

# Growing



in  
Grace & Gratitude





# I Need You, God

Help the children learn to pray with humility and assurance in God's grace.

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Luke 18:9-14

The Bible and our Reformed tradition stress that God's grace is open to all people, in spite of, rather than because of, their position and status in life. No matter who we are, we never have enough within us to gain God's favor. The good news: we don't have to gain God's favor. God's favor, or grace, is already with us.

Pharisees were prominent scholars and teachers. The Pharisees worked hard to obey God's law. Jesus had friends among the Pharisees; he didn't universally condemn this group. The Pharisee in the parable is a caricature of sorts, a foil—he pointed out how righteous he was and how much better he was than everyone else. He kept the law and gave away money. He was trusting in himself as being righteous while he “looked on everyone else with disgust” (v. 9, CEB).

But the tax collector—hated by others because he worked for the despised Romans—realized he had no righteousness or goodness to bring before God. He humbly prayed, “God, show mercy to me, a sinner” (v. 13, CEB).

By portraying a tax collector's prayer as more faithful than a Pharisee's, Jesus focuses on the attitude of the supplicant's heart. The Pharisee does all the right things, but he is boastful and looks down on others. The tax collector behaves poorly, but with a humble heart he confesses.

We are grateful that God's grace comes to us no matter what we have done or what we are like. We only need to come before God and ask God to show mercy to us with confidence that God already embraces us and enfolds us in God's love. No matter who we are, we are embraced by God's gracious love. In that assurance, we dare to approach the throne of grace to offer praise, confession, supplication, and thanksgiving.

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

Children grow up in a culture that celebrates pride. Success in life often depends on a person having a certain level of arrogance, which is praised as confidence. Conversely, our culture confuses humility with humiliation, which feeds bullying. It is no wonder, then, that children can confuse being boastful with confidence and being humble with weakness.

Children develop a framework for humility and gratitude when they know they are valued as they are, not because they win the race, earn the highest grades, or score the most points.

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

Children may not understand humility or grace on an intellectual level; however, humility becomes real as the children experience unconditional love and acceptance from people who tell them about God and model a forgiving spirit. Teach them to say “I'm sorry” and “Thank you.”

True humility, like grace, comes from personal strength and assurance. Your ministry includes building the children's confidence in the assurance of God's unconditional love. Encourage your children's confidence in and gratitude for God's grace; they will eventually claim it for themselves, enhancing their humility.

Model humility without becoming a doormat; demonstrate confidence without being boastful. Your humble stance before God will evoke in the children resonance with the parable's message: God's grace calls for humility and gratitude.

*Holy God, guide my thoughts, my words, and my actions in all humility.  
In Christ's name. Amen.*

## Supplies

- basic supplies  
(see p. ix)
- downloaded songs from  
growinggracegratitude  
.org
- audio recording  
(see p. xi)
- Stories, Colors & More  
(SCM) 1–12**
- table covering
- candle, matches

## Responding

### Claiming

- copies of **Grace Notes  
(GN) 1**
- sheets of wax paper
- tissue paper

### Celebrating

- variety of colorful  
balloons, one for each  
person

## GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the children arrive, post **SCM 9–10** and cut out and glue the arrow marker on a clothespin. Use the visual schedule to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM 11–12** for the key to icons (for example, **LG T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

### Welcoming and Preparing **LG**

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.

Post **SCM 2**. Tell the children that, in today’s story, Jesus tells a story about people praying in the temple. Emphasize that the temple was a place of prayer. Ask the children when they pray and what they talk about with God.

Invite the children to transform your space into a place of prayer. Let them make their own decisions by using available objects or drawing pictures.

Encourage the children to include a worship table with a Bible, a table covering, a candle, chairs, and a music player with the downloaded songs. Have them post **SCM 5–6**.

Post **SCM 7–8** near the worship table. Ask older children to practice the Lord’s Prayer motions and be prepared to lead the group later in the session.

### Singing

Invite the group to sit at the table. Admire the efforts of the children to create a worship space.

Sing “This Is the Day.” As you sing, point out the words on **SCM 6** so the children can follow along.

### Praying

Light the candle. Invite children to close their eyes and breathe deeply. Encourage them to feel God with them.

Say that Jesus gave us a prayer to use to talk with God. Invite the volunteers who are prepared to lead the Lord’s Prayer with motions. Repeat the prayer motions as desired.

**A** *Adapt any activity to suit your children’s needs. Ask yourself, “How can I change this activity so that this child can do it?”*

### Preparing to Hear the Story D VI

Invite the children to name what they know about the Lord's Prayer. Comment that Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer so we have words when we don't know what to say to God.

