



Who Is the Greatest?

Goal: To explore the meaning of being last instead of first as a follower of Jesus.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Mark 9:33-37

Though they were followers of Jesus, his disciples got into a discussion about a basic human desire: to be great. They argued about it one day until Jesus asked them what they were saying. They were silent, and afraid or ashamed to respond.

Then Jesus put it to them: "Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all" (v. 35; CEB). To illustrate, Jesus placed a child in their midst and said, "Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me" (vv. 36-37).

In contrast to the disciples, who sought to be "great," Jesus said true greatness means being "least of all and the servant of all." Greatness is defined by service, not glory. The one who serves becomes vulnerable. A child is vulnerable among adults. When we welcome children, we are welcoming God in our midst. We are welcoming the vulnerable ones, the ones who remind us of those who are truly great: the servants of God.

Gratefully, we are thankful for God's grace and the call to follow Jesus by being a "servant of all."

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Children know about bragging. It is a very common experience that they have seen or experienced. "I can ride my bike without falling off." "I can help my Dad cook on the stove; you can't." It is especially common among siblings! It is a way humans have of being distinctive or making sure everyone knows what they are good at. Inviting children to name things they are good at is a great entry into this story. Children will be able to relate to the idea that Jesus wants us to be great with our actions and how we live. That is more important than telling people how great we are with words.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Invite the children to think about something they are good at. Tell them you will count to ten so everyone will have time to think about one thing. Then ask each child to name their one thing. Make sure you hear from each voice. Help them know it's a good thing to know what they are good at. Then ask them to name something they are not good at, something they need help with. Knowing what we are good at and the things we need help with will remind children how important it is to remember that God loves us and wants us to remember to help others.

O God, too often I choose first place. Help me claim the last place so that I may live in faithfulness. Amen.

Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 10, 17, 24

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

white cloth

green and brown tissue
paper

small rocks/pebbles

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

Responding

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.

Welcoming and Preparing

Greet the children by name and with the words “Christ is risen!” Prompt the children to respond, “He is risen indeed!” These words are spoken during Eastertide, the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost.

Invite the children to help prepare the worship space. Provide a Bible, a candle, a white cloth (white is the liturgical [church] color for Eastertide), and mural paper.

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

Invite the children to plan a tabletop background for today’s story on the mural paper covering the table. Offer that they will need a road for the disciples and Jesus to walk on, a place for a house, and a spot for a crowd to gather for a conversation. They may use tissue paper to create grass and small rocks or pebbles to make a path on which the disciples can walk. Encourage children to add details to the scene as time permits. Provide copies of **GN 1** and invite the children to cut out and color the figures and attach them to craft sticks.

Singing

A **B** **SD**

Play and sing “A Child of God”—**MM 21**; **SCM 24**. Hand out rhythm instruments and encourage children to play along as you listen again.

Praying

L **T**

Turn on the candle as a reminder that God is present among you. Gather in a circle. Ask children to join you in this echo prayer:

God, help us to be humble. /
Help us to put others first. /
Help us to be like Jesus. /
Amen. /

A *You can adapt an activity by process, product, or environment—the way that something is done, what is done, or the setting in which it is done. Giving extra support in the completion of a task is an example of changing the process; having children make something different is an example of changing the product.*



Preparing to Hear the Story L

Play “Thumbs Up or Down.” Explain that you will read a series of sentences and, if the children believe what you have read to be “good news,” they should “thumbs up.” If children believe it to be “bad news,” they should “thumbs down.”

- When a friend at school reached a reading goal before you, she told everyone she is smarter than you.
- The only empty seat in the cafeteria is next to older kids who say that you can’t sit with them.
- Your brother puts away his laundry and then helps you put away yours.
- An older member of your church is in the hospital, so your family mows her yard.
- Your cousin got a new video game but refuses to let you play; she says that it is hers and that no one else can play it.

Comment that some of the sentences reflect people being selfish and some reflect people being generous. Ask children when it is hard for them to be generous.

Hearing the Story L

Invite a child to find Mark 9 in the Bible. Invite a volunteer to read Mark 9:33–37. 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 worship table.

