



Choose This Day Whom You Will Serve

Goal: To make a choice to love and serve God.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Joshua 24:14-28

The people of Israel are now residents of Canaan. The conquest is complete. The land has been divided among the tribes. The people gather at Shechem, thirty miles north of Jebus, which would later be called Jerusalem. Joshua leads the people in a covenant renewal ceremony with God. The people have a free choice as to whether they worship God or the local gods. Despite Moses' teaching the people that there was only one God, the Israelites at this stage had a concept of territorial gods. That means, while they confessed that the Lord (YHWH) was the God of Israel, they also believed that the other nations had their own gods who were equally real. Influenced by these other nations around them, the Israelites were inclined to practice *syncretism*, which is the mixture of belief systems. So they worshiped the Lord, but they wanted to include the worship of other nations' gods with their worship of the Lord.

Joshua confronts this thinking directly. He tells them that the worship of the Lord and the worship of idols is an either/or proposition, not a both/and (24:14). For Joshua, this is a life-or-death decision. God's grace invites the people to choose this day whom they would serve. Joshua and his household elect to serve God (v. 15). The people choose to serve God also.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

For the younger children, choosing to love and serve God may mean simply going to church and treating others with kindness and compassion. The older children, however, may realize how difficult making important decisions can be. They may be sensitive to pressures to act in ways that would be at odds with their faith. Some may be more apt to choose the way of least resistance and will need encouragement to live according to faith values.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Think about your role in contributing to the faith of your children. How do you feel knowing that you are playing a role in encouraging them to love God and to live in God's way? Introduce Joshua as an important leader for God's people who called them to make important decisions. Brainstorm ways they can be like Joshua and show their love for God in the ways they serve God. They can offer their skills to the church. Make a list of their skills and find ways to offer them.

*Gracious God, help me choose to follow you each day and
model my commitment to love and serve you. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2022–2023

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 5, 16, 24

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

green cloth

candle

large rock

Responding

Claiming

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

Celebrating

beach ball

Praying

plastic disposable
tablecloth, shaving
cream, towels or wet
wipes

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, **LG T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

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

Welcoming and Preparing

LG A C L T

Greet the children by name and with the words “The grace of Christ be with you.” Prompt the children to respond with the same words.

Invite children to help set the scene. Provide a Bible, a green cloth, a candle, a large rock, and a long piece of mural paper. Invite a child to draw a river through the center of the paper vertically. Encourage all of the children to help draw a desert scene to one side of the river. Leave the other side blank for “Hearing the Story.” Display the mural in the worship space. As children create the mural, lead in discussion about what it means to “serve God.” Wonder together what kinds of choices we make if we choose to serve God. Are there specific things we do or don’t do if we serve God?

Ask a few children to help prepare any “Responding in Gratitude” activities you may be doing today. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Today’s Scripture passage is lengthy. Decide if you will have volunteers read it or use **SCM 5**. Ask for several volunteers to practice the reading.

Singing

SD

Listen to “God Forgives”—**MM 4; SCM 16**. Form a circle by holding hands or joining elbows. Play the song again and have the children sing along as they sway to the music.

Praying

L

Wonder aloud how God must feel when we make choices that reflect our love for God. Accept their responses. Wonder, too, if there are times or places when it is more difficult to choose to serve and love God. After children have responded, suggest that they breathe deeply and quietly for a moment. Turn on the candle. Pray:

God of grace, your love and faithfulness never end. Give us faithful hearts. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

T *Activity during times of transition can lend focus to children. Challenge them to lift one foot and balance. See how long they can stand on that foot, and then tell them to switch feet.*



Preparing to Hear the Story

B MS L

Invite children to stand in the center of your gathering space. Offer a variety of “choices” as you point to opposite sides of the room, inviting them to move to the side of the room that reflects their choice (for example: move to the left wall if you choose chocolate, to the right wall if you choose vanilla). Use the following and make up your own:

- ▼ Chocolate . . . Vanilla
- ▼ Winter . . . Summer
- ▼ Books . . . Video Games
- ▼ White Milk . . . Chocolate Milk
- ▼ Dogs . . . Cats

Comment about the number of choices we make in a day, and invite children to call out some of the choices they have made already today. Encourage them to listen to the choice Joshua encourages in today’s story.

Hearing the Story

LG L

Invite a child to find Joshua 24:14–28 or **SCM 5**. 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 in the worship area.

Read the story again using **SCM 5** or listen to the story audio. Invite children to draw a neighborhood of homes all across the other side of the river on the mural paper. From each home they draw, ask them to add a speech bubble coming up from the house that includes the words “We will serve God,” as though the people in each house are making that promise.