Suggest that, in today's story, Jesus wants us to focus on our attitudes when we pray. Jesus wants us to be humble, not boastful, when we pray. Wonder if the Lord's Prayer is a humble prayer or a boastful prayer.

Show the children **SCM 3** and **4**. Comment that both men are praying. Wonder together which man is praying with humility and which is bragging with his prayer.



### Hearing the Story

Open the Bible to Luke 18 so children know that the story comes from the Bible. Hand out paper and crayons. Invite children to write or draw pictures as they listen. They can share their creations.

Read **SCM 1**. Look boastful as you read the Pharisee's prayer. Act humble as you read the tax collector's prayer.

Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

### Reflecting on God's Grace

Tell the children that God is gracious and loves all people. God loves both men who are praying in the temple. Discuss:

- ▼ I wonder what is boastful about the Pharisee's prayer.
- ▼ I wonder what is humble about the tax collector's prayer.
- ▼ I wonder why Jesus prefers the tax collector's prayer.

Comment that Jesus' story tells us that God welcomes prayers that are humble (such as "I need God"). Encourage the children to name ways their prayers can express a humble heart and their need for God.

Invite the children to pray an echo prayer:

God of grace, / thank you for always being with us. /  
Show us / how you want us to live. /  
Thank you, God. / Amen.

### Singing

Sing "God Hears Our Prayers." As you sing, point out the words on **SCM 5** so the children can follow along. Use repetition.

- T *For children who struggle with transitions, this may be a good time for an adult helper to come close to one or more children to model and encourage appropriate responses.*

## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Help the children thank God by inviting them to participate in one or more of the following activities. Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Sin: Any action that separates people from God or destroys relationships between people.<sup>1</sup>

### Claiming God's Grace A

Comment that, like the tax collector, we show humility when we confess our sin. Make mosaics to illustrate God's grace that forgives us when we confess our sin:

1. Cut out the heart frame on **GN 1**. Cut out the smaller heart shape on the dotted line.
2. Tear tissue paper into small pieces.
3. Glue torn tissue-paper shapes in an overlapping design onto the wax paper, not quite to the edge of the paper.
4. Glue the heart frame over the mosaic. Trim the edges of the wax paper.
5. Punch a hole in the top of the frame, where indicated, and attach yarn for hanging.
6. If you have a window, tape the mosaics there to dry.

As you and the children work, talk about how our sins make us broken like the torn tissue-paper pieces.

Talk about the light of God's grace shining through when we confess our sins and making us into something new, whole, and beautiful. God forgives us and loves us no matter what we have done or not done.

Encourage the children to take the mosaics home as a reminder for them and their families to trust God's grace.



### Celebrating God's Grace M

*Before the session, inflate and tie off balloons, one per person. Be mindful of any latex allergies.*

*Make a chart on newsprint to assign each balloon color to one of the following phrases: I praise you, God; I'm sorry, God; help my friend, God; help me, God; thank you, God. (For example: blue = thank you, God.)*

Ask the children to stand in a circle. Explain the activity: While you play "God Hears Our Prayers" or another song, they will bounce balloons in the air, with everyone helping keep them afloat.

When the music stops, each child will catch one balloon. Point out the chart with the color code. Explain that each child will lead a short prayer, according to his or her balloon color. For example, a child holding a blue balloon thanks God for something and the group responds, "Thank you, God."

1. *CEB Deep Blue Kids Bible*  
© 2012 by Common English  
Bible, p. 1422.

Give each child an inflated balloon. Play and pause the music several times, repeating the color prayers each time.

Close the prayer time by saying, “In Jesus’ name, we pray,” and prompt the children to respond, “Amen.”

### Praying God’s Grace

Teach the children a rap about prayer by saying one line at a time and encouraging them to follow along. Boldface type indicates the downbeat:

We can **pray** in the **morn**-ing.  
We can **pray** at **night**.  
We can **pray** when we’re **close**.  
And when we’re **out** of **sight**.

We can **pray** with **whis**-pers.  
We can **pray** with a **song**.  
We can **pray** when we’re **sick**.  
We can **pray** when we’re **strong**.

God is **with** us all the **time**.  
God **hears** the words we **share**.  
God **loves** every **one** of us.  
God **lis**-tens to our **prayers**.

Encourage the children to create motions appropriate to the words. Ask the pastor or worship committee to let the children lead the rap in an upcoming worship service.

