

Gracie and the Sea Star

“One, two, three . . .” Gracie heard Gus Grouper calling out the numbers in the distance as she swam with all of her might. This time she was going to hide someplace that her friend would never find her. She was going to become the hide-and-seek champion of the coral reef. She swam quickly between the pink and orange coral branches as she looked for the perfect hiding place. Her friend Angie Angelfish could identify every plant that might hide her tiny fish body. And yet, Gracie thought, “I can be brave. I can hide someplace where we have never been before.” So Gracie swam to the very edge of the reef near the deep waters.

Suddenly she stopped. The coral here did not look like the coral in her home. It was all white, hard, and still. Perhaps it was no longer alive. “But what had killed it?” she wondered.

Then far below she saw a shape that looked like both a star and a giant pin cushion. She swam down to this strange creature and said boldly, “Excuse me! Can you tell me who has killed the coral?”

The spiny, star-shaped creature slowly lifted one of his twelve large spiny arms and asked, “Are you talking about my dinner last night? I was really hungry, so I ate a few more coral creatures than I usually do.”

“You ate the coral!” cried Gracie. “But the coral is our home. All of us who live here depend on the coral.”

“I had no idea that anyone else thought the coral was important,” replied the sea star. “My mother always told me that to stay big and strong I needed to eat a lot.”

“But there must be other things you could eat,” Gracie suggested. “Have you ever tried algae? Many of us love to eat plants.”

“I suppose I could try eating plants,” began the sea star. “Maybe the other sea creatures would like me better. I don’t have many friends.”

“My name is Gracie,” said the little fish. “I will be your friend.”

“My name is Seymour,” replied the sea star. “I will try to eat algae and then maybe I can find some other friends, too.”

“Wait a minute, Seymour. I will find you some friends,” said Gracie, and she swam off to find the other fish.

“98, 99, 100,” counted Gus. “Gracie, you were supposed to hide,” he complained when he saw her swimming his way.

“I found a new friend. He’s very lonely,” she assured Gus.

“All right! Let’s round up Angie and meet your new friend,” Gus said, going back the way Gracie had come. He quickly found Angie Angelfish, and the three of them headed to the edge of the reef, where Gracie saw a spiny, star-shaped creature down below.

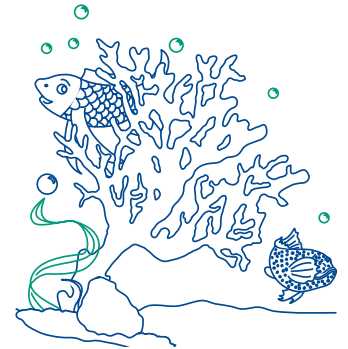
“Seymour, stop!” she cried suddenly. “You’re eating the coral again!”

The sea star slowly lifted his spiny arm and said, “I’m not Seymour. I’m his twin brother, Simon. Who are you?”

Gracie looked puzzled and then noticed that one of this sea star’s arms was shorter than the other eleven—just like Seymour’s had been. “Seymour, stop playing around, I know it’s you,” she said. “Now stop eating the coral. There’s some nice algae over there.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” replied the sea star. “I’m Simon, not Seymour, and I don’t know anything about eating plants instead of coral.”

At this moment they heard a slight cough just behind Gus. They turned and saw Old Codfish, who looked very serious as he approached the group. “Seymour Crown-of-Thorns Sea Star,” began Old Codfish, who never used anyone’s full name unless he was really angry. “You do know Gracie, and you are not telling the truth.”



"I'm sorry, Gracie," replied Seymour. "I was embarrassed that I was so hungry that I did just what I always do—eat the closest thing around. The algae was way over there, and this coral looked so good."

"Seymour," said Old Codfish, sounding more kindly now. "You may have just made up the name of Simon, but what you did reminds me of another Simon—a human, Simon Peter, who also said he didn't know his friend. That friend was Jesus."

A hush fell over the sea as Old Codfish began to tell the story of Jesus, who wore a crown of thorns, and about his friend Simon Peter, who was afraid of getting in trouble and so pretended that he did not know Jesus.

"Did Jesus ever forgive him?" asked Seymour, hopefully.

"Yes," replied Old Codfish. "He asked him, 'Do you love me?' and Simon Peter said, 'Lord, you know that I love you.' Then Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep!'"

"Feed my sheep!" exclaimed Gus. "Did Jesus have sheep?"

"No," replied Old Codfish. "But he wanted Simon Peter to think of others and not just himself. That is something like what you asked Seymour to do, isn't it, Gracie?"

"I guess so. I wanted him to know that this coral is our home and we all need to take care of it," said Gracie.

"I can help Seymour by growing some really tasty plants," said Angie.

"I can build new homes for some of the creatures who lived in this coral by using the rocks down there," said Gus.

"I guess I could talk to other sea stars about trying new foods," said Seymour, reluctantly.

"What can I do, Old Codfish?" asked Gracie. "I'm such a little fish."

"You can keep telling the truth just as you did to Seymour," replied Old Codfish.

"You have helped to save the coral reef just by speaking up."

The group of friends, old and new, said a bubble prayer to God of the seas, and each headed off to help others as Jesus taught.

For Younger Children:

1. Ask some questions about the story like, "What could Seymour do to have more friends?" "Why was Old Codfish angry at Seymour?" "What did each of the creatures do to help the sea?"
2. Talk about a time when you had to forgive someone for doing wrong. Talk about a time when someone had to forgive you for doing wrong. How did you make things right between you?
3. Jesus told Simon Peter to feed his sheep to show his love. How do you show your love for Jesus? How does One Great Hour of Sharing show love for Jesus? (Explore other materials that tell some of the stories behind the offering.)

For Older Children:

1. Read the story that Old Codfish told of Jesus and Simon Peter from John 13:36–38, 18:15–18, and 21:15–19. How are these passages connected? Think of a time when you have been forgiven and showed your love through action.
2. Talk about the different ways that people in your church work together to solve big problems because of their love for Jesus. Look through the different stories of people helping each other through One Great Hour of Sharing. How do they use their gifts to show Jesus' love?
3. Make a plan with your family or church class to help others through giving food or clothes or happiness to someone who needs these. Work together to raise money for One Great Hour of Sharing so that others can know Jesus' love.