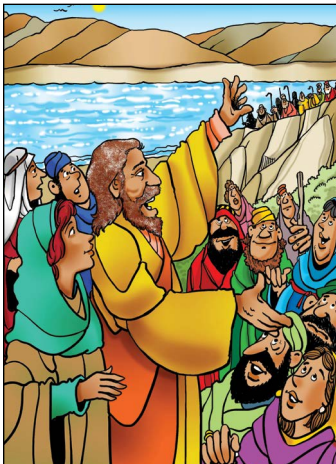
Reflecting on God’s Grace

C L

Re-read the last sentence of the story and ask children to imagine what God’s people must have thought each time they saw the large stone. Invite children to recall what would, or does, help them to remember their choice to love and serve God. Encourage their responses and then ask them to include a drawing of their responses on one of the houses on the mural they created.

Engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- ▼ What did you like best about this story?
- ▼ What did it make you wonder about?
- ▼ What does this story tell you about God’s people?
- ▼ What do we learn about being faithful from this story?



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.



Singing

Play, listen, and dance to “Thank You, God, for Loving Me”—**MM 25; SCM 24.**

Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God’s Grace



Re-read the paragraph from the story that begins “Joshua challenged the people. . . .” Identify together Joshua’s challenge and his commitment. Notice together that Joshua didn’t just make a promise for himself, but for his family as well.

Provide copies of **GN 1** and craft supplies. Encourage children to create a door hanger and include on it words that affirm their promise to love and serve God. Encourage older children to help younger children with spelling. Caution them that, once the door hanger is folded, they will see just one side at a time.

When the design is completed, have the children fold the paper along the dotted line and use glue sticks to secure sides together. Cut along the solid line.

Suggest that they can place their door hangers on the door of their home that family members use most often. Like the large rock Joshua used, the door hanger can serve as a reminder of their promise. As they enter and exit their homes and see this reminder, invite children to offer a prayer asking God to strengthen them to be faithful.



Celebrating God’s Grace



Before the session, use a permanent marker to draw twelve sections on a beach ball. Most have six panels so outlining each panel and adding a line bisecting the circumference should make the needed number of sections. Write the numbers 1–12 in large numerals—one in each section.

Have the children gather in a circle. Toss the prepared beach ball to someone across the circle. Whatever section their right thumb is on is the question or phrase they are invited to answer or complete from the following list.

1. If I could choose who to serve, it would be . . .
2. For me, it is challenging to show love when . . .
3. I can serve God at church by . . .
4. I can serve God in my home by . . .
5. I can serve God at school by . . .
6. What does being faithful mean to you?
7. What helps you remember to be faithful?

8. Who has taught you to be faithful?
9. For me, it is challenging to serve when . . .
10. Where can we learn how to be faithful?
11. I like to serve God by . . .
12. I show my love for God when I . . .

Continue tossing the ball around the circle until everyone has had the chance to answer at least once.

LG *Providing opportunities for children to make decisions about how they can lead, offer help, and express generosity helps build their confidence. This also helps them learn that they are gifted members of your community.*



Praying God's Grace

TD SD

Acknowledge together that, even after God's people promised to be faithful to serving God, sometimes they made choices that were not faithful. Recognize that is also true for us.

Place a plastic tablecloth on a table and invite the children to be seated around the table. Ask children to think of a time this week that they made a choice that did not reflect their love and service to God. Maybe they used harsh words, were unkind, told a lie, and so forth.

Dispense a pile of shaving cream in front of each child and invite them to write one word in the shaving cream that reflects that choice (*lie, words, mean*, and so forth). Once the word is written, invite them to offer an "I'm Sorry" prayer to God and then to wipe the word away. As they wipe away their word, say, "In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven, thanks be to God." Provide towels or wet wipes for them to clean their hands. Carefully fold up the tablecloth and throw it away.

Offering God's Grace

LG C

Brainstorm ways the children can be like Joshua and show their love for God in the ways they serve God and the church. Make a list of their skills and gifts. Consider ways they can be used at church.

Give each child a sheet of construction paper and invite them to choose one of the ways they can show their love for God and/or serve the church. If a child has trouble identifying a skill they have, invite other children to offer skills they see in them. Invite the children to draw a picture of themselves. The picture may show them doing the service, or words may be added to the picture describing how they show their love for God and serve God.

Attach all the pictures to a large sheet of mural paper and title it, "We Will Serve God." Display the mural in your church building as an offering of the children's gifts and skills.

Extra Activity

Hand out a copy of **GN 2**, scissors, and a sheet of blank paper to each child. Use the following directions to make houses for their families:

- ▼ Cut around the door and windows of the house on only the dashed lines. Assist with cutting as needed.
- ▼ Fold the door and windows open.
- ▼ Glue the house to a piece of blank paper, being sure to keep the door and windows open.

