

Gracie and the Reef Mender

The storm clouds had gathered over the reef. Gracie and her friends were huddled in their safe places. They had been through storms before and knew what to do. This didn't keep them from being afraid as the reef got darker and the water choppier. There were flashes of light above them and a booming sound that sent chills down their spines to the tips of their fins.

Gracie prayed to the God of the Seas to protect them and keep them safe. She knew how destructive storms could be. Her friend Efraim Eel had lost his home in the last one and all her friends had helped to clean up the clutter.

All of sudden there was an especially loud crack. It sounded like it was in the reef near the sunken ship where she liked to play. She would need to wait until the storm was over before she could discover what had happened. As the winds began to still and the water became less choppy, Gracie ventured out of her fan coral and began to check on the others. She found her friend, Angie Angelfish first, who was already busy blowing the sand off of her algae plants.

"Everything all right, Angie?" asked Gracie.

"I'm fine," replied Angie, "but this storm sure kicked up a lot of sand on my poor plants." Angie was a gardener and spent her free time tending to the plants on the reef.

Benji and Belinda Butterflyfish were the next to appear. As brother and sister, they had holed up in their family's branch coral home.

Slowly all her other friends began to appear. Gus Grouper, Efraim Eel, and Saul Slug all looked to be fine after the strong storm. Then Old Cod Fish, their teacher, appeared from the direction of the sunken ship.

"Is everyone well?" asked Old Cod Fish, who was out of breath from swimming so quickly.

"We're fine, teacher," chorused everyone.

"Good, good," replied Old Cod Fish. "Then perhaps you could help the creatures who have lost their homes and all their food supply over by the shipwreck."

The friends followed their teacher back in the direction from which he had come and were amazed to see a big hole in the reef near the surface of the water, where once many fish had made their homes.

"Lightning struck this part of the reef and destroyed this section," explained Old Cod Fish, anticipating that they would want to know how this happened. "We need to help the animals that use to live in this part of the reef find a new home," he continued.

"This was such a beautiful area," sighed Gracie. "It looks so empty without this part of the reef."

"Couldn't we fix it?" asked Gus. He was always ready to help when called upon.

"I heard of a scientist who helped another reef to grow again, by introducing certain types of coral that grow well in warm water," said Angie. "She used staghorn coral and attached it to the coral that was left, almost like grafting plants like my algae," she continued. Angie was always interested in hearing any news that talked about growing things.

"I know where there is some staghorn coral over by my old home," said Efraim. "Perhaps those coral colonies would be willing to move to this part of the reef in order to help out."

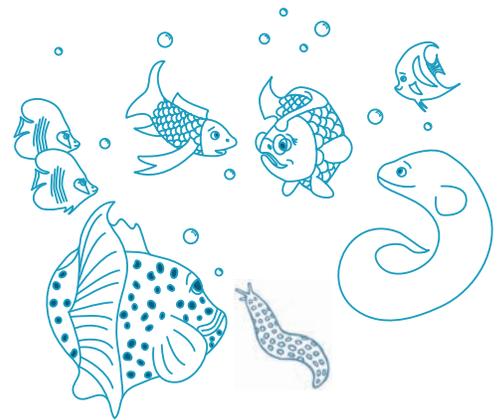
"Aren't you all forgetting something?" interjected Benji. "This scientist had arms and hands to be able to do this grafting. We can't pick up this coral with our fins to mend this reef."

"Surely we could find someone to help us," said Gracie, not willing to give up this idea. "Who do we know who can pick things up?"

"Well it isn't me," said Saul, who had been very quiet. "Sea slugs don't have any arms or fins, but I do have a friend who might be able to help. Her name is Octavia and she is very shy."

"But does she have arms?" asked Benji.

"She has eight of them," replied Saul.



“Eight arms?!” repeated Gracie. “But the only sea creature I know that has eight arms is an octopus,” she said, a little fearfully.

“That’s right!” replied Saul brightly. “She is so cool, but doesn’t know how cool she is. She has so much love to give that she has three hearts. And she is so smart that not only does she have a brain in her head, but each of her arms can think for itself.”

“Wow! That is cool!” said Benji, warming to the idea of meeting a real octopus.

Saul took them way down by the shipwreck to a dark hole that they hadn’t noticed before. He talked softly into the hole, explaining the situation. Finally, Octavia emerged and started to work.

Gracie and her friends were amazed how each arm could be doing a different task, carefully moving the staghorn coral, brushing away the sand, attaching the coral together with sea weed, and shaking the fins of the others as she was introduced. After they recovered from their surprise, the others began helping too, clearing up the clutter, talking to the coral colonies, and bubbling their prayers into the reef as it was being mended.

Old Cod Fish looked on, beaming with pride. His students were beginning to work together as a team, and they had made a new friend. After all the work was complete, he gathered them. Octavia was about to crawl back into her hole, but Old Cod Fish invited her to join the group and sit next to him in the place of honor. He told them of a great prophet, Isaiah, who had spoken in a difficult time like this to the people. “Your ancient ruins will be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” (Isaiah 58:12)

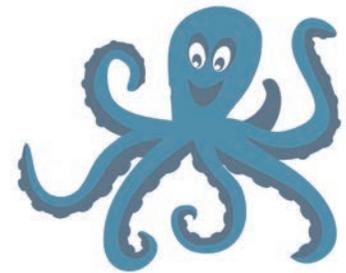
“Repairer of the breach,” said Gracie in a hushed voice. “That’s what we should call you, Octavia. We couldn’t have done this without you.”

“That’s too grand for me,” replied Octavia, blushing bright red.

“Well, then, we’ll just call you the Reef Mender,” insisted Gracie.

“I’d rather you just called me friend or neighbor,” replied Octavia shyly.

“Friend it is!” shouted everyone, and each one of Octavia’s eight arms hugged a different new friend. Then, they all sang praises to the God of the Seas and welcomed all who were to live in this new home that they had created together.



For younger children:

1. Who are your friends? What gifts do they have or what are they good at? What gifts or skills do you have?
2. How do we help others with our gifts? Think about ways you help and are helped by others. Talk about ways your church helps and is helped by others. Plan a way that your class or group can help others with your gifts.
3. Explore the different ways that One Great Hour of Sharing helps others by using different gifts. Tell some of the real-life stories on the OGHS website: <http://specialofferings.pcusa.org/oghs>

For older children:

1. Angie Angelfish had heard about the work being done in Belize by scientist Lisa Carne, who is working with others to repair the breach of coral reefs that have been damaged by storms and the rising water temperature. Here is a link to learn more about her work: <http://www.takepart.com/feature/2014/04/22/save-coral-reef-from-global-warming-ocean-acidification>. How can you help to care for God’s creation?
2. The natural world has many destructive forces like hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornadoes. There are also many places in the world where there is hunger and poverty. Isaiah spoke to people who had experienced war, famine, and probably some of these other destructive forces. In Isaiah 58, he gives the people hope by talking about those who will repair the breach and make the streets livable again. Where have you seen people working together to address some of these issues? What can you do with your family or friends to be part of this global healing team?
3. One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) funds projects all over the world. Use the interactive map here: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/o/viewer?mid=1LoboL9BNjxIHbZz73HkeBEy7-Xw> to explore the many places that receive the offering money from OGHS. Collect money in your Gracie fish banks to help people close to home and all over the world.