



# The Potter Shapes the Clay

Goal: To imagine ways God is shaping grateful lives.

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Jeremiah 18:1-6

Jeremiah must have wondered why God told him to visit the potter's house (18:1, CEB), but he obeyed.

There he saw a common occurrence. The potter was working on his wheel. But the piece he was making was flawed in his hands. So the potter started on another one ("reworked it" in NRSV).

Then the Lord's word came to Jeremiah. Before his eyes, he saw an enacted parable of God's relationship to the covenant people of Israel. God was saying, "Can't I deal with you like this potter, declares the LORD? Like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in mine, house of Israel!" (v. 6).

Like the potter who has total control over the clay, so God the potter has the power to do whatever God desires with the nation. God is the Lord.

Yet God is at work. When the clay was flawed, the potter started over with it to make something new. So does God. The flaws—or sins—of Israel and its people do not cause God to reject them. Instead, God continues to redeem the people. This is pure grace. God does as God wills, and God wills to save and redeem. How grateful we are!

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

Children have experience with imperfection. Each one probably has a story about a time when she dropped a glass and it broke or when he knocked over something on a table and it came crashing down. Children hopefully also have experienced kind help from adults who have reminded them that mistakes happen. We are human; we are not always perfect.

Children also are able to make the connection between imperfect things and imperfect people. This story of God helping Jeremiah see how God does many incredible things with humans—just like a potter working with clay—is a good reminder of how we can recognize God's grace in all we do each day.

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

One of the things that God hoped Jeremiah would understand with the vision of the potter and the clay was that God would always love God's people, flaws and all. Just as God wanted Jeremiah to remind God's people of God's love, so are you one of God's messengers with God's children.

Children need help in remembering God's love for everyone, flaws and all. Bring a box of plain adhesive bandages with you and invite each child to take one and think about something God would like them to remember.

*O God, make me, mold me, fill me, and use me according to your holy will. Amen.*



## Supplies

**Music & Melodies**  
(MM) 2022–2023

**Stories, Colors & More**  
(SCM) i–iv, 13, 13a, 13b,  
19, 26

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

green cloth

candle

pieces of pottery  
(optional)

potter (optional)

internet-connected  
device (optional)

## Responding

### Claiming

**Grace Notes (GN) 1**

### Praying

**SCM 13, 13a, 13b**; sticky  
notes

### Extra

card-stock copies of  
**GN 3**, envelopes  
(optional)

Note: bit.ly web addresses  
are case sensitive.

## 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.

If possible, have someone who is a potter visit your group today. Invite the potter to read today’s Bible story.

### Welcoming and Preparing

**LG** **TD** **A** **B** **M** **MS**

Play “Holy, Holy, Holy!”—**MM 29**—as the children arrive.

Welcome each child by saying, “Grace and peace be with you, (Name).” Prompt children to respond, “And also with you.” Invite children to place a green cloth, a candle, a Bible, and pieces of pottery (if available) on the worship table.

Ask some children to prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two lead today’s singing. Ask a volunteer to practice reading today’s Scripture passage if you do not have a potter visiting.

If a potter is able to join you, let your children observe the potter at work, ask questions, and learn about making pottery. If you do not have a potter visiting, show the children **SCM 13a** and **SCM 13b** and ask: “What do you see in this picture?” Explain to the children that this is a picture of a potter using a potter’s wheel. Describe how a potter creates pottery on the potter’s wheel. Consider watching “Shaped by the Potter’s Hands - Jeremiah 18:1–10” ([bit.ly /JeremiahClayPot](https://bit.ly/JeremiahClayPot)). Stop the video at 3:10 (3 minutes:10 seconds) to match the Scripture for today’s story.

Invite the children to play with the play dough. Encourage them to create small plates, bowls, cups, and other tableware. Notice how the children form the items, and praise their creativity. Ask the children whether they have ever made a dish that they use at home. Discuss different things the children create with their hands.

Together, look at the children’s play dough creations and invite them to think of compliments they can give to one another. Then ask each child to put the play dough away.

