

Gracie Finds Joy

It was the big day! Gracie's school was going on a field trip with all her friends. Gracie was up extra early and swam to her favorite fish cleaning salon on the reef, Cara's Cleaners. There was already a line, but Gracie waited patiently for her turn.

Just as she reached the front of the line, Benji Butterflyfish came rushing over and blurted out to Gracie, "You're such a little fish, and it'll hold up the field trip if I wait in this long line. You don't mind letting me go first with Cara the cleaner fish, do you?"

Gracie bit her bottom fishy lip and said very quietly, "No, you go first."

Benji replied, "Thanks, Gracie. You know the God of the seas loves a cheerful giver."

Gracie thought, "Here I waited all this time and Benji just swims right up and asks me to give up my space. What if I don't feel like it? Does that mean that God doesn't love me?"

Just behind her, Old Codfish gave a little cough. "I would imagine that you don't feel very cheerful right now, Gracie. Am I right?"

Gracie thought that Old Codfish, her teacher, was the smartest fish she knew. Sometimes he seemed to know exactly what she was thinking and feeling, like now. Gracie nodded her head slowly and then took her turn with Cara the cleaner fish. Somehow, the excitement that she had felt at the beginning of the day was just not there anymore.

Old Codfish rounded up the class and said, "It's time for our field trip. Today we're going to explore our reef for what it means to be a cheerful giver. Does anyone have any thoughts before we head out?"

Belinda, Benji's sister, raised her fin and said, "We should always have a smile on our face whenever we give something to someone else."

"What if we don't feel like smiling?" retorted Gracie, still upset over Benji's behavior.

"Perhaps there is something deeper going on than being happy here," said Old Codfish. "I wonder if trying to find joy in giving would be a better theme for our field trip."

"Is Joy a jellyfish?" said Gus Grouper.

"Joy can be someone's name, but that's not the kind of joy I'm thinking of today, Gus," said Old Codfish. "Let's see if we can find this other kind of joy as we travel."

All the fish paired off and began to swim in a line, following Old Codfish. Gracie and Angie Angelfish chose to be partners, and Gracie tried to stay as far away from Benji as she could.

After a few minutes of swimming in and out of the coral, the school of fish halted by a pink, flowery-looking object attached to the reef.

"Don't get too close!" warned Old Codfish. "This sea anemone stings. I want you to meet a friend of mine."

"You have a friend that is a plant?" interrupted Benji.

"Plants are my friends in a way," replied Old Codfish, patiently, "but you haven't actually seen the friend I want to introduce yet. Ilo, are you in there?"

When he called, a small clownfish stuck his nose out of the sea anemone's tentacles. "Hello, Old Codfish, my friend. This must be your school of young students. How can I help you on your field trip?"



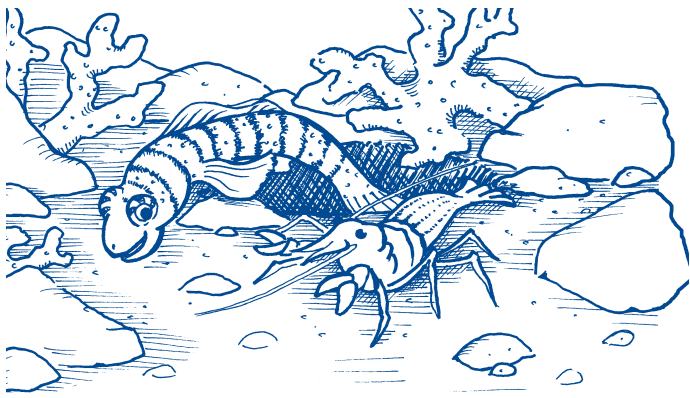
"We're looking for joy," said Gracie. "Can you tell us what it means?"

Ilo paused, then he said, "I think joy is feeling safe and protected. I feel joyful when I think about my sea anemone and how she shares her home with me."

"But aren't you afraid of getting stung?" asked Angie Angelfish, who knew all sorts of things about plants.

"No, she protects me and I protect her from butterflyfish," Ilo said, giving a special, knowing look to Benji. "We bring joy to each other."

