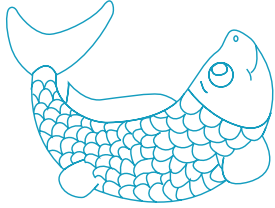




ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

SPECIAL OFFERINGS

HUNGER • DISASTER • DEVELOPMENT



## Gracie and Friends Use Their Gifts

It was an exciting day at the Red Sea School for Fish. Each student had been given the task of talking about something that they knew how to do very well. Already today, Gus Grouper had demonstrated how to dig holes in the sand in order to hide from others. Benji and Belinda Butterflyfish had done a joint report on twin behavior, even though they didn't always agree on who was the leader. Efraim Eel had discussed the ins and outs of cave home selection.

Gracie was getting more and more nervous, because she didn't really know what her gift was. She was just a little fish living in her fan coral, doing the best she could with the help of her friends. She'd better think of something quick, however, because only her friend, Angie Angelfish, was talking before she would be called on.

Everyone could guess what Angie would talk about—she was the plant expert. Sure enough, she began a long report on each form of algae on their reef and its particular need for care. One needed more sunshine; another needed moving water rather than still water. One grew best near boulders, while another preferred sand.

As Angie continued, Benji became increasingly squirmy. Finally, he interrupted her description of the history of a particularly old plant form and said, "Angie, are you ever going to stop? You're making me so hungry."

Angie, in her particularly annoying know-it-all voice, said, "Benji Butterflyfish, you obviously don't understand how important plants are for our reef. What if you had to grow all your own food? Would you even know where to begin? Knowing about plants is the most important gift of all!"

Gracie didn't want to see her friends arguing, so she asked a question of their teacher, Old Codfish, that she hoped would change the subject slightly. "Are all plants good?" asked Gracie.

"What an interesting question, Gracie," replied Old Codfish thoughtfully. "What do you think, Angie?" he asked.

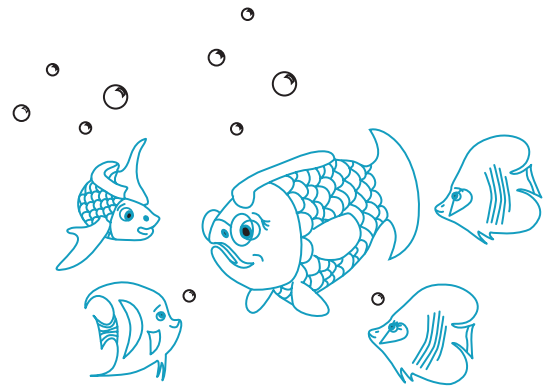
"Oh, yes!" replied Angie. "They are all different, but they are all good."

"I wouldn't be so quick with your answer, Angie," replied Old Codfish. "Sometimes you can get too much of a good thing. What happens when you get too much macroalgae on your reef?"

"What is macroalgae?" asked Gracie.

"Basically it means big plants," replied Angie. She then went into a long explanation of the many positive uses of macroalgae both for the reef and for humans.

"Yes, all of this is good, but let's take a break from our reporting and go look at some macroalgae that's getting out of control," suggested Old Codfish.



The fish all lined up with their field-trip partners, and off they went to an unfamiliar part of the reef that seemed very dark and creepy compared with where they'd just been.

"This part of the reef has been taken over by macroalgae. There are so many plants here that the reef is dying, because the plants are blocking the light that the coral and fish need to survive. What can you think of to help save this part of the reef?" asked Old Codfish.

Everyone turned to Angie. She blushed, realizing they expected her to use her gift of knowing plants to solve this problem. "Well, I could . . . no, that won't work. Or I could . . . no, that won't work either," she murmured.

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them (Matthew 18:20)," muttered Old Codfish seemingly to himself.

As Angie continued to think about what she could do herself to fix the problem, Gracie began to get an idea. The more she thought about it, the more it made her smile. She thought she would have a little fun as she laid out her idea for the others to hear.

