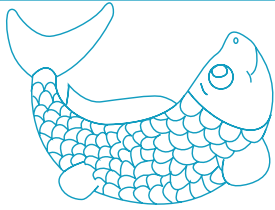




ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

SPECIAL OFFERINGS

HUNGER • DISASTER • DEVELOPMENT



Gracie Makes a Coral Covenant

It was a lazy day on the coral reef. The sun streamed down from above, casting bright rays on the beautiful coral and making the water warm and wonderful. The young fish were gathered at Ephraim Eel's home and trying to decide what they would do next.

"What do you want to do?" said Gracie to Gus Grouper.

"I don't know. What do you want to do?" Gus asked Benji and Belinda Butterflyfish.

"Well we could . . ." began Belinda.

"Naw! We did that yesterday," interrupted Benji. The twins were so close that they often could finish each other's thoughts and even sentences.

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Angie Angelfish, just swimming up. "Haven't you moved from when I was here an hour ago?"

"We were trying to decide what to do," replied Ephraim. "But it's so hard to decide when it's just so comfortable being together here," he finished with a yawn.

"Well, I've been busy planting algae in a new part of the reef," said Angie proudly. "Do you want to see?"

Since none of them could think of a better plan, they swam together to where Angie had planted the algae. Only, instead of beautiful green, growing seedlings, they only saw withered brown plants.

"I don't think your plants are doing so well," said Benji, stating what they were all thinking.

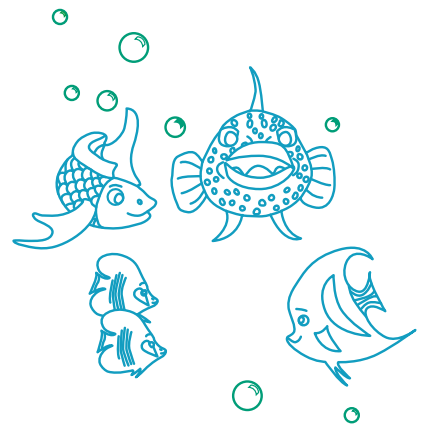
"I don't understand," said Angie, tearing up. "I wasn't gone all that long. What could hate my little plants so much to hurt them like this?"

All the fish began to look around for some type of predator who might have a grudge against algae, but there was no one to be found.

"Why don't we ask the coral next to where you planted?" suggested Gracie. "They certainly would have seen anything that damaged your plants."

They all agreed that this was a great suggestion. Gracie was elected to be the spokesfish as this had been her idea. She wasn't sure how to address the large branches of the coral colony in front of her. Did you talk to them all at once or individually? Was there a certain part of the coral colony that was more important than another part? Finally, she just decided to use a loud voice and speak to the entire colony.

"ATTENTION, CORAL COLONY! HAVE YOU SEEN WHAT KILLED THE LITTLE ALGAE PLANTS NEAR YOU?" yelled Gracie. All the other fish swam away, because Gracie's voice was so loud.



“Please don’t yell!” came a small voice from the coral, but it was so tiny that Gracie couldn’t make out the words.

“COULD YOU REPEAT THAT?” yelled Gracie again.

“Please don’t yell!” said the voice again, but it was still so soft that Gracie couldn’t hear it well.

“Any suggestions?” asked Gracie spinning around and addressing her friends who were some distance away.

“Perhaps I could be helpful,” said a new voice from below in the sand.

Gracie looked down and saw a large, cone-shaped shell with long spikes sticking out around the edges.

“My name is Samuel Spider Conch,” said the shell, or rather the creature inside it. “I couldn’t help overhearing your attempt to talk to the coral colony.”

“Everyone in the Red Sea could have overheard her,” muttered Benji.

“Anyway, perhaps my shell could be helpful to your conversation,” continued Samuel.

Gracie didn’t see how a shell could help her communicate with the coral colony, but she was willing to take any help she could get. “What do you suggest?” Gracie politely asked their new friend, Samuel.

“I think perhaps if I was closer to the coral and you talked through one of spikes on this end and I pointed another of my spikes toward the coral, perhaps the sound could be amplified within my shell so that you won’t have to shout and someone from the coral colony could be heard,” suggested Samuel.

“Like a megaphone or a cup telephone!” exclaimed Belinda, who was very interested in science and inventions.

“Let’s try it!” exclaimed Gracie.

Gus volunteered to lift Samuel up on his nose, so that he was midway up the coral colony branch, since this was the area where Gracie had directed her shouting earlier.