Read the story again using **SCM 10** or listen to the story audio. If reading, use your voice and expressions to make the story lively, especially to give voice to the disciples as they argue. Invite children to give “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” when they hear a part of the story they like or dislike.

Reflecting on God’s Grace B M C

Provide a few moments for children to use the figures they cut out from **GN 1** and the tabletop mural they prepared to play act the story together. They may choose to play alone or in pairs. Ask:

- I wonder, “What started the argument among the disciples?”
- I wonder, “Why was it so important for them to feel like they were the greatest?”
- I wonder, “Why didn’t they want to tell Jesus what they had been talking about?”
- I wonder, “What does God hope we will learn from this story?”





Singing



Play and sing “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”—**MM 13; SCM 17**. For each verse, have the children use the following motions: “Lord” (*point up*), “I want” (*cross arms over chest*), “In my heart” (*form a heart with hands and pulse it over their heart*). Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

Claiming God’s Grace



Ask the children to name words that will help them remember the story. Write the words the children name on newsprint.

Invite the children to select a piece of construction paper and yarn. Have them choose one of the words from the list and write it on the construction paper in large letters. Using glue bottles, have the children outline the letters of the word with a stream of glue. Then lay the yarn over the glue.

Have the children put their words in a place where they can dry. As they dry, invite the children to share with the group what word they chose and what it helps them to remember.

T *Washing hands can take time! Waiting in line for the sink may make some children anxious. Devise a routine so they know what to expect. Try using a physical activity to match the time required.*

Praying God’s Grace



Ask volunteers to read aloud the following stories:

Pastor Chris and her family were on vacation. While they were away, one of the church members died. When Pastor Chris’s family heard about the church member’s death, they packed up and came home even though their vacation was not over.

Mr. Jordan goes to work very early every morning. When he gets home, he would like to be able to take a nap, but he agreed to coach Brianna’s soccer team. In addition to having practice three times a week, he goes to the games on Saturdays.

Ask the children:

- How were Pastor Chris’s family and Brianna’s dad both leaders and servants?
- How did each person put himself or herself last?
- Why do you think the person in each story made those choices?

Ask children to imagine and identify ways they can be servants. Suggest that they write or draw a picture to represent their ideas of how God may invite them to serve others. Explain that, as they write or draw, they can offer their ideas to God as a prayer, asking God to give them ways to serve others.

LG *Teach children about the power of teamwork. When they learn to support others, cooperate, and problem solve as a group, children become better leaders. Serving others helps children see firsthand that they have the power to make a difference.*

Offering God’s Grace **LD**

Provide card stock and invite children to use markers to trace their hands. Invite them to write “Jesus Asks Us to Serve Others” on the palm of their traced hand.

Invite children to consider someone they know who humbly puts others first. Talk about the people they think of, letting them share stories about their servant friends. Ask them to take a few moments to write or draw on the fingers of their traced hands the ways they see the person they are considering serve others (for example, teaching Sunday school, delivering groceries, being a friend, and so forth).

Invite them to cut out their traced hand. On the opposite side, ask them to write or draw a note of gratitude: “Thanks for showing me how to serve.” Encourage them to offer it to the person they have made it for sometime this week.

Extra Activity **LD**

Explain to the children that, as followers of Jesus, we know that the first are last and the last are first. A *palindrome* is a word, phrase, number, or any sequence of characters that can be read the same backward as forward, such as “mom” and “race car.” This means that the same word, phrase, or number forms when the sequence of characters is read first to last or last to first.

Provide copies of **GN 2** and invite the children to circle all of the palindromes they can find. (There are 41 on the page.)