"So, Benji," she said. "Are you still hungry?"

This seemed like an odd question in the midst of this difficult problem.

"I guess so," said Benji. "But aren't there more important problems now than my stomach growling?"

"Let Gracie finish, Benji," replied his twin Belinda, beginning to catch on. "I think she might have an idea where we can eat and solve our problem at the same time."

"Yes," replied Gracie. "What if we all ate as much of this macroalgae as we possibly could? Would that solve the problem?"

"Why not invite everyone we know to come to this feast?" said Gus

Grouper, expanding on the idea. "The groupers can also get rid of some of these roots by digging in the sand."

"We could invite all the twin fish," said Belinda and Benji together. "That would double our numbers."

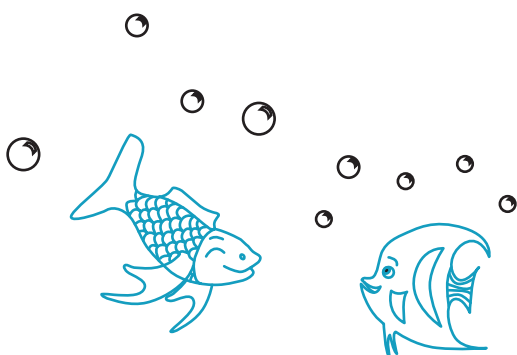
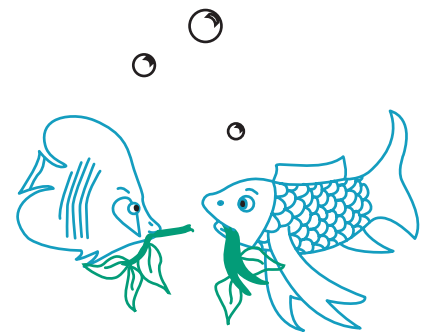
"I'll get my eel friends," said Efraim. "We can get into some of these rocky crevices to get the algae away from the coral and other sea animals."

All the other fish swam off to invite their friends and neighbors and anyone who happened to be swimming by to the great feast on the reef.

When they returned, they all began eating and eating and eating until the light once again broke onto the reef, and it began to look like home for the coral and the fish who wanted to live there.

After they had eaten all they could, they rested and gave thanks for the hard work of all.

Gracie whispered to her friends that she was secretly glad they'd had this problem to solve, because it gave her time to try to discover what she knew how to do best.



Angie laughed and said, "Gracie, we all know what your gift is already. You care for others more than anyone else we know, and you've already given that report by solving this problem. I couldn't do it with all of my plant knowledge, but you could because you listen and care for others."

"Yeah!" said Gus. "You brought us all together like you always do."

Now it was Gracie's turn to blush, and she quickly turned to Old Codfish and asked him to lead all of them in a bubble prayer to God-of-the-Seas. So, they prayed with all their hearts and on very full stomachs.

### For younger children:

- 🌱 Grow a plant from a seed. Think about all that is needed for its care. Explore some of the stories from One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) about places where it is difficult to grow plants for food. Talk about how you might help.
- 🌱 It took all of Gracie's friends and more to solve this problem in the story. How is your church working together to solve big problems like this?
- 🌱 What do you know how to do well? How might you use this to help others? How might the gift of your money to OGHS help others, too?

### For older children:

- 🌱 Identify the various gifts in the story. How did they bring them together to solve the problem on the reef? How might you use the things you do well to work with others to solve a big problem?
- 🌱 Explore some of the local and global ministries in which your church is involved. How does the church work together to help solve problems that are too big for one person to tackle on their own? What does Old Codfish's quoting of Matthew 18:20 in the story have to do with what the church does in ministry?
- 🌱 Think about the problems that OGHS addresses with funds from multiple churches. Name some of the problems that are too big for one church to address on its own. How might collecting money for OGHS help address some of these issues?