"Thank you, Ilo," said Old Codfish. "We need to move on to our next stop. You have helped us along our way to finding joy."



The class paired up again and continued swimming. This time they dove deeply to the sandy floor and surrounded a small hole.

“Meet two more friends, Gioia Gobyfish and Alegría Blindshrimp,” indicated Old Codfish, pointing to the hole.

Out came a tiny, transparent shrimp and a larger narrow fish, who kept her tail in the hole.

“Hello, class,” said Gioia, the goby fish. “Welcome to our home!”

“You both live in that tiny hole!” said Gracie in wonderment. “How can you find joy being so crowded together?”

“Well, I wouldn’t be able to build a home on my own. I don’t have strong pinchers like my friend here,” replied Gioia.

“And I wouldn’t be able to see anything that might want to eat me while I work,” said Alegría. “When Gioia sees something, she moves her tail and I run into the hole. So we find joy in looking out for each other.”

“Wow,” thought Gracie, “neither of these two could live on their own, but together they could be joyful even in a small space.”

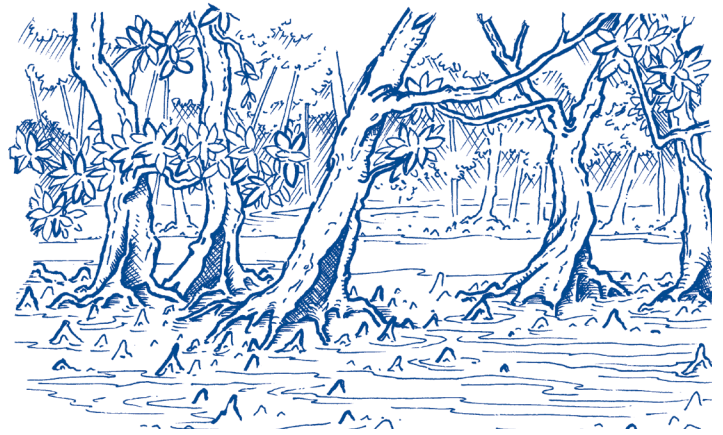
Old Codfish thanked these friends before forming up the lines for one last stop on the field trip. They had to swim a long way to the very shoreline of the Red Sea. As they arrived, they saw big, wooden tree roots and all sorts of living creatures even smaller and younger than anyone in their class.

“Does anyone know where we are?” asked Old Codfish.

“We’re in the fish nursery,” said Belinda Butterflyfish. She and Benji had just welcomed a new brother into their family.

Old Codfish turned to one of the nearby nursery workers, Freude Fincastle, and asked him to explain his work.

Freude explained how the mangrove tree roots protect the eggs and the young fish until they are old enough to join their families on the reef.



Gracie asked, “Where do you find joy?”

Freude said, “I find joy in watching the young grow and get stronger. Sometimes we have bad days here in the nursery, but I only have to look at one of these young fish to know that what I share is important.”

Old Codfish turned to the class and asked if they had found joy today on their field trip.

They all cried, “Yes!”

“So when we give to someone else like Cara, Ilo, Gioia, Alegría, Freude, and our plant friends did, we bring joy to God, to others, and even to ourselves,” taught Old Codfish. “I wonder where you will find your joy in giving.”

For Young Children:

1. How do you share with others? Decide how you will bring joy to someone today.
2. Go on a God-spotting field trip with your parents or class. See how many ways you notice people bringing joy to each other and to God.
3. Using the One Great Hour of Sharing materials, look for ways that people around the world are sharing resources and bringing joy.

For Older Children:

1. Explore 2 Corinthians 9:6–8 in the Bible. What do you think it means to be a cheerful giver? What do you see at home, at school, or at church that seems to embody this?
2. The names in this story—Cara, Ilo, Gioia, Alegría, and Freude—are different ways of saying, “joy,” around the world. Find out the global ministries that your church supports, and ask or write to them to find out how they share joy.
3. Using the One Great Hour of Sharing materials, discover even more ways that people around the world share joy.