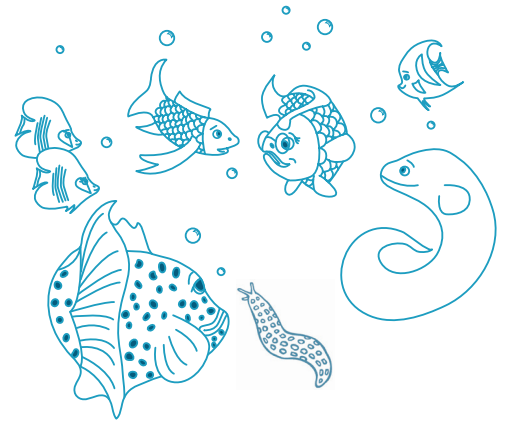


Gracie Helps a Hermit

“1, 2, 3, 4, 5...” Gracie was counting slowly as her friends began to find places to hide. They were playing a game of Hide and Seek after school, and it was her turn to be the one who found the others. There were six of them playing all together, so she would need to use her best finding skills to discover them. Gus was always pretty easy to find, because as a grouper he was very large, and there just weren’t that many places that a grouper could hide within the coral reef. Ephraim Eel was usually the most difficult to find. As an eel he could often slither into places that were difficult for the others to go. “98, 99, 100—Ready or not, here I come,” cried Gracie.



She turned around from the rock she had been facing and immediately saw Gus trying to hide behind some branch coral. She swam quickly over and tagged him on his tail before he even had a chance to move. As she moved to the left, she caught a glimpse of some shiny scales down near the sandy bottom and knew they must belong to her best friend, Angie, as she was hiding behind some algae, which Angie loved to plant. After tagging her on the fin, Gracie discovered Benji and Belinda Butterflyfish over by some rocks. She could hear them before she saw them, as they were arguing over who would be the last to be tagged. Gracie tagged both at once as she swam between them.

Finally only Ephraim Eel was left. Gracie enlisted all her other friends to help her find him, as he was always so difficult to spot. Some swam up near the surface. Others looked deep within the coral reef. Gracie decided to concentrate her efforts near the bottom, as she knew Ephraim really liked caves.



As she was swimming near the sand, close to the reef, she heard what sounded like crying. She listened carefully and sure enough, there seemed to be a tiny snail shell down below that was deeply sad and crying so hard that it was shaking. She swam quickly down to the shell and said, “Are you all right?”

But the shell was crying so hard that it didn’t hear her.

She tapped it gently and said, “Excuse me, but can I help you?”

Slowly the shell stopped shaking quite so much, and a tiny crab poked its tentacles and claws out of the shell, looking around very nervously. “Have you come to take away this home, too?” said a small voice, trying to hold back the tears.

“Why would I want to take away your home?” said Gracie. “My name is Gracie and I live in the branch coral over there,” indicated Gracie, pointing her fin.

The next part was a little difficult to understand, as the tiny crab was having difficulty stopping his crying and so this is what Gracie heard between the sniffs and sobs.

“My name is Herman,” sniffed the little crab. “I am a hermit crab ... live in shells of other animals ... traveled a long way ... lost track of family ... old reef was dying ... no food ... big crabs are bullies ... this shell is too small ... it pinches.

“Well, if your shell is too small, why don’t you live in a bigger home?” asked Gracie, settling on the last problem that Herman had mentioned. “There must be other shells around here.”

“Every time I find a larger shell, a bigger hermit crab always takes it away from me. I am just too little,” said Herman.

“Everyone deserves a home!” stated Gracie strongly. “Perhaps my friends and I can help you find a new shell and you can stay with us until we find your family. We’ll make sure the larger hermit crabs don’t take your home this time.”

“Would you really? But I don’t think I can move in this tiny shell to even find another shell. I am so cramped in here,” sighed Herman.

“How about if we bring the shells to you?” cried Gracie as she thought of this plan.

“Could you do that?” asked Herman.

