



Who Is the Greatest?

Goal: To celebrate that following Jesus means helping and serving others.

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, 14, 20

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

snack

Guided Play

choice 1: water play table, plastic toys from the nursery, liquid soap, towels

choice 2: helper props such as toy doctor's kit, firefighter's hat, toy police badge, and others

choice 3: copies of **Grace Notes (GN) 1**

Exploring

choice 1: copies of **GN 2**

choice 2: copies of **GN 3** and **GN 4** for each child

choice 3: bucket of soapy water, cloths or paper towels

choice 4: copies of **GN 5**

Water play is a very soothing activity for young children. Supervise carefully and remind the children of a few simple rules, such as no splashing.

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **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.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

"Exploring God's Grace" choice 3 may require additional adult help.

Welcoming and Guided Play

C F A B M MS

Greet the children as they arrive and say, "Grace and peace be with you." Prompt them to respond, "And also with you." Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time. Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers you do not know personally. Tell the parents/caregivers that today's story is about when Jesus told his disciples that following him was not about being great but about serving and helping others. Invite the children to choose a guided-play activity to start:

- 1. Serving with Water**—Tell the children that today's story is about how being a follower of Jesus means helping others. Explain that one way they can help others is to wash toys. Give the children plastic toys from your church nursery to wash in the water table. Add some liquid soap to the water. Invite the children to dry the toys when they are finished.
 - Place a plastic tablecloth or dropcloth on a low table or on the floor under the water play area.
 - If you use a tub of water, set it on a low table or on the floor.
- 2. Community Helpers**—Create a space where children can use props related to service occupations such as doctors, teachers, firefighters, police officers, builders, farmers, judges, and so forth. Have conversations about how each of these occupations work to help others, and encourage them to give you an example by acting out a provided service.
- 3. Being a Helper**—Provide copies of **GN 1**. Invite each child to place their hand on the page over the words. Help them trace around their hand. Fill in their name. Ask the child what they do to be a helper. Write down their answer in the heart.

T *Younger children need routine. The sense of security and order is how they know what comes next. Remember to use the Visual Schedule to reinforce the routine.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Jesus Says God Cares for Us”—**MM 12; SCM 14**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Jump and Shout



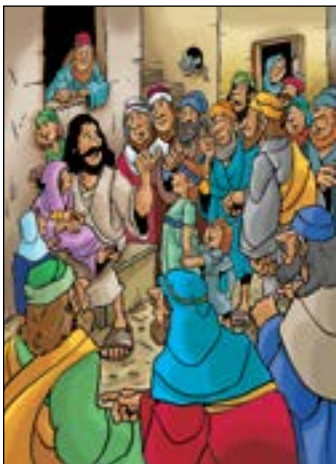
Using the song “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” teach the children the following song:

If you’re a helper and you know it,
jump and shout. (*jump and shout*)
If you’re a helper and you know it,
jump and shout. (*jump and shout*)
If you’re a helper and you know it,
then your face will surely show it. (*point to your smiling face*)
If you’re a helper and you know it,
sit and rest! (*sit down, hands in lap*)

Be a Friend

Using the song “She’ll Be Coming Around the Mountain,” teach the children the following song and invite them to do the actions suggested in the song:

If you want to make a friend, shake a hand. (*shake hands*)
If you want to be a friend, give a high five! (*give a high five*)
If you want to have a friend, be a friend who never ends.
If you want to be a friend, give a hug. (*share a hug*)



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.

Hearing the Story



Open the Bible to Mark 9 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about when Jesus told his disciples that following him was not about being great but about serving and helping others.

Read **SCM 10**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Reread the story and invite the children to walk in a circle around the story area as you read. Invite them to raise their hands and shout out, “Greatest!” when they hear the word.

Near the end of the story, when you read “serving and helping others,” tell the children to stop and hold hands with one another in the circle.



EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Being Jesus' Helper C

Hand out copies of GN 2. Ask the children if they can identify the kinds of helpers that are on the sheet. Lead a discussion about the things that help the helpers do their work.

Encourage the children to draw lines from the helping items to the helpers. Let each child choose one helper and take turns acting out how the helper uses the things that help them. Allow time for the children to color the pictures. Discuss what helping things they can do.

2. Make a Book FM

Remind the children that Jesus said to be his follower means that we serve and help others. Invite them to make a book of pictures showing how they can be Jesus' helpers.

Hand out copies of GN 3 and GN 4. After the children finish coloring, help them cut the pages apart and put them in any order they choose, but with the first page being "I can be Jesus' helper." Staple the pages into a book.

FM *To help children build fine motor skills, encourage enjoyment in activity participation instead of focusing on a "successful" outcome such as staying in the lines while coloring.*



3. Serving the Church A B L SD

Before the session, fill a bucket with soapy water and cloths. You might want to engage additional adult help and permission for this activity.

Remind the children that Jesus said to be his follower means being a helper. Tell the children that they can be helpers in their own church. Give each child a slightly damp cloth or paper towel and invite them to wipe down the pews or chairs in the sanctuary. Praise their good work and how they served the church by cleaning.