**TD** *Some children who have tactile sensitivities find working with clay or play dough unpleasant. Consider providing an option such as drawing.*

### Singing

Play and sing “Every Time I Feel the Spirit”—**MM 13**; **SCM 19**. Sing the song together once. Then invite the girls to sing the first verse and the boys to echo the verse. Sing the song again, switching roles.



### Praying C

Turn on the candle. Ask if the children have any prayer concerns. Invite someone to lead the opening prayer. Encourage the volunteer to include the concerns in the prayer. End the prayer with:

Loving God, help us to be good listeners as we learn about Jeremiah today. Amen.

### Preparing to Hear the Story C

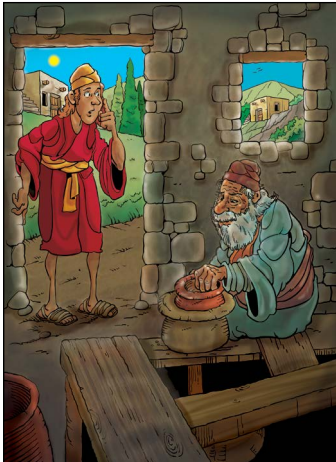
Ask the children what they know about Jeremiah. Remind them, if necessary, what a *prophet* is. Explain that a prophet is a person who speaks God's words to the people of God. Many times, a prophet would tell the people how they were not being faithful to God, what would happen if they continued to be unfaithful, and that they needed to *repent* (return to God).

Wonder with the children what guidelines God gave the people about how they were to be in relationship with God and with other people. If not mentioned, suggest that God gave the Ten Commandments to guide the people's way of life. However, the people disobeyed God's rules. God sent Jeremiah to warn them that bad things would happen if they didn't obey. Listen to what happened when Jeremiah did what God told him to do.

### Hearing the Story L TD

Invite a child to find Jeremiah 18 in the Bible. If you have a potter visiting, ask them to read Jeremiah 18:1-6; otherwise, have a volunteer read the passage. 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.

Distribute pieces of play dough to each child, as well as some for yourself. Have them make a pot with the play dough as you read the story using **SCM 13** or listen to the story audio. While you read or listen to the story, make a pot as well. Make a "mistake" on yours at the appropriate time in the story. Then reshape the clay. Encourage the children to do the same.



### Reflecting on God's Grace C A

Squeeze the dough to change the shape. Reshape the dough. Comment that, if we fail to obey God, God will reshape us.

Engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- I wonder, "How does the clay feel in the potter's hands?"
- I wonder, "How does the potter feel when the clay falls over?"
- I wonder, "How is God like the potter?"
- I wonder, "How are we like the clay?"



### Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play and sing “Holy, Holy, Holy!”—MM 29; SCM 26. Turn off the candle.

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.

### Claiming God’s Grace



Remind the children that, just as the potter shapes and reshapes the clay, God shapes or reshapes us when we are hurt or broken or when we make mistakes. Sometimes we do things, sometimes things happen to us, and sometimes we make choices that affect us or others. God reshapes our lives no matter what.

Form a circle sitting on the floor. Play a variation of the Never Have I Ever game. Teach the children the response, “God, reshape our lives.” Hand each child a lump of play dough. Explain that you will read statements (from GN 1) and that those who cannot agree with what was said should stand up. Then rephrase it for clarity, saying that, those who *never did* what the statement said should stand. Direct the children who are still standing to say the response while they reshape their dough. Have the children sit. Repeat the action with another statement and so forth. You do not have to use all of the statements, but be sure to include the last one. Note that the children should all be standing on this one so they can respond in unison.

- 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.*

### Celebrating God’s Grace



Children will use play dough to play a game like Pictionary. Form teams of three to five and give each team a chunk of dough. Invite the youngest child in each group to hold the clay first and come to you to hear what they are to make. Children who are sculpting should not use any words to give clues; they may only fashion the play dough while their teammates guess what the object is. Have the children take turns molding the dough into a variety of items, such as a heart, a spoon, a flower, a shoe, a horse, a balloon, or an arrow.

