



# Searching for God

**Goal:** To ponder the mystery of God—more than we can understand and always with us.

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Acts 17:22-31

When Paul was in Athens, he debated with Greek philosophers. Paul had seen the idols all around the city and stood in front of a group to tell about his Christian faith. He said that, with all the religious sites, the people must be very religious. They worshiped many gods and even had an altar “To an unknown god” (v. 23). The people worshiped this god even though they did not know who this god was!

Then Paul told them about the true God. God created the universe and all that is in it. This God is “Lord of heaven and earth” who “does not live in shrines made by human hands” (v. 24). Using the language of Greek poets, Paul affirmed that it is in the true God that “we live and move and have our being,” and we are God’s “offspring” (v. 28).

There is a table grace: “God is great; God is good, and we thank God for our food.” The God we worship and serve is both “great”—mysterious, far beyond us—and “good”—the God who loves us in Jesus Christ. We praise God for God’s grace to us, and we love God gratefully for always being with us.

### . . . In Your Children’s Experiences

On warm summer evenings, it was fun to play hide and seek with other children in the neighborhood. Of course, the goal was to not be found, but in reality you wanted to be found before it got dark and you were left outside alone.

Children can understand that God does not hide from us. They can grasp that God doesn’t live in idols that humans make. They can also understand that teachers, pastors, and family members all work together to help children learn about Jesus and how we can live our lives as he would want us to do.

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

It is always interesting to invite children to engage the biblical story with wondering questions. For example, “Where do you think God lives?” would be a great question to pose as you begin to tell them this story of Paul’s experience with the people who lived in Athens. The story of Acts 17 today reminds us to remember how big God is and how close God can be. These are not concepts easily understood by children or adults. As you prepare to teach this session, remember that children learn about God as they experience the love and care of people in the church, people like you. Thanks be to God!

*O great I Am, be ever near to me and those I love.  
In Jesus’ name. Amen.*



## Supplies

**Music & Melodies**  
(MM) 2023–2024

**Stories, Colors & More**  
(SCM) i–iv, 9, 26

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

*Growing in God's Love:  
A Story Bible*, edited by  
Elizabeth F. Caldwell  
and Carol A. Wehrheim  
(Flyaway Books, 2018)

## Responding

### Claiming

equal amounts of salt  
and water

### Celebrating

SCM 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d

### Praying

streamers

### Extra

card-stock 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.

“Claiming God’s Grace” and “Praying God’s Grace” require more prep.

### Welcoming and Preparing

**LG** **M**

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.

As children arrive, invite them to help prepare the worship space. Ask the children to include a Bible, a candle, and a green cloth.

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

Provide the children with a variety of art supplies. Encourage them to draw or create a representation of a place—such as a church, their room, or a place in nature—where they might search for and find God. Play soft music as the children create. Display and affirm all the children’s creations.

### Singing

**T**

Gather around the worship table. Remind the children that Jesus wants us to share the good news of God’s love and compassion with the whole world. Play, listen to, and sing “God’s Love for Us Is Truly Amazing (El amor de Dios es maravilloso)”—**MM 29**; **SCM 26**—to celebrate sharing God’s love with the world.

### Praying

**L**

Turn on the candle, reminding the children that the light represents Jesus the Christ and the light he brings into the world. Invite everyone to say an echo prayer:

Dear God, /  
thank you for being with us today. /  
Tell us something new about you. /  
We are ready to listen. /  
Amen. /

**L** *Children who struggle with attention may have difficulty during story time. To help with focus and comprehension, suggest listening prompts, engage them with movement, or provide a specific item within the story picture to find.*



### Preparing to Hear the Story C

Give the children an opportunity to tell about the art they created earlier in the session. Discuss:

- ▼ Where is God for you?
- ▼ Where can you talk to God?
- ▼ Where can you listen to God?

Comment that God is in all those places and more. God is right here, waiting to hear from us and glad we are here to learn more about Jesus.

Explain that the Bible story is about Paul revealing the identity of the one God by telling others about Jesus.



### Hearing the Story L MS

Invite one of the children to find Acts 17 in the Bible. Have a volunteer read Acts 17:22-31. 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.

Read the story again using **SCM 9** or listen to the story audio. Use the following prompts to have children become part of the story.

- ▼ When you get to the third paragraph, invite the children to strike a pose like a statue and hold the pose while you continue to read.
- ▼ When Paul says, “I know who this God is,” have the children release their pose, put their hands by their mouth, and shout “Who?” Then hold that pose.
- ▼ When you say, “We are all God’s children,” have the children give themselves a hug and return to their place.

### Reflecting on God’s Grace

Comment that people wonder and have questions about who God is, where God is, and what God is like. Suggest that the Bible tells us a lot about God, but sometimes it uses poetic language or word pictures to describe God.

Choose one of the following stories in *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* to read to the children: “What Is God’s Name?” (p. 170), “What Is God Like?” (p. 172), “How Close Is God?” (p. 174), or “Where Does God Live?” (p. 176). Wonder with the children what the story tells them about God.

Option: If you have a large group and at least four copies of *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*, form four groups and have each group read a story and report back to the large group.