Gracie cleared her throat and decided to address the coral colony as friends this time. “Greetings, friend corals! We would like to know if you have seen what harmed the little plants next to you, please,” she asked politely.

The voice from the coral came back loud and clear this time, thanks to Samuel’s natural shell amplification.

“Thank you for not yelling,” said the voice. “My name is Camila Coral. I am one of the thousands of coral animals making up this colony, and I’m happy to meet you.”



Gracie repeated her question about the plants and the two began a long conversation. It seems that the coral colony was growing larger in this fine weather and clear water. They were running out of space and had sent advance tentacles out to secure more land for new coral animals to build on. Angie had unfortunately planted her seedlings on the land the coral colony had marked for future building, so the coral colony had been the ones to destroy the plants. Camila apologized on behalf of the coral colony, but was firm that they needed this space. Gracie relayed all of this to Angie and her other friends.

Angie felt bad about taking the coral colony’s land, but she also wondered how she would know where she could plant her algae next.

“Perhaps we could make a covenant,” suggested Gracie. She remembered that Old Cod Fish had once told her stories about the Hebrew people and others who made covenants with each other and with the God of the Seas.

“What’s a covenant?” asked Camila.

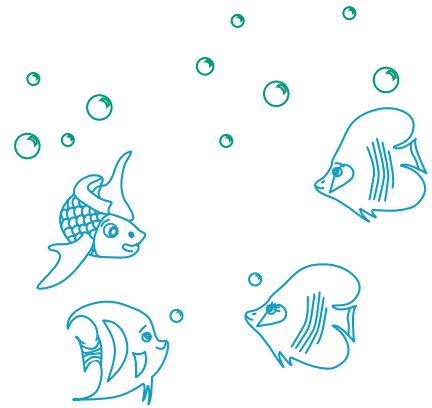
“It is an agreement between two parties to be in relationship with each other so that both benefit,” recited Gracie remembering what she had been taught.

“So, perhaps we could agree that your algae plants would not be planted closer than 10 feet from our coral colony,” said Camila.

“And perhaps your colony could agree to build in the opposite direction from my plants, so that they could grow for a long time,” offered Angie.

“That sounds like a covenant to me!” exclaimed Gracie.

Both parties agreed to these terms and then the covenant was sealed by everyone offering a bubble prayer to God of the Seas that they would be able to live together in peace for many years to come. The fish swam in circles around the coral colony as Samuel amplified the grateful songs of praise of all the tiny coral animals. Everyone decided it had been a good day as they went their separate ways and agreed that they were glad that their covenant had brought them some new friends.



For younger children:

- ⦿ Think together about the word “covenant.” What are some places where you make covenants? (With your parents? At school? At church?) Look in the Bible for other types of covenants (With Noah’s family, Abraham and Sarah’s family, Hagar, Hannah, David, Jesus)
- ⦿ Was it right for the coral colony to hurt Angie’s algae to protect their land? Why or why not? Would you have solved this problem in a different way?
- ⦿ Many of the projects supported by One Great Hour of Sharing involve people making agreements with each other. What are some things that people need that they may be asked to share with each other? (food, water, land for homes . . .) Look at some of the projects on the One Great Hour of Sharing web page (<http://specialofferings.pcusa.org/oghs.html>). What stories will you tell when you ask people to contribute to your fish bank?

For older children:

- ⦿ Compare and contrast Angie’s and the coral colony’s covenant with those you find in the Bible. (Here are some options: Noah’s family, Abraham and Sarah, Hagar, 10 Commandments and Moses, Hannah, David, Mary, Jesus-Great Commandment or Great Commission) How are they alike and how are they different? What difference does it make that God is one of the parties in most of the Bible covenants? How is this different from an agreement among people? What happens when one side breaks the covenant?
- ⦿ Make a covenant within your church. Who will be the parties involved? What will each side request from the other? What will you do to celebrate the sealing of this agreement like Gracie and her friends did?
- ⦿ This year for One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS), one of the projects being supported and discussed will be the Martín Peña Channel Land Trust. This allows people in Puerto Rico who would have individually lost their land both before and after Hurricane Maria to work together to keep a place to build their homes. Do some research on this project here (<https://www.world-habitat.org/world-habitat-awards/winners-and-finalists/cano-martin-pena-community-land-trust/>) What can you and your church do to aid this effort through OGHS and become friends and partners with this group who, like the coral colony in the story, want places for their children to grow and thrive?