After playing, wonder:

- ▼ Was it frustrating to shape the play dough? Why? Why not?
- ▼ When your teammates had trouble guessing what you were making, what did you do?
- ▼ How does God celebrate shaping our lives?



### Praying God's Grace L

Draw attention back to **SCM 13a** and **SCM 13b**. Re-read God's message at the end of the story on **SCM 13**, emphasizing the words, "When things go wrong I can help you start over."

Remind the children of God's patience. Like the potter, God doesn't throw us out when things go wrong. God continues to shape us into who God created us to be.

Ask the children to think of an action or attitude that they need to change or start over. Invite them to write or draw it on a sticky note. Post the sticky notes on **SCM 13a** and **SCM 13b**, reminding the children that God continues to shape their lives. Offer a prayer over the ways they have identified that they need help being shaped. End with a litany:

And God said, "I am like the potter."

**We are the clay. Thank you, God, for shaping our lives.**

### Offering God's Grace LG TD

Offer a single pipe cleaner to each child. Invite the children to shape their pipe cleaners into stick people, encouraging them that there is no wrong way to do this—each may look different and that is OK. As they fashion their stick people, invite them to imagine how God may be shaping their lives. Encourage them to consider and then to speak aloud the ways God could be shaping them. Offer a reminder that God is patient and will not give up on shaping any of us.

Gather in a circle. Invite each child to turn to the person on their right, unravel their stick person, and wrap the pipe cleaner around their neighbor's wrist while saying, "Wear this as a reminder that God is shaping your life."

### Extra Activity

Give each child a card-stock copy of **GN 2**. Invite them to color the pottery with crayons. Provide scissors and instruct them to first cut out the larger shape along the dotted lines, and then cut out each piece so that it becomes a puzzle. Remind the children that, even when the pot crumbled and went wrong, God put it back together, reshaping it patiently. Invite them to put their puzzles together when they are finished. Give each child an envelope or plastic bag to store their puzzle pieces. Encourage them to take their puzzles home and ask each person in their house to assemble the puzzle while they share the story of Jeremiah and the potter, remembering to include that God is like the potter.

Encourage them to make an offering to God by sharing the good news of grace with others.

Encourage all children to do the activity. If they protest about not wanting to undo the person they made, remind them that they can, like God, reshape it.



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



Invite the children to close their eyes and imagine God's hands shaping their lives. Encourage them to share what they see as they imagine. Go to each child, touch his or her shoulder, and say:

*(Name)*, God says to you, "I am like the potter. You are like the clay. I am shaping your life."

End by offering a prayer of gratitude for God's patience in shaping us and for God's grace in helping us start over when things go wrong.

Encourage the children to be grateful to God by sharing today's story with others.

1. Never have I ever cried or thrown a fit when I didn't get my way.
2. Never have I ever eaten food that fell on the floor.
3. Never have I ever broken a bone.
4. Never have I ever played in the mud.
5. Never have I ever spilled someone else's drink.
6. Never have I ever played video games for more than 4 hours in a day.
7. Never have I ever tried to convince a sibling to take the blame for something I did.
8. Never have I ever stuck my finger in a birthday cake.
9. Never have I ever been sneaky about eating candy.
10. Never have I ever cut my own hair.
11. Never have I ever accidentally put clothes on backwards and not noticed.
12. Never have I ever accidentally worn shoes on the wrong feet without noticing.
13. Never have I ever played a prank on adults.
14. Never have I ever sneaked dessert before dinner.
15. Never have I ever lied about doing my chores.
16. Never have I ever put stuff under my bed or in my closet and pretended I cleaned my room.
17. Never have I ever fed the dog under the table.
18. Never have I ever fought with my brother or sister.
19. Never have I ever watched something on TV that I knew I wasn't allowed to watch.
20. Never have I ever gotten my brother or sister in trouble.
21. Never have I ever asked one parent (caregiver) something after the other parent already said no.
22. Never have I ever broken my parents' (caregivers') rules.
23. Never have I ever fallen asleep in church.
24. Never have I ever lied about brushing my teeth.
25. Never have I ever had an argument with my parents (caregiver).





