please help him feel at home with us.” What do you do?

After their role plays, talk about ways to include everyone, no matter where they come from or what age they are, in your church.



### Celebrating God’s Grace



Ask the children if they have heard a parent, caregiver, or grandparent say, “You sound like a broken record.” Then ask if they understood what that meant. If needed, share with them that it means to say the same thing over and over again. The saying came from vinyl records that, when scratched or “broken,” can play the same recorded segment repeatedly. Tell the children that, just like them, the Ethiopian knew some of the words he read over and over, but he needed someone to help him understand what they meant.

Watch the YouTube video based on Acts 8:26–40 “Philip and the Ethiopian” ([bit.ly/PhilipAndTheEthiopian](https://bit.ly/PhilipAndTheEthiopian), 1:47). Discuss the following questions:

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.

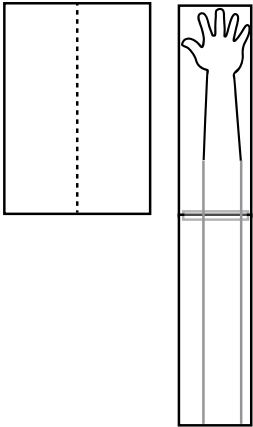


- How did Philip meet the Ethiopian?
- What was the Ethiopian reading?
- What did Philip ask the Ethiopian?
- How did Philip help the Ethiopian?

### Praying God's Grace C

If Philip and the Ethiopian official had a theme song, it might be "I'm Gonna Sing When the Spirit Says Sing"—**MM 19; SCM 18**. Sing it together. Ask:

- How did Philip and the Ethiopian official live the words of this song?
- How might you live the words of this song?



Invite the children to name or think of ways they will live so God can use them in the coming week. Invite children to add verses as a sung prayer, reflecting the actions in the story or ways that the Spirit moves them to act today.

### Offering God's Grace LG

The children can offer a welcome poster to your church. Invite each child to select a color of construction paper. Instruct the children to fold the construction paper lengthwise. Have them cut along the fold, then tape the two pieces together along a short end to form a long, narrow rectangle. At one end, have them trace their hand and forearm. Show how to continue the lines of the forearm down the length of the paper (see diagram in sidebar). Have them cut out the long arms and hands and invite them to decorate their cutouts with patterns, doodles, and shapes.

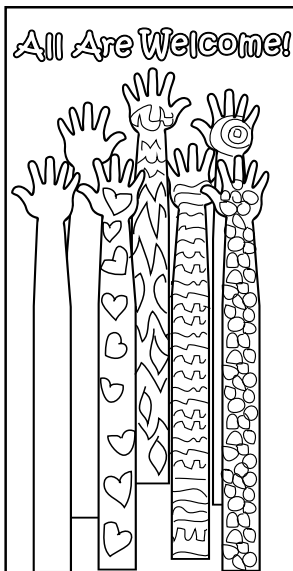
Prepare a 3-foot length of mural paper. As the children finish the colorful arms, invite them to glue their cutouts to the mural paper. Assign each child one or more letters of the title: ALL ARE WELCOME. Have them draw, decorate, cut out, and glue their assigned letters to make the title for the poster. Encourage them to make letters approximately the size of their palm so that none is too small or too big.

Find a place to display the poster for all to see.

### Extra Activity C

Tell the children that Philip helped spread the good news about Jesus by helping the Ethiopian man and baptizing him. Tell them that one way we can welcome others is to share stories with everyone.

Hand out copies of **GN 1** and have the children color the story pictures. While they work, ask volunteers to recall the different parts of the story, telling it in their own words. Have the children cut out the rectangle and fold it in half both ways to create a mini book.





Encourage the children to use the mini book to tell friends about the story of the two men and how the Holy Spirit worked to spread the good news about Jesus.

## LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Have the children join together in a circle. Ask the children to think of the people who have told them the story of Jesus and offer a personal word of thanks for them.

Play “Prayer Music”—**MM 31**—as they pray silently. After a few moments, close with a simple prayer:

Thank you, God, for Philip and all the first friends of Jesus who told his story. Thank you for the Ethiopian official who wanted to be baptized and to follow Jesus. Thank you for all the people who told us about Jesus so we could believe in him and follow him. Amen.

Have children cross their right arm over their left so their right hand holds the left hand of the person beside them. Have them repeat the following blessing after you:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, /  
the love of God, /  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit /  
be with us all. /  
Amen. /

Then all raise their right arm over their head and turn clockwise to their right.

Announce that, now that everyone in the circle is facing outward, we are ready to go out and serve Jesus in the world by finding ways to tell others about his grace and love.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads). Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).



# The Spirit in Action

based on Acts 8:26-40

