



Everything Begins with God

Goal: To extend God's gracious welcome to all people.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Isaiah 56:1-8

Isaiah looks to the future. In this magnificent vision, God embraces all nations and extends God's covenant agreement. God says, "My house will be known as a house of worship for all nations." Here is God's gracious love for which we can be grateful!

To people who had returned from exile in Babylon and were unsure about their land and future, the words of the prophet provided hope. A new community will be formed by God and "God's people" will be widened as God's glory is demonstrated to the world. The promises begin with God saying: "Soon I will come to save you; my saving power will be seen everywhere on earth" (v. 1).

The coming glory of God begins with God's actions among the people. God will act to save in the future as God has acted to save in the past. Everything begins with God!

Those who had been outside God's holy people will now come in (vv. 3-7). God promises "to bring together my people who were taken away, and let them join the others" (v. 8).

This wonderful description of God extending grace to all nations brings forth our gratitude to God!

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Children begin a new school year in August or September each year by greeting old friends from previous years and meeting new children who are in their class. Every year teachers work to help form these children into a new community. Children may experience varieties of abilities, ethnicities, and even languages. The kind of experiences a child has when she or he has a chance to live and learn in a diverse setting provides a great context for hearing this story of Isaiah's vision for the future. Just as God extends grace and welcome to all nations, so we too can extend God's love to all of the people we meet.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Be aware of the experiences your children are having with difference or diversity. Perhaps there is even diversity of abilities, or race, or first languages in your class. The story of Isaiah's vision of God's gracious welcome to all people can be explored by inviting children to talk about their experiences of being welcomed or welcoming someone who is different from them. The community that God envisions is not always easy and requires hard work. Invite children to name the good things and the hard things required of living in God's way.

*Thank you, God, for making me and the children givers and gifts.
Strengthen us to be bearers of hope and joy. Amen!*

Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 13, 20, 22

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

colored dots or stickers

blanket(s)

bell

building blocks

Grace Notes (GN) 1

Responding

Celebrating

globe (or an atlas with
a map of the world);
optional: invited guest;
simple refreshments
such as crackers, juice

Bonus Activity

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” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

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

Welcome each child with, “Grace and peace be with you, (Name).” Prompt children to respond, “And also with you.” Hand each child a colored dot or sticker.

Invite children to help prepare the worship space. Provide a candle, a Bible, and building blocks.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s Responding in Gratitude activities and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Spread a blanket on the floor and ask all the children to stand on it. If you have a large group, use more than one blanket. Have everyone step off. Fold the blanket to make it smaller, and have the group try again. Continue folding the blanket into smaller sizes until the entire class can no longer fit on the blanket. Ask the children with one color dot to get off the blanket. They no longer belong in the game. Have the rest keep playing. When you need to, have the children with another color dot stop playing because they no longer belong. When you can no longer fold the blanket any smaller, have everyone sit down, and wonder:

- ✦ I wonder, “How did you feel to be asked to leave the group?”
- ✦ I wonder, “How did you feel to be part of the group left playing?”
- ✦ I wonder, “Was the game fair? Why? Why not?”
- ✦ I wonder, “If the blanket was the church, how would you decide who stays in and who is out?”

Singing

Gather the group together in the worship space. Play “Alabad al Señor (Let Us Give Praise to God)”—**SCM 20**—and sing along.

Praying

Turn on the candle. Allow for a couple of moments of silence. Invite children to consider and name ways they know God is with them. As children take turns naming God’s presence, lead the rest of the group in saying, “Thank you God!” in response to each offering. Pray:

God, thank you for our church, where we come to learn and to worship. Thank you, also, for our group. Help us to do what is right and just. Amen.



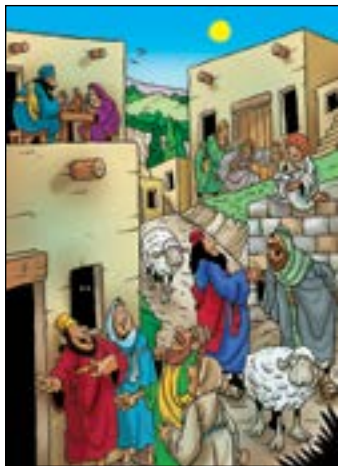
Preparing to Hear the Story



Describe the story's scene. Long after the time of King David, the people of Israel were taken into exile in Babylon, where they lived for many years. Their homes and temple in Jerusalem were destroyed. They were sad, but after about forty years, they were allowed to return home. They began to rebuild the temple. Ask the children to build the foundation for the temple, a simple rectangle of blocks.

People started to argue about who could worship in the temple, who was a “true” Israelite, who belonged, and who didn't belong.

Isaiah talks about the “holy mountain” of God, referring to Jerusalem.



Do your children (especially younger ones) need some help with statue poses? Have the Insiders start proud, and the Outsiders dejected. Have the Insiders bring the Outsiders into the middle. Help the statues strike poses to show a holy mountain and a house of prayer.

Hearing the Story



Have a child open the Bible to Isaiah 56 and place the open Bible on the worship table.