### Offering God’s Grace

LG

Help the children make hand prayer prompts to offer to their families. Invite them to trace their hands on paper. Help them write the following words on each part of the hand:

- ▼ In the palm: Pray for . . .
- ▼ On the thumb: family and friends
- ▼ On the first finger: people in the world
- ▼ On the middle finger: people who lead and help
- ▼ On the ring finger: people who are sick or injured
- ▼ On the little finger: my thanks and needs

Cut out paper hands and glue them to construction paper. Show the children how the phrases can be used to start their own prayers.

When the children have finished, ask them to take a moment to pray with their prayer hands. Encourage them to share the prayer hands with their families. Suggest they set family prayer times.

You may choose to make a sample of your hand as a guide.



## LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite the children to gather. Ask them to think of people they will pray for in the week ahead.

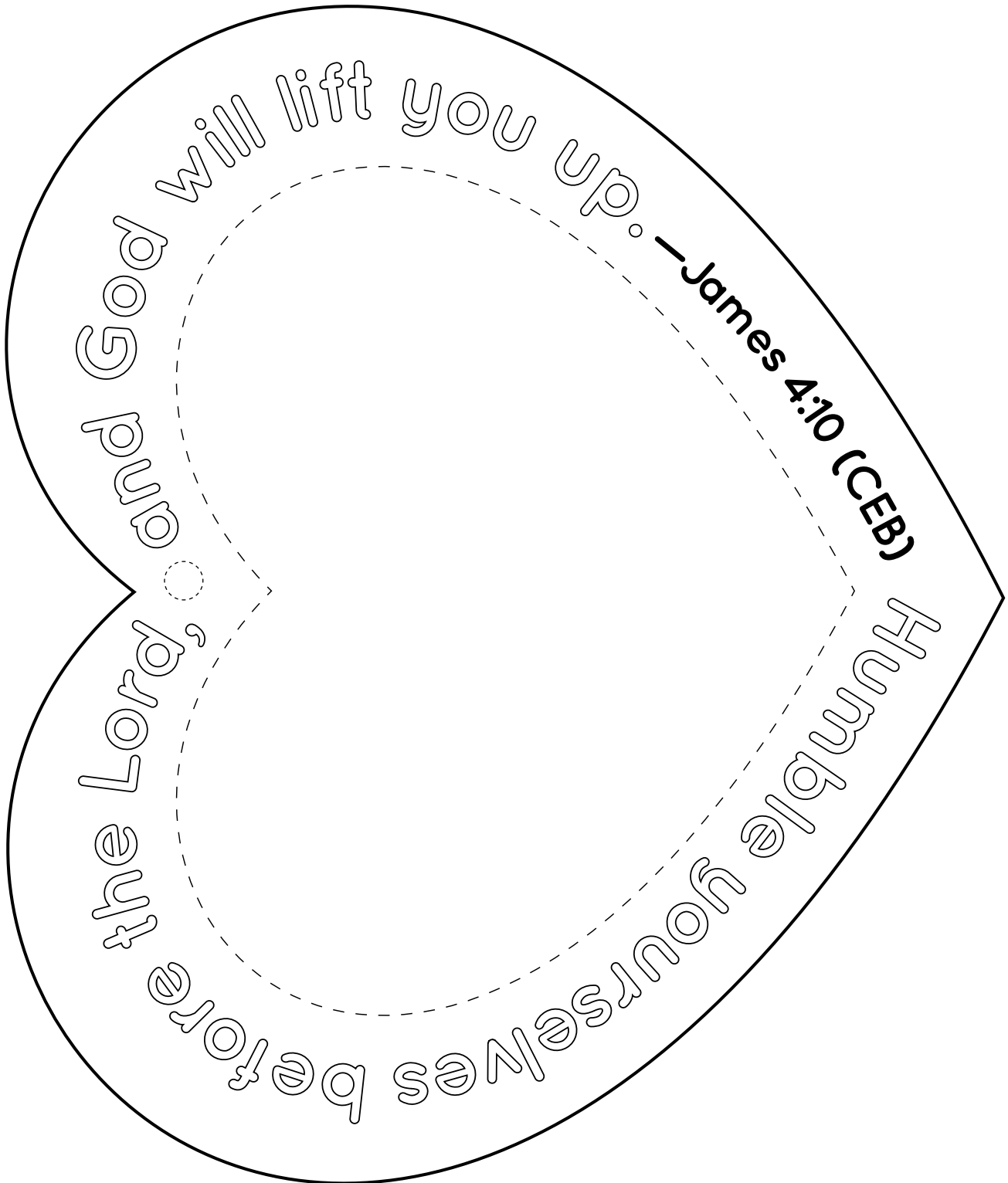
Explain that the group will make prayers to add to the balloons from Celebrating God's Grace. Give everyone a piece of paper and a pencil or crayon. Ask each child to write a short prayer or draw a picture of a prayer.