GN 2 Solution:

Hannah	Ada
tuna nut	kayak
noon	Eve
Mom	Otto
Dad	pup
Wow	Madam
Bob	deed
pop	eye
Rise to vote,	pop
sir	race car
civic	toot
level	top spot
sees	Now I won
stats	Was it a cat
Eve	I saw
Anna	Don’t nod
solos	sagas
ah ha	Nan
refer	Sis
Pip	Mum
a Santa at	Do geese
NASA	see God
never odd	
or even	



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

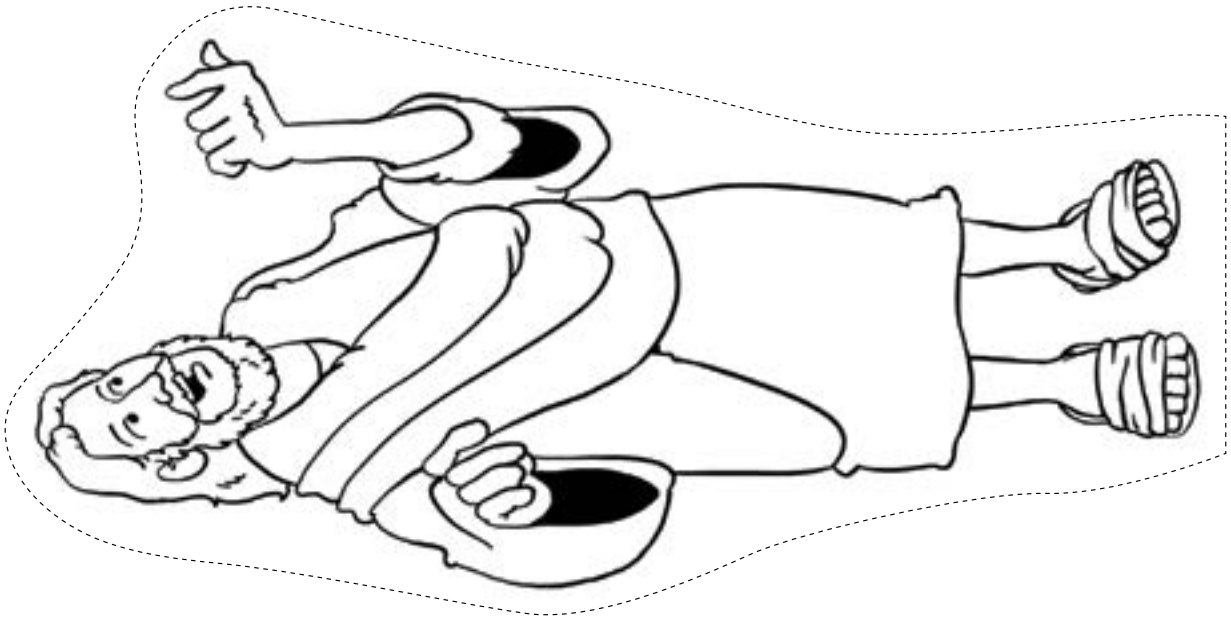
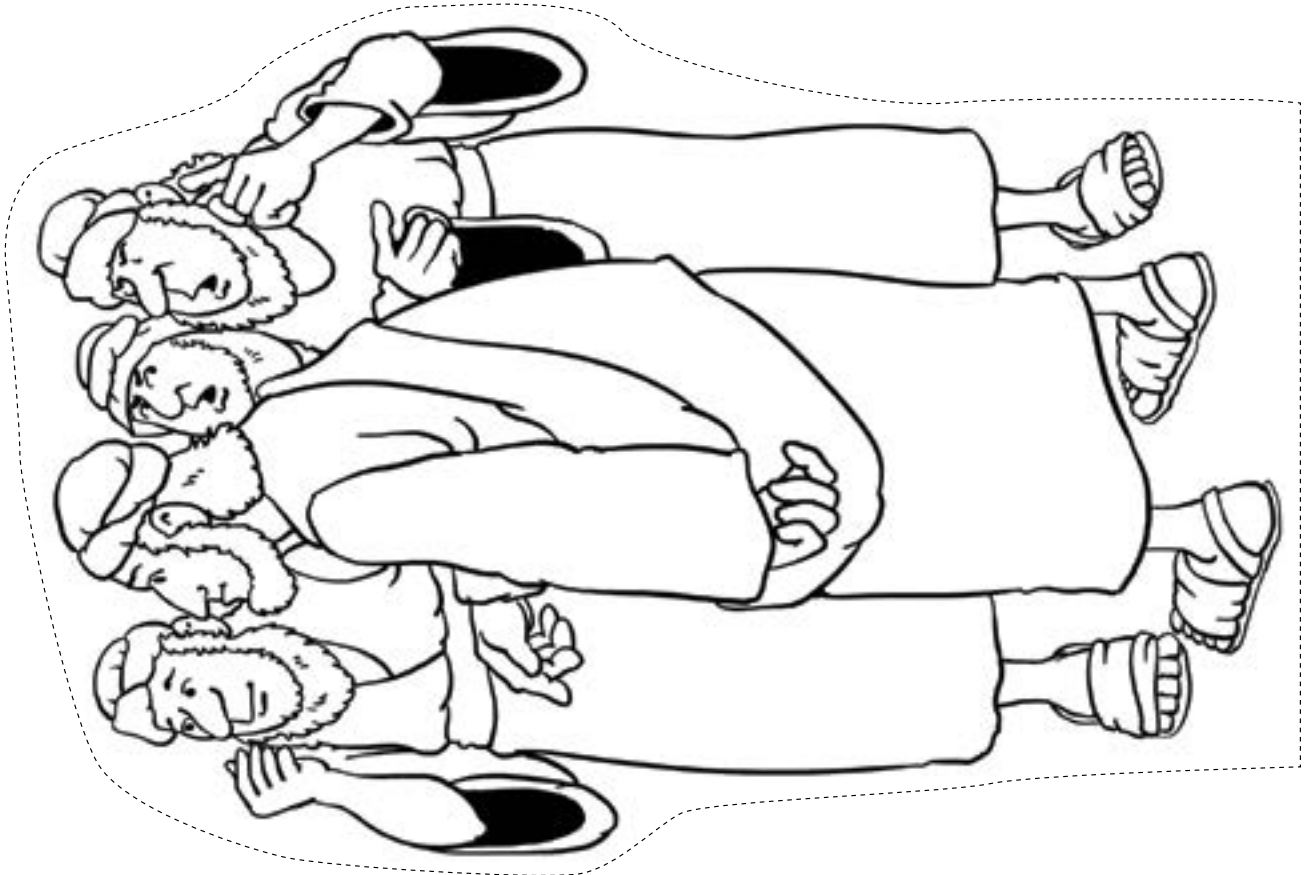
Invite the children to gather, and lead them in cleaning the worship space.