4. Coloring Page

Hand out copies of GN 5 and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture of Jesus and his disciples. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ▼ I wonder, "What did Jesus think about the disciples arguing?"
- ▼ I wonder, "How did the disciples feel when Jesus said that being his follower wasn't about being great?"
- ▼ I wonder, "What can we do to be Jesus' helpers?"

T *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as touching toes, wiggling fingers, moving their arms in circles, and so forth.*

Use "wonder" questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

FA

Call the children together, singing “With My Hands Open Wide”—**MM 20; SCM 20**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Remind the children that Jesus said being his follower was not about being great but about serving and helping others. Ask the children how they might be Jesus’ helpers this week.

If you would like to share a snack, now would be a good time. Pray:

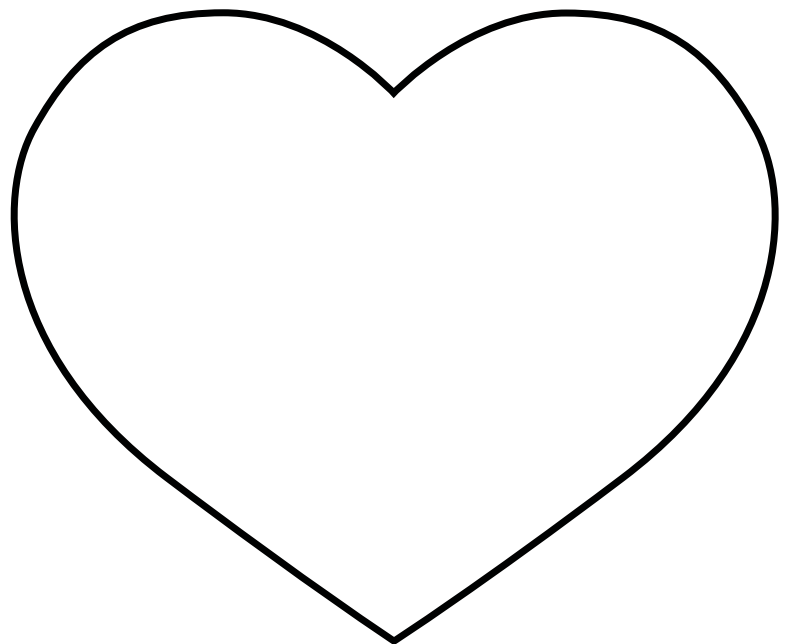
God is great and God is good,
and we thank God for our food.
By God’s hand we all are fed,
give us, Lord, our daily bread.
Amen.