Tie string to the balloons, and tape the prayers to the string.

Gather in a circle. Invite each person to say the prayer on the balloon. Prompt the group to respond to each prayer with "Lord, hear our prayer."

Challenge the children to give their balloon prayers to the people they are praying for this week.

As they depart, give each child a blessing. Say to each one: "(Name), the grace of God is with you."





# Stories, Colors & More

for Multiage  
(Ages 5-10)



# Stories

(based on Luke 18:9-14)

One day, Jesus told a story to people who were proud of the way they lived. They trusted in themselves, in their own sense of being right, and looked down on everyone else. Jesus said:

A prominent religious leader and a tax collector went up to the temple to pray. The religious leader was called a *Pharisee*, a word that means “separate.” He believed that people pleased God best by following the Law of Moses, so he worked hard to obey all the rules. He was a really good person, and all the people liked him.

*I wonder what the Pharisees were separate from.*

The other person was a tax collector. He collected money for the Romans who had invaded the country. He knew that most people hated him and thought he was a bad person.

*I wonder why people hated the tax collector.*

The Pharisee and the tax collector climbed the stairs and went inside the temple. The Pharisee walked quickly past the tax collector and marched right up to the front of the temple. He knew he was living a good life. He felt good about himself and stood proudly. The Pharisee lifted up his arms and began to pray:

“Oh God,” he said. “I thank you that I am not greedy, that I don’t lie and cheat like everyone else. I am very glad,” he puffed, full of himself, “that I am not like the tax collector. I am a very good person,” he admired himself, “and I work hard to obey all the rules. I keep myself separate from all wrongdoing. I am glad to be such a good person. Amen.”

Meanwhile, the tax collector hid in the shadows. The tax collector was very sad. He knew he hadn’t always done the right thing. He felt sad for the ways he had hurt others and turned away from God. He knew he needed God’s love. He did what Jewish people often did when they were sorry and filled with sadness. He kept his head bowed and began to beat his chest.

“Oh God,” he whispered, “I need your love. Have mercy on me. I am a sinner. Amen.”

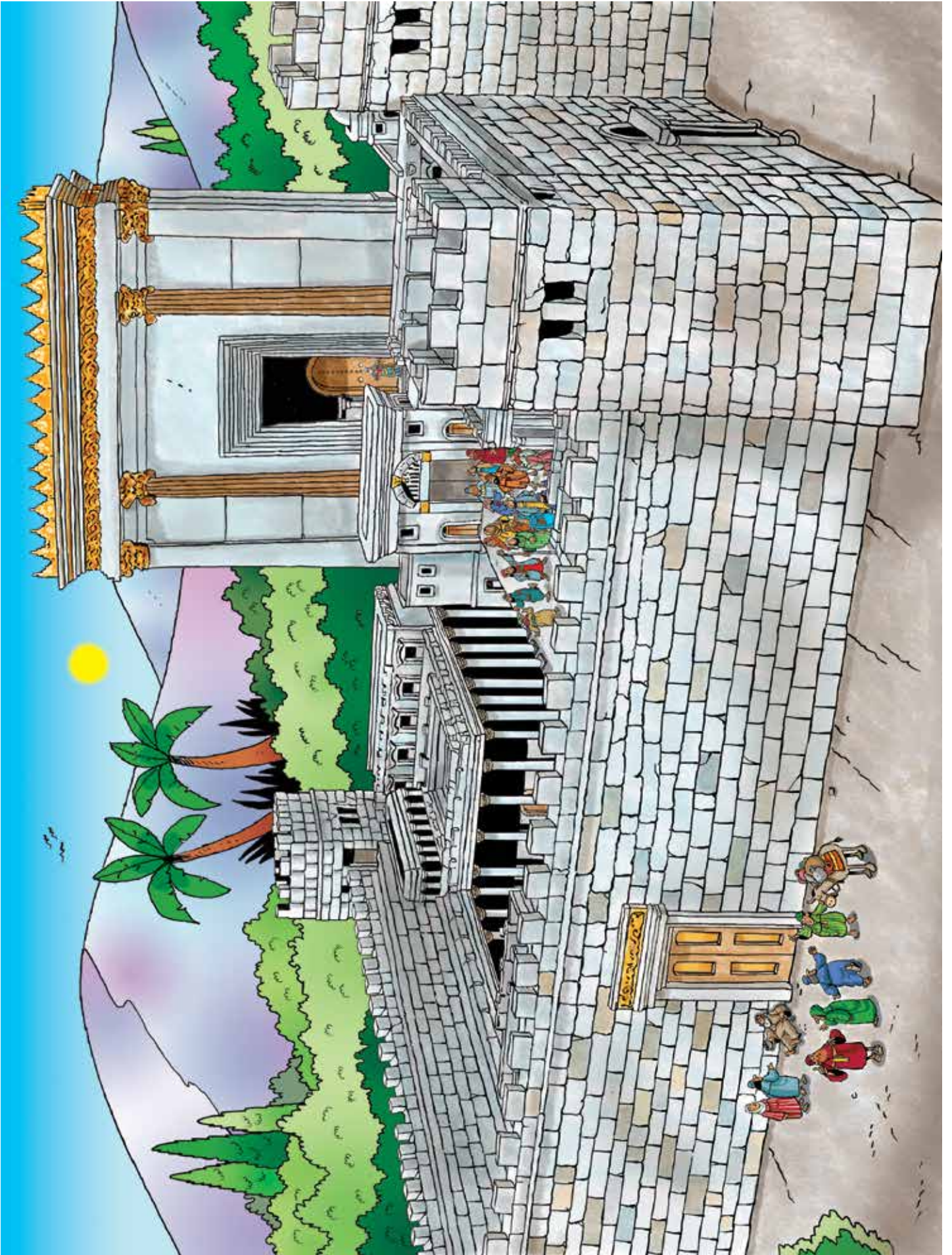
*I wonder what God thought of the Pharisee’s prayer and of the tax collector’s prayer.*