Read the story from **SCM 13** or ask a volunteer to read. Use your voice and expression to make the story engaging. As you read, invite the children to continue building the temple.

Conclude by saying, “Word of wisdom, word of grace,” and prompt children to say, “Thanks be to God.”

Reflecting on God's Grace

Gather the children into two groups: Insiders and Outsiders. Insiders are people who know they belong in God's house. They pose as statues in the middle of the room. Outsiders are those who don't belong in God's house. Have them pose around the edges. Read the story from The Message on **GN 1**, ringing the bell where indicated. Ask the group to change statue poses when the bell rings to show what the passage says about insiders and outsiders.

Have all the statues take a bow and then sit down. Wonder:

- ✎ I wonder, “What size blanket is God using for the house of God?”
- ✎ I wonder, “How would Outsiders feel about being welcomed in?”
- ✎ I wonder, “How would Insiders feel about Outsiders being welcomed?”
- ✎ I wonder, “How does this message apply to our church today?”
- ✎ Who are the Insiders? The Outsiders? Who are you?
- ✎ I wonder, “How can we welcome Outsiders?”

Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play and sing together “We Are Blessed to Be a Blessing”—**SCM 22**. Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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



Option: Invite a refugee family to join your group and share some of their culture.

Celebrating God's Grace

Before the session find someone in your congregation who is a newcomer to your country. Invite that person to visit your group to talk about their homeland.

Explain that God told the prophet Isaiah that God welcomes everyone. God is concerned with all nations—all countries and all people. Display a world map or a globe. Invite children to point out where they (or best friends, relatives, and so on) live. Now look at all the other countries. Talk about how God loves every person in our world. Ask them how they feel when they hear that message.

Ask your guest to bring music from their country to lead a song or dance. Encourage children to help the person feel welcome; if desired, provide a simple snack for the group and have a volunteer offer some refreshments to the visitor.

Praying God's Grace

Ask the children to sit in front of blank mural paper. On the paper, sketch a mountain shape. Around the edges of the shape, print, "I'll bring them to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer." Read the words as you print them on the page.

At intervals, print the following inside the mountain shape:

- ♥ You are great, God, because . . .
- ♥ Thank you, God, for . . .
- ♥ I'm sorry, God, about . . .
- ♥ God, please help . . .
- ♥ God, show us how to care for . . .
- ♥ I'm listening, God . . .

Provide self-adhesive notes in one or more colors and fine-tipped colored markers. Invite children to write or draw prayers on the notes and attach them to the mountain under the appropriate category. Read each of the categories, allowing the children to complete the phrase by sharing their contributions (drawn or written).

Offering God's Grace

Recall that the Bible tells us to welcome strangers. One way we can welcome people to our church is to give them a bookmark for their Bible. Help the children cut construction-paper sheets into 8 ½" x 2" strips. Make fine-tipped markers available. Have children write the word “welcome” at the top of their construction-paper strip, or print the word for them. Have them decorate the rest of the strip by adding stickers and drawing designs on it with markers—things that make people feel good inside, such as flowers, sunshine, and so on.

If you have time, invite children to make a second bookmark. Have each child keep one of his or her bookmarks as a reminder of God's welcoming love.

Collect the remaining bookmarks and, if possible, go as a group to give them to the minister or pastoral care team so that they can be presented to newcomers to the church.

Bonus Activity

Hand out copies of **GN 2**. Remind the children that *justice* means treating all people fairly. Ask them to circle the pictures on **GN 2** that show people acting in a way that shows justice. Invite them to color the pictures. As the children color, wonder together how to find justice for the people in each of the pictures. Have the children suggest how to recognize situations that are right and how to make them right.



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).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD





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


Have the children hold one hand of the person on each side of them. Look to the child on your right and say, “Peace be with you.” Prompt the child to respond, “And also with you.” That child exchanges the message of peace with the child who is on his or her right side. The peace exchange moves around the circle, passing from child to child and ending with you. Invite all of the children to join with you in saying, “Amen.”

Dismiss the children with the following prayer, or one of your own:


God, help us to know and to do what is right. Help us to welcome those who are outcasts, and to remember that your house is for all people. Amen.

“God says to the insiders . . . “Be on guard: Do what’s right and do it in the right way. 


For salvation is just around the corner, my setting-things-right is about to happen. How blessed are you who are insiders, who keep my laws, who watch your step and do nothing wrong! 


Some outsiders who follow God might want to say, ‘God put me in second-class. I don’t really belong.’ Or ‘I’m damaged goods. I don’t really belong.’ ” 


Don’t you insiders let that happen! 

For God says: “To the outsiders who keep my laws and choose what delights me, I’ll provide them an honored place in my family and within my city . . . 

. . . even more honored than that of the insiders. These honors will never be taken away. 

As for the outsiders who now follow me, working for me, loving my name, and wanting to be my servants—all who keep my laws—I’ll bring them to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. 

They’ll be welcome to worship the same as the ‘insiders.’ Oh yes, my house of worship will be known as a house of prayer for all people.” 

The Decree of the Master, God himself, who gathers in the exiles of Israel: “I will gather other outsiders also, gather them in with those already gathered.” 

Justice