Once the house is glued to the blank paper, invite the children to draw family members, even pets, in the door and windows of the house. After drawing, the door and windows can be shut and open to reveal their family members.

Have the children take home their houses to share the story of Joshua with their families. Encourage them to claim along with Joshua, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”



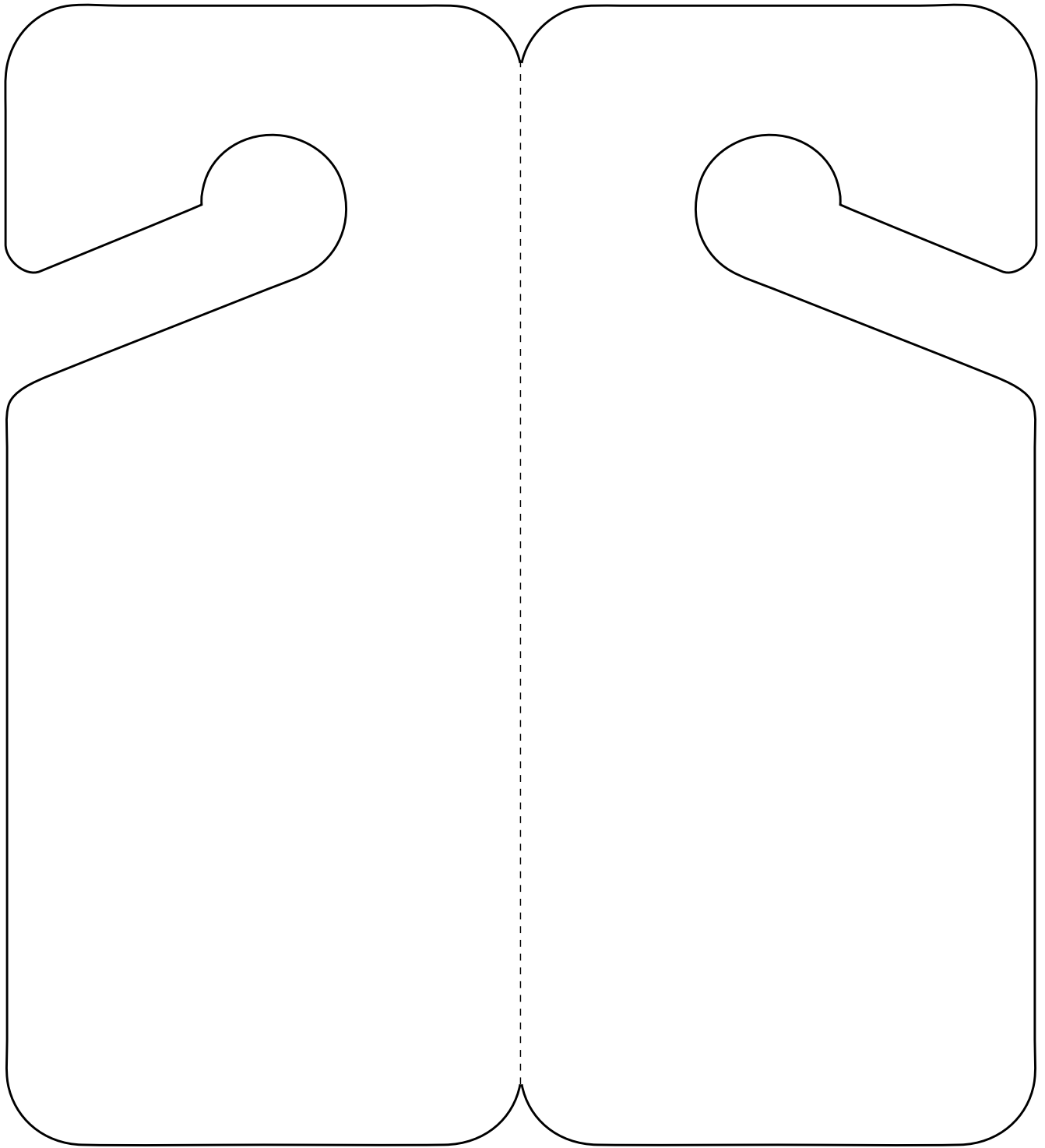
Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite the children to gather and lead them in cleaning up the worship space.

If the children created a door hanger or house picture, encourage them to share with the members of their household the story they heard today and the reason for using the door hanger as a reminder to be faithful.

Invite children to gather in a circle and offer this blessing over each of them as you lay your hand on their arm or shoulder: “(Name), this week, choose to love and serve God faithfully.”



As for me and my house,
we will serve the Lord.