“I’m sure my friends would be willing to help,” said Gracie. She signaled to the others to join her and explained to them about Herman’s housing problem. Each of them immediately went in search of other snail shells. Everyone brought back at least one and Gus found a whole lot of shells in various sizes.

Herman looked at all his choices and saw two different shells that looked like they would be just the right size. He crawled over to the first one. It was brown and white with some black dots around the top of the shell. He was just about to try it on for size when an angry voice said, “This shell is occupied!” A purple-bodied snail stuck its tentacles furiously in Herman’s face, and quickly (at least for a snail), Herman moved away from the pile of shells the fish had collected.

“Whoops,” said Benji, blushing. “I guess I forgot to check that it was empty.”

Herman turned his attention to the second shell that was about the same size. This one had black and white swirls on it. He knocked on the shell and asked, “Anyone home?” He wanted to make sure that he didn’t make another creature angry. No one answered this time, so Herman came as close to the shell as he could, then carefully transferred his body from the little shell to this bigger one.

“How is it, Herman?” asked Gracie.



“Ah! Just right!” said Herman. He was so happy that he did a little jig in his new shell, and Gracie and her friends all laughed along with him.

“Isn’t anyone going to try to find me?” said Ephraim Eel as he joined the noisy group.

“Oh, goodness,” exclaimed Belinda. “We forgot completely about the game. Have you been hiding all this time, Ephraim?”

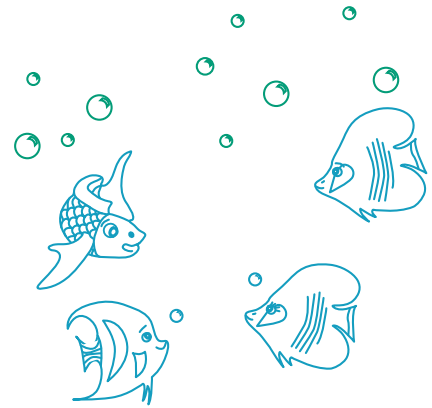
“Yes,” laughed Ephraim. “But I could hear what you were doing, and I thought it was more important to help Herman find a new home. Hey, Herman, now that you have a more comfortable home, do you want to play with us? You can be it.”

Herman agreed. Before they began another game, however, Gracie thought it would be a good idea for them to send a bubble prayer of thanksgiving to the God of the Seas for Herman’s new home and their friendship together. She also sent a passing seahorse to find Old Codfish, their teacher. She was sure that as wise as he was, he would be able to come up with a plan to locate Herman’s family. The group gathered in a circle with Herman in the center and each fish said a blessing for Herman’s new home and all gave each other high fives with their fins, claws or tails.

Then Herman began the count again, “1, 2, 3, 4, 5...” and all of his new friends began looking for good hiding places.

For younger children:

- 🌐 Gracie was good at noticing when Herman, the hermit crab was sad and tried to help. What do you do when you see another child who is crying? How might you be able to help?
- 🌐 Draw a picture of your home. What are you grateful for within your house or apartment? Some people have difficulty buying a safe place to live. Talk with your parents or teachers about what you might do as a family or church together to help others find a home in your community.
- 🌐 Collect money for One Great Hour of Sharing in your fish bank. Want to know more about the projects this money supports? Check out the activity sheet that contains a fishing game at this web address: <https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/resource/supplemental-sheet-younger-children-fishing-projec/>



For older children:

- 🌐 Herman the hermit crab was bullied by the larger hermit crabs and forced to live in a shell that was too small for his body. Think about how you might aid those who are being bullied around you. How might you and your friends stand with them, as Gracie and her friends did?
- 🌐 As Gracie said, “Everyone deserves a home!” Do some research about how your community provides affordable housing for those who may not have the resources to purchase a home. Here is a United States government website, where you can learn more about this issue: https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/affordablehousing/ What can your family and church do to support this issue?
- 🌐 Collect money for One Great Hour of Sharing and the programs it supports. To learn more about where this money is going, explore these statistics and this interactive map of different projects this special offering supports. <https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/offering/oghs/>