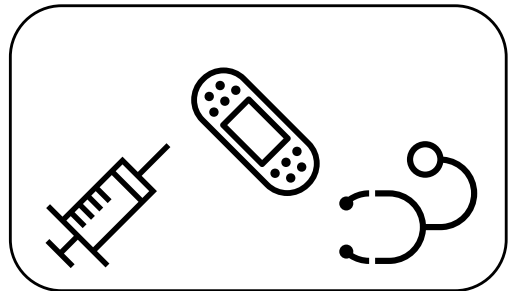
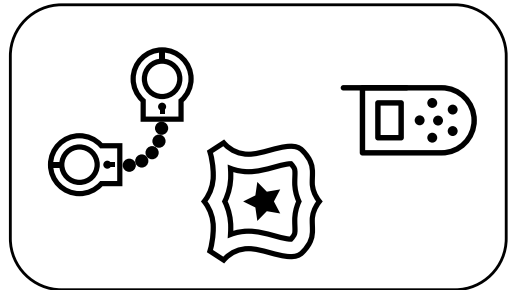
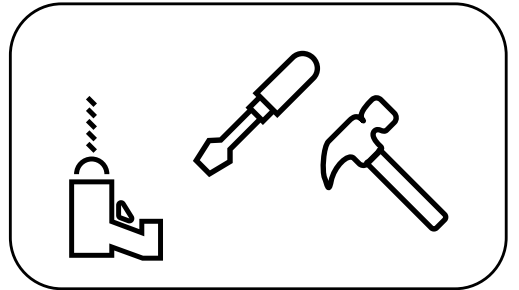
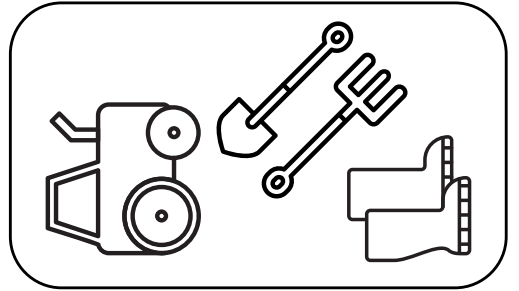
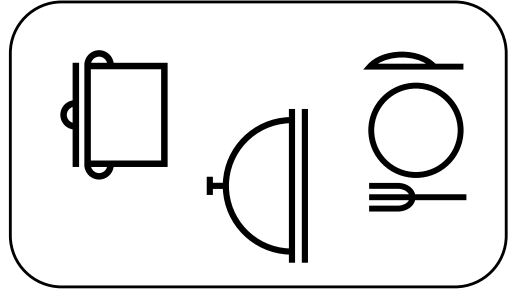
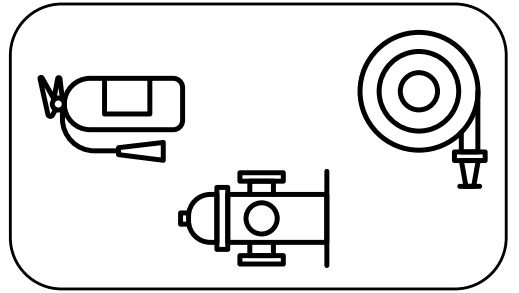
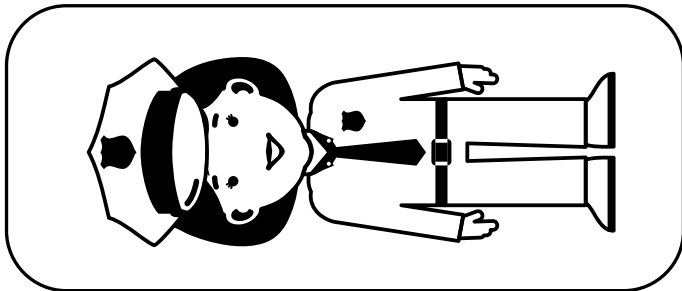
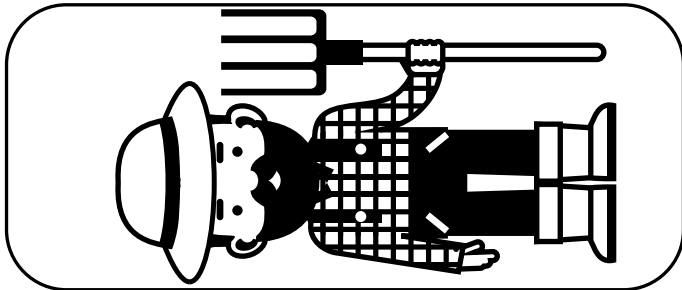
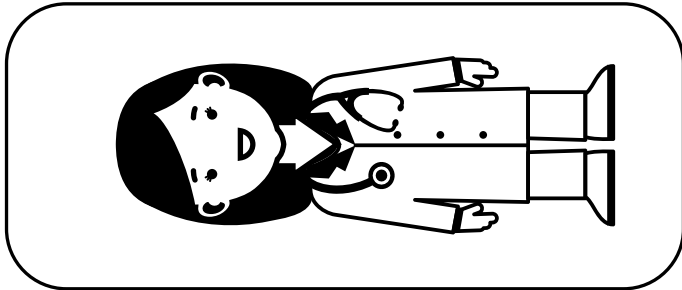
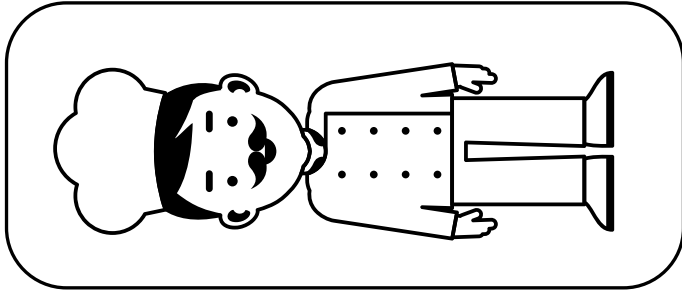
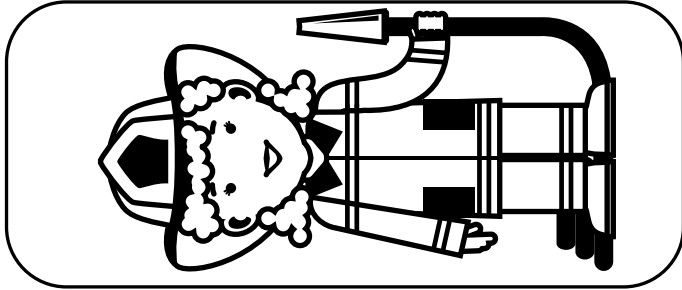
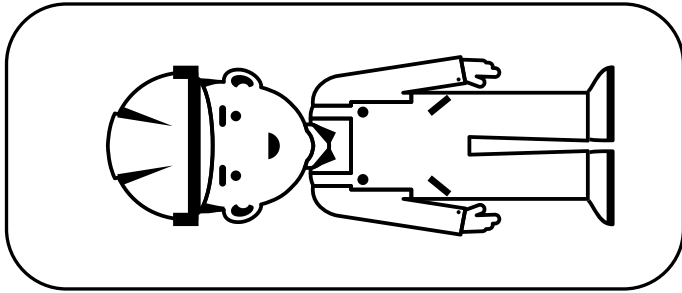
As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), you are Jesus’ helper. Help someone today. The grace of God goes with you.”



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).

is a
helper.





I can be Jesus' helper.



I can help.



I can be kind.



I can help.



Who Is the Greatest?



Jesus calls the disciples to be great by serving others.