Jesus continued: “Two people left the temple. The Pharisee had done everything right, but his prayer was not right in God’s eyes. He did not understand that he still needed God’s grace. The tax collector had done nothing right, but he had asked for and received God’s grace anyway. And the tax collector was forgiven. Now he was right in God’s eyes.”



Colors













More





This is the day, this is the day,  
that our God has made.  
We will rejoice, we will rejoice,  
and be glad in it, and be glad in it.


This is the day that our God has made,  
we will rejoice and be glad in it.  
This is the day, this is the day,  
that our God has made.

Come unto me, come unto me;  
O my people, come; O my people, come.  
Sing praise to God, sing praise to God;  
I will make you one, I will make you one.


Come unto me; O my people, come.  
Sing praise to God, I will make you one.  
Come unto me; come unto me;  
O my people, come.

This is the day, this is the day,  
that our God has made.  
We will rejoice, we will rejoice,  
and be glad in it, and be glad in it.


This is the day that our God has made,  
we will rejoice and be glad in it.  
This is the day, this is the day.  
This is the day that our God has made.  
This is the day that our God has made.




Our Father, who art in heaven,  
 (Lift one arm over head,  
 fingers pointing up, and hold.)



hallowed be thy name.  
 (Lift other arm over head,  
 fingers pointing up.)



Thy kingdom come,  
 thy will be done,  
 (Slowly lower both arms  
 to sides.)



on earth as it is in heaven.  
 (Sweep one arm across body.)



Give us this day our daily bread;  
 (Cup hands in front of body as  
 if holding something.)



and forgive us our debts,  
 (Move fist to chest.)



as we forgive our debtors;  
(Bow head and fold hands as if praying.)



and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
(Hold hands in front of face,  
palms toward face.)



For thine is the kingdom  
(Arms down, angled out from  
body, hands open, fingers  
pointing down.)



and the power  
(Make fists with hands; cross  
arms at chest height by  
touching wrists.)



and the glory, forever.  
(Open arms and hands; lift  
arms over head.)



Amen.  
(Bring hands together and fold  
as if in prayer.)