Invite children to repeat Jesus' words from Mark 9:35 after you. Repeat it several times verbally with the motions.

Whoever wants to be first (*hold up your right index finger*)
must be last (*point both thumbs behind you, over your shoulders*)

and servant of all. (*extend both palms in front of you and move them out in opposite directions*)

End with the following charge spoken individually to each child. Mark their hands with the sign of the cross as you speak to them:
“(Name), serve others, just as Jesus taught you.”



My friend Hannah is a total tuna nut. She eats it at noon every day.

Mom ordered pizza for dinner because Dad burned the burgers on the grill.

“Wow! You mowed the lawn,” said Bob.

My pop told John, “Rise to vote, sir. It’s your civic duty!”

The manager tries to keep a level head when she sees the stats rise.

Eve and Anna sang solos in church last Sunday.

“Ah ha! I will refer to this Bible verse,” said Pastor Kim.

Pip asked, “Is there a Santa at NASA?”

Can there ever be a number that is never odd or even?

Ada floated down the river in a kayak.

Adam and Eve ate an apple.

Otto took the pup to the vet.

Carlos saw someone in need. He asked, “Madam, may I do a good deed for you today?”

A red balloon caught my eye, then suddenly I heard it pop!

The race car driver will toot the horn when he takes the top spot and then exclaim, “Now I won!”

Lil asked, “Was it a cat I saw?”

“Don’t nod,” said the teacher as he told sagas of history and saw Nan close her eyes.

As we drove to church, Sis asked Mum, “Do geese see God?”