## Singing

SD

Sing “God’s Love for Us Is Truly Amazing (El amor de Dios es maravilloso)”—**MM 29; SCM 26**. Add rhythm instruments and encourage the children to sing loudly and with passion.

Turn off the candle.

**SD** *Some children with sensory issues have difficulties with sound, particularly loud sounds. These sounds may be painful or overwhelming. Help these children feel more comfortable by providing advance warning and letting them select or distribute the instruments.*

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.



### Claiming God’s Grace

TD

Remind the children that the people of Athens worshiped an unknown god. Paul revealed the unknown God by presenting the good news about Jesus.

Help the children make an invisible message. Stir together equal amounts of salt and water (about 1 cup of each for the entire group). Have the children decide on a message—it could be a symbol (a fish or cross) or words (We belong to God). Dip a paintbrush in the salt-water mixture and outline the symbol and/or words on a piece of paper. As the salt-water mixture dries, the outline becomes almost invisible. When completely dry, use a pencil to lightly rub over the entire sheet of paper. The outline will appear. Talk about how Paul’s words about Jesus made the unknown god known. Wonder how the children can make God known by talking about Jesus.

### Celebrating God’s Grace

VI M

Post or show the images on **SCM 9a, 9b, 9c, and 9d**. Invite the children to identify what they see in the ocean, on land, in the air, and from the universe. Encourage the children to wonder about the things they can see and know and the things they cannot see or may never know. Wonder together about the vastness and mystery of all God’s creation.

Give the children a physical image of the vastness of God and the nearness of God. Invite the children to stretch their arms as far as they can. Say, “God’s love and grace are farther than we can stretch.”

Ask the children to join hands with another person, and another, and another to make a big chain of children and leaders. Say, “God’s love and grace are as near as another person and as far as all the people connected across the world.”



While the children continue to hold hands, invite them to say the chant, beginning softly and getting louder with each repetition:

God is mystery that is with us.  
God is mystery that is with us.  
God is mystery that is with us!  
Thank you, God!



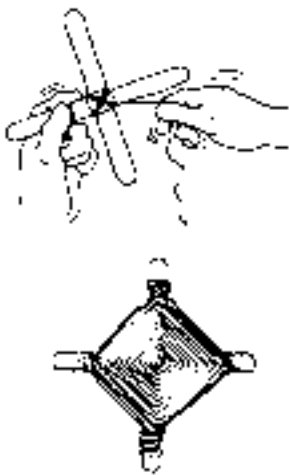
### Praying God's Grace



Explore prayerful movement in response to God's glory. Play several pieces of music, such as "Sing Thanks to God"—**MM 23**—and "Thank You"—**MM 26**. Invite children to explore the ways their bodies can move to music. Distribute streamers for the children to wave while they dance. Then suggest that the children move with joy to the grace of God that is always with them.

**MS** *Make sure children with mobility issues are included in all activities. Find ways to adapt activities to ensure all are able to fully participate, such as having all the children dance in chairs or raise arms up and down.*

*Ojos de Dios*, or God's eyes, are commonly made by the Huichol Indians of Mexico. They symbolize the loving eye of God.



### Offering God's Grace

Paul taught the Athenians that God is greater than anything humans can see or make. He also taught them that, as much as we are searching for God, God is very near. The God's eye the children will make will remind them that God is near, God is watching after us, and God is eager to be close to each of us.

You may need to help younger children get started.

Distribute two craft sticks and two-foot lengths of two to three colors of yarn to each child. Cross the sticks in the center. Tie a piece of yarn around both sticks. The knot goes in the back of the God's eye. Loop the yarn around one stick. Loop it around the next stick and pull the yarn tight. Go around in a circle, looping the yarn around each stick. Work your way from the center, around and around, until you get near the end of the sticks.

As you loop the yarn, remind yourself, "Around and under, around and under." When you want to change colors, cut the yarn and tie the new color onto the old color. Keep looping. Use colors to design a beautiful God's eye.

Invite the children to make two eyes, one to keep and one to give away. Encourage them to think of someone who could be encouraged to know that God's love and grace are always present.



### Extra Activity

Help the children share the news that God is all around us by making glasses.

Have markers, crayons, and other craft supplies such as stickers or glitter and glue available. Hand out copies of **GN 1** and invite the children to decorate both sets of glasses before cutting them out. Help them poke a hole in the center of each lens, then cut each out. Cut out the temples (or stems) and adjust the length before securing with tape or glue at the stars. Fold at each of the dotted lines, temple connection and bridge of the nose.

Have the children try their glasses on and look for God in all they see. Invite them to share the other pair with a friend or family member.



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).

### LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Hold the end of a ball of yarn and toss it across the circle while you say, “Go with joy and tell someone about Jesus!” Have the child who catches it hold the yarn and toss the ball to someone else while saying the words. Continue until everyone is holding the yarn, creating a web across the circle. Pray aloud:

God, help us remember that you are always with us. Help us remember Paul and his joy and courage in telling the story of Jesus. Help us remember that you are always with us and help us tell the good news too! Amen.

Bless each child as they leave, saying, “(Name), go out to share the love and grace of Jesus with everyone you meet.”