# Your Weekly Visual Schedule



Welcoming  
and  
Preparing



Singing  
and  
Praying



Hearing  
the  
Story





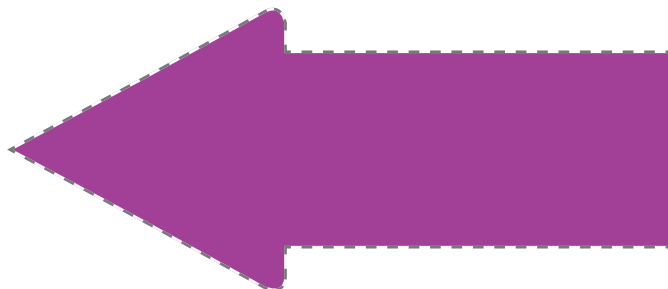
Reflecting  
on God's  
Grace



Activity  
Choices



Loving and  
Serving  
God



## Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

### Support Map

#### **M** Movement

Some children need to move more than others. Setting boundaries for appropriate movement can allow the leader to meet the needs of the group while also meeting the needs of the child. Mark a place on the floor with tape, a mat, or a pillow. Be clear that the child can move within this space. Sometimes having two spots (chairs and pillows or mats) can be helpful.

#### **T** Transitions

Transition times provide a challenge to children. Clear expectations, follow-through, and routine help with those times, but they may not be enough for some children. For children who struggle with transitions, consider quick physical activities—such as doing chair push-ups, squeezing your hands together, and stretching—before or after the transition.

#### **TD** Tactile Defensiveness

Sometimes children struggle with textured objects such as glue, clay, finger paint, and chalk. For some children, textures create real anxiety. Allow and encourage children to explore textures without pressure, and provide opportunities to wash or wipe hands right away. For children who struggle with texture, find a way to participate in the activity without getting their hands dirty, such as being a timekeeper.

#### **A** Adapting Activities

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. Instead of thinking, “This child can’t do this,” think, “How can I change this activity so that this child can do it?”

#### **B** Behavior

Children’s behavior can challenge us, disrupt the group, and lead to unsafe situations. Be clear about what you expect before you do the activity. If you don’t want children to touch one another while they are in a circle, tell them that before they touch one another. Clear expectations let children know what the rules are. Using the included visual schedule is a great way to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for children to remember.

#### **C** Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty Communicating

Reach out to parents and caregivers about alternative forms of communication used by children. Learning a few words in American Sign Language, becoming familiar with Picture Exchange Communication System, or exploring how to support with other assistive technologies are examples of showing hospitality to the children. In addition, give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.

#### **FA** Food Allergies

Remove all food products containing allergens. Post signs to help people remember the allergy. Have all children wash their hands and faces to avoid triggering a reaction.

#### **L** Listening

Attending to a story or comprehending instructions can be a challenge for children who struggle with attention. Supporting these children requires consistency, clear expectations, and organization. Some hints that may help include clearly communicating expectations before the activity, checking for understanding, providing visual support as well as verbal instructions, building movement into activities, and supporting transitions.



## Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

Support Map

### LG Leadership and Generosity

Focus on the strengths of the children, and learn to see them as gifted members of your community. Look for opportunities for them to express generosity. Offer them ways to practice leadership, such as passing out items, holding visual aids, helping other children, or serving as the example in games and activities.

### LD Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty with Reading and Writing

Whenever children read aloud, ask for volunteers. Calling on a child who does not read at grade level may make him or her feel embarrassed and unwelcome. Always encourage children to write or draw pictures as part of their responses. Children then can share their drawings.

### MS Supporting Children with Mobility Supports

As you set up, think about ample space between furniture to maneuver a wheelchair or walker. Think about materials and how they are positioned. Doing a roll-through in a wheelchair or walker can be a helpful way to make sure that your room setup is accessible. Think about including your children who use assistive devices. For example, seating all children on chairs or placing materials for a game on a table instead of on the floor are simple ways to create a more welcoming community.

### VI Visual Impairment/Blindness

Talk with parents, caregivers, and children about the strengths and abilities of the child as well as the best ways to offer support. Large print or special lighting may allow full access to the materials. Talk with parents or caregivers about the use of the copy machine or scanned images and a computer or tablet to enlarge print. Encourage children to describe their pictures and other creations in words as they share them.

### D Deaf / Hard of Hearing

To create a welcoming environment for children who are deaf or have difficulty hearing, provide visual supports, such as written instructions and copies of the stories told. Employ an interpreter, and encourage children and adults in the community to learn to communicate through American Sign Language. Limit background noise. Face a person before speaking. Become familiar with children who use assistive technology. Be sure to check with parents or caregivers of children who use cochlear implants or hearing aids about any special considerations.

### F Fairness

To make every child feel welcome and successful, think about fairness in a different light. Fairness is not every child getting the same thing; it is every child getting what she or he needs.

#### Ask for Help

A team approach to including people with disabilities in your congregation helps build understanding and knowledge in the congregation, provides support for the child and family, and makes including all of God's children in church school an attainable goal.